



HOPE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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February 2024

Hello All,

I'm in Ann Arbor at U of M Hospital with Deb. Its Monday morning January 22, 2024, her improvement is slow but steady. Deb received a new liver two weeks ago today on January 8th. What a miracle this process has been, God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.

This has been an adventure of a lifetime. Let me tell you what I have seen. If we watch the news every day, we feel as if racism is running rampant throughout this beautiful country of ours, It is not... Black, White, Mexican, Christians, Muslim, Hindu and many others, I would have to assume, all with a single focus in mind. Only the health and wellness of the patient... I believe that God wants it that way. We are called to love our neighbor. At U of M this is evident in real time...

February is upon us, as is the beginning of the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is February 14th and Easter is on March 31st this year.

We are children of the resurrection. We are saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his blessed gift of Grace. That blessed gift that we could never purchase but, have received through faithfully following Jesus.

Winter is also nearing the halfway point. Groundhogs Day is fast approaching. What will the gopher find this year? Will spring come early, or will we get 6 more weeks of winter? Either way we are on the better side of winter, I can almost smell spring in the air. I'm itching to be planting flowers again....

I would like to thank you for the financial support that we received when Deb became hospitalized, what a huge blessing it has been to be loved so completely by our church families. It has been truly unbelievable and unforgettable. From the bottom of my heart and our hearts we thank all of you.

From our February 4th Gospel Reading, Mark 1: 35 – 38:

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him,
³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”
³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

I pay close attention to the scripture to see the movement and the purpose within. Jesus got up very early, it was still dark. He left the people to be alone in his thoughts and he took time alone with his father, God in prayer...

Do we do that? Do we get away by ourselves in solitude to pray and to listen for God’s small voice?

In the busy, crazy, noisy out of control world, do we spend much time alone in solitude to just spend time with the creator. Because we should! We need to do that you know...

Precious time cuddling while a newborn is sleeping often provides that precious time that we seek. People seem to be quiet while a baby is sleeping, not wanting to wake them and cause them to cry. I have found cuddle time beneficial to the baby and to my prayer time as well...

You soon realize how very noisy this crazy world is, when silence is needed to calm a child. We need that precious quiet time also.

Please take some precious quiet time this winter as we will soon enter the season of Lent that blessed time of preparation knowing that our Lord’s time of his earthly ministry is coming close, as is his blessed resurrection from death.

I pray that the season of lent greets you with many blessings and many opportunities to spend time with family and friends as we approach Easter Sunday...

Blessings Always,

Pastor Bill & Deb Cleland

Upcoming events for February

UMW will meet on **February 28** at 3:00 pm at the church.

POT LUCK The next Pot Luck lunch will be on **February 12** after church. Please bring a dish to pass and if you forget, there’ll be plenty of food. Remember the little boy, Jesus and the bread and fishes.

POP UP PANTRY The January Pop up pantry was a tremendous success. You served food to over 90 cars and about 220 families. We are making our presence within our community a major presence. The February event will be on February 22 from 12:00 – 2:00 pm. The truck will arrive around 10:00 am and workers are asked to arrive around that time. Please park in the fire barn parking lot to the east of the building. **HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO OUR WONDERFUL PASTOR, BILL CLELAND February 3.** I believe he qualifies for Medicare this year!!

My article this month comes from Jayne Davis of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

Spiritual Practices for the New Year

There is something very empowering about a new year — a clean slate, a fresh start. Whether you enter this new year energized and ready to reimagine how life might be different in the coming days and months or whether you have barely crawled your way up onto the shore of a new year, gasping for breath, shipwrecked and weary from the storms of the past year, I offer you a few thoughts on spiritual practices that may help to anchor you in God and bring you joy, meaning, and deep rest in the coming year, whatever it may bring.

1. Practice gratitude. It is easy to get caught in the spin cycle of the chaos that surrounds us, to grow weary and frustrated and overwhelmed in a time when so much feels out of control. Gratitude is a spiritual practice that helps us to take a step back, to maintain perspective that there is much good amid the challenges, and to remind ourselves of the many ways that God is present and providing for us. Consider beginning or ending each day by writing down three things for which you are grateful. An intentional practice of gratitude shapes the lens through which we see the world — a world of abundance or scarcity, a world of threat or of promise.

2. Cultivate wonder. The difference between gratitude and wonder, to me, is that wonder often catches me by surprise. It is a gratitude that washes over me. You come around a curve on the Blue Ridge Parkway and see the expanse of mountain ridges layered one beyond the next in hazy blue hues. It is the multitude of stars appearing in the night sky or the sudden, impulsive hug of a small child around your knees. It is the innovation of an underground park on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, migrating Monarch butterflies filling the sky, the unexpected word of grace from a crusty old soul. Awe. Wonder. Hope. Imagination. We can't create wonder, but we can put ourselves in a position to experience it, with humility, openness, expectation; praising God for who God is and wondering what God will be up to next.

3. Make room for Sabbath My best friend is an Orthodox Jew. "When I light the Sabbath candles on Friday night, I can feel myself exhale," she told me. Whether you have rushed to get everything done before you are cut off from work and the office and household chores, or whether you have entered gently into this moment, the exhale is there, she said. The body, the mind, and the spirit know — this is their time. And collectively, they rest. Wouldn't you love to know what that feels like?

To have separation between the ordinary and the holy? Start with five minutes a day if you are convinced that is all you can muster. Set the alarm on your phone to go off at noon and then stop; stop for five minutes and sit before God, resting in God's presence, received not for what you do or what you bring, but simply for who you are. Let your whole self exhale.

4. Ask great questions. There are benefits to being the dumbest person in the room. I am not talking about intelligence; I'm talking about listening from a posture of not knowing, of curiosity. It is a skill that every good coach knows. So often as ministers we feel like we must have all the answers, or at least act like we do. But when we give ourselves permission to ask questions, instead of offering answers, we get to journey with our people on their own road of discovery. Think about the questions Jesus asked his disciples. "What do you want?" "Who do you say that I am?" Questions that provoked thought and internal wrestling. Jesus did not manipulate them to a predetermined answer but gave them space to make their faith their own, to develop the internal understanding that leadership required of them.

5. Be uniquely you. If we are just like everyone else, what's the point? Truth is, God has made you unique. You have a combination of gifts, personality, sphere of influence, way of seeing the world like no one else. And the world needs to see how God is reflected through you, the real you. Trust that you are enough, just the way you are.

6. Notice God. "Where have you seen God today?" It's a simple question that a friend of mine taught me to start asking myself at the end of the day, a question that I commend to you as well. We see what we expect to see, for better or for worse. We are shaped by what we notice, what we look for — in others and in the world.

7. Share the journey. Few things will take a toll on your spirit and your ministry like isolation. You may know this all too well. I speak with too many ministers who are despairing. It's a strong word, but it is the one that they choose. The common thread among these ministers is isolation. If this is your story, make 2024 the year that is going to be different. Commit now to building a support system. Identify a trusted lay leader, another pastor in town or in the next city or of a different denomination. A friend who is not connected to ministry at all. We are shaped for community to carry one another's burdens; to offer a voice of hope or reason when one is going off the rails; to give perspective when the thoughts in our head have become all consuming. It does not have to be therapy; it may just be

coffee. Someone else may need your voice as much as you need theirs, maybe for different reasons. Share. Laugh. Breathe. God's mercies are new every morning. May you experience the abundance of God's grace and God's joy as you seek him and serve him in the year ahead.

Grace and peace to each of you,

Randy'

A footnote to Deb's journey to get back to good health again:

The roller coaster ride is continuing for Deb and more prayers are needed.

The end of last week was promising. They had Deb out of bed and sitting up for 5 hours on Saturday and even doing some peddling exercises.

This morning they drained 5 liters of fluid from her abdomen, (Ascitis again). There is also fluid in and around her lungs which is why yesterday her breathing was labored.

It was decided that Deb should be put back on the ventilator, so she is now in a medically induced coma – on the ventilator. Doctors are also starting continuous dialysis.

While Deb's new liver is functioning well, her kidneys have not resumed proper function.

Please continue lifting Deb in prayer. There is power in those prayers and in the name of Jesus.

Also, keep Pastor Bill and the family in prayers and hold them up in presence of Jesus and God so They will keep the comforted and knowing the Deb will be healthy again.

A LAST MINUTE UPDATE: The Hope UMW's proceeds from their soup supper was about \$650.00. A huge thank you to Greg and Shelly Brady for the donation of the food and their time. God is good, all the time.

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

3 Pastor Bill Cleland
6 Betty Fillmore
8 Charlotte Elmore
11 Ron Fillmore
13 Judy Page
18 Wendy LaCourt
19 Sonya Alexander
22 Haley Doede
23 James Crook
23 Randy Arthur
23 Dan Holzinger
24 Teri Horning
27 Pat Varner

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

2 Pastor Pat Poag
16 Karen Leuenberger
23 Tom Fillmore
24 Bill Horning
24 Chris Elmore
25 Pam Geiling
30 Caryn Leuenberger

Happy Birthday to all of you marvelous Christian people. God loves you and so do I.

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