



Weekly Booster

CHURCH STAFF

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Pianist

Terry Stafford

Bells & Choir Directors

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Multimedia & Website

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Alan Hutchison

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Sunday Facebook Host

Craig Harris,

Facebook Contributors

Pastor David B. Clark,

Barb Cunningham,

Craig Harris, Jeff Hiser

Sunday Praise Team

Terry Stafford, Linda Haldane,

Margaret Brady, Deb Finlay,

Jeff Hiser, Drew Morelock,

Pastor David



Remembering God's Promises in the Midst of Chaos

"People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed." This famous quote comes from Samuel Johnson, born in 1709. He was an English literary critic, biographer, essayist, and poet. He published the work he is perhaps best known for, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 1755. He is regarded as one of the greatest figures of 18th-century English life and letters.

The man knew about how people learn, and how they apply what they've learned to their lives.

What Dr. Johnson said back in his day about people's needs certainly rings true for our lives today as 21st century Christians. In a world where we have the vast majority of global intellectual capability in the palms of our hands, how much more do we as Christians need to learn? If we've sat in church services for decades, is instruction in the meaning of God's words really our problem as we face our daily struggles?

More likely, we need daily reminders of God's love, care, concern, and purpose for us. And we begin to understand the wisdom behind Samuel Johnson's words when we realize that in the words of the Bible, we find those consistent reminders of God's love and care for us.

Continued page 2.

Did you know the the Bible is the most stolen book? Ironically, although one of the Ten Commandments is "thou shalt not steal," the Bible is the most stolen book in the world. Bibles are regularly taken from hotels, hospitals, bookstores, and other locations.

Reminders

May 8th

Bible Study – 11:00 a.m.
Praise Team - 5:00 p.m.
Choir – 5:30 p.m.
Bell Choir – 6:30 p.m.

May 9th

T.O.P.S.

St. Mary's Ladies Salad Bar
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

\$12 per person or free will donation

****No Men's Saturday Bible Study**

****No PK-6 or Jr/Sr High
Sunday School until Fall**

****Worship Assistants are needed for
May 12th, 19th, 26th**

**** Fellowship Volunteers needed
sign-up in Fellowship Hall**



Two Volunteers Needed each Thursday
to Deliver Meals
Sign-Up Sheet is on the
Welcome Center Counter

God's Promises - Continued from page 1.

Where Have God's Promises Been?

Perhaps our memory of God's promises for us has been dulled as of late. What have we as a nation just emerged from?

- The recent memories of local and national shutdowns because of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Watching numbers of infections and deaths increase.
- Once-in-a generation waits in huge public facilities standing in carefully spaced-out lines to receive vaccinations and booster shots.
- Pandemic-related confusion and disruption at the highest levels of our society.
- Over two years of educational upheaval and pandemic-related isolation, with its accompanying change in the ways we act as individuals and families.
- Culture-changing shifts in the way we learn, communicate, and work.
- The loss of too many seemingly healthy friends and family members.

As many of us have now emerged from the protective cocoon of home and moved back into the workplace, we experience the difficulty of reminding ourselves of what life was like before the pandemic. We can't remember what we did before the first few weeks of March 2020, when the world shut down in the face of this unknown virus. And we still wait with the vague fear that another, more virulent, variation will emerge that's not covered by our current vaccinations. Finally, we live with the loss of our loved ones, gone too soon.

The American Bible Society, in their recent publication *State of the Bible: USA 2022*, [1] have observed through their research that the last two years, and our American experience with the pandemic, showed a shift in the ways that people have engaged with God's Word. Their research reveals that while Bible engagement experienced an uptick during the first part of the shutdown, since then a precipitous drop in Bible reading and engagement has happened.

Continued page 6.

Volunteers Needed



**LAST PERSON LEAVING
PLEASE TURN OUT LIGHTS
AND LOCK DOORS**

First United Methodist Church
**Please wear your
name tag on
Sunday mornings**



Church Ad Board Members

- Michelle Morelock - Chair*
- Mary Peterson - Secretary*
- Margaret Brady - Vice Chair & Trustee*
- Gary Milstead - Trustee*
- Roger Jones - SPRC*
- Robin Hensen - Finance*
- Dave Lashier - Treasurer*
- Craig Harris - Lay Member to Annual Conference*
- Connie Anderson - Memorials*
- Linda Haldane - Membership*
- David Clark - Pastor*

Church Office Hours

**** Children & Jr.-Sr. High Sunday School – will resume in the Fall. Have a safe summer!**

****Choir –** Wednesdays, 5:30 p.m. Sunday 8:30 a.m.
****Bell Choir –** Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m.

The front door to the church will be unlocked during office hours and closed only for errands and lunch.

Monday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Tuesday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Wednesday
CLOSED
Thursday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00
Friday
9:00-11:00
12:00-3:00

Please continue to call in advance if you need in the church to make sure someone is in the office. If you reach the answering machine please leave your name, number, and a brief message and your call will be returned. Calls after 2:00 p.m. may be returned the next business day.



Who was Nicodemus?

- a) Sadducee
- b) Prophet
- c) Zealot
- d) Pharisee

Who won a beauty contest out of the following

- a) Queen of Sheba
- b) Esther
- c) Delilah
- d) Abigail

What seed did Manna look like?

- a) Mustard
- b) Barley
- c) Coriander
- d) Rice

Check page 4 for answers from the previous week.



- 5th – Darby Skillern, Dave Christensen
- 6th – Randy Dailey
- 8th – Janet Jones
- 10th – Molly Bowen
- 11th – McKenzie Sheeder

****See a wrong birthday or anniversary, or need one added, please call the office, or send an email to office@shen.church**

**Shenandoah First United
Methodist Church**

200 Church St.
Shenandoah, IA 51601

Phone 712-246-2081

Church E-mail
office@shen.church

Same address – a new look at
<https://shen.church>



<https://shenchurch.onechurchsoftware.com/>



United Methodist Church,
Shenandoah, IA

<https://www.facebook.com/methodist.church.shenandoah>



Services are now on our YouTube
channel only.

<https://www.youtube.com/@shen.church8192/streams>

***Prelude/Postlude/Accompanist: Terry Stafford**

Call to Worship

Leader: Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things!

People: Sing of God's great faithfulness and steadfast love to all.

L: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; sing praises!

P: Rejoice in the presence of God, who reigns with equity and justice.

“Can Anyone Withhold the Spirit”

Scripture Reading: Acts 10:44-48

Songs

Victory In Jesus #370

Shout to the Lord #2074

What a Friend We Have in Jesus #526

Last Week's Attendance

In-Person Worship – 91

On-Line Worship – 13

Our Mission:

“Know & Serve God by Sharing Christ's Love.”

Our Vision:

“We will grow in holiness, our community will thrive, & we will make a difference in our world.”

**Answers for April 28th are b) it is over a) Naomi a) Timnath-serah
Quiz hints – Q1) John Q2) Esther Q3) Numbers**



May 2024

Pasta (any kind), Jelly, Ketchup & Mustard, Barbecue Sauce, Spices, Green Beans & Corn, Brownie, Cake, and Muffin Mixes, Pineapple, Cinnamon Applesauce, Boxed Potatoes, Rice Side Dishes, Microwave Popcorn, Soda Crackers, Shampoo & Conditioner, Toothbrushes.

There are times when people who use the Food Pantry come to the pantry on foot. They are then forced to walk home carrying, pushing, or pulling several pounds of food. Southwest Iowa Transit, for a very reasonable fee of \$5.00, will take individuals with their food items home. If you are interested in helping pay for these fees, simply seal your cash (whatever you would like to give) in a plain envelope and add it to your donated food items.

Bring Your Change to Make a Change

*Collected each Sunday after
the children's message*



"Each of you should GIVE what you have decided in YOUR HEART to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for GOD LOVES a cheerful GIVER." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

The Noisy Offering is one more way to do ministry for those in need and also teach your children the importance of giving and serving. Each Sunday a new opportunity for mission giving will take place after the Children's Message. Sunday School students will walk around the congregation, collecting your loose coins and currency in their colorful metal pails. This would be a good time to clean out the loose change from your pockets or purse. The money donated in May will go to the **Student Scholarship Program**.



God's Promises - Continued from page 2.

This is based on their surveys of Americans in different age groups and in all walks of life. Perhaps most alarming is that their overall observation shows a more than 10% drop in Bible engagement since their last annual report in 2021.

The trends here are not good. That means some 26 million Americans have either slowed or stopped engaging with the Bible since the second shutdown year of 2021. Dr. John Plake, with a hopeful tone, observes in his introduction to the research in this way: "Whenever Christians face disruptions and difficulties from warfare, pandemic, heartache, and grief, we look to the Bible for wisdom, guidance, and perspective...So how do we [as Christians] respond when the world is broken and tragic? We just keep showing up and trusting God with the outcome because we know that God's Word brings freedom, healing, and help to those who seek it."

Searching for God's Promises

Yes, today more than ever it seems we need those reminders of God's love for us. We need to remember more than we need to learn. So how do we begin down that road?

One way that people commonly engage with Scripture, per the research in the *State of the Bible*, is that they search for help and wisdom based on how they're feeling, or, as the report states, their "mood at the time" they pick up the Bible. (Not surprisingly, many more in the 18 to 25 age group say they engage the Bible digitally rather than picking up a printed Bible. This is actually a hopeful sign for Bible engagement in the future, as our phones are now basically an extension of our hands.)

If, as Dr. Plake asserts, Christians look to the Bible during life's crisis points, that means that they're likely searching out God's promises in the Bible to find inspiration and reassurance when facing life's tough circumstances and questions.

Those of us who have spent our Sundays sitting in church pews have heard these promises time and time again. Regular church attenders who spent years in Sunday school and other church-sponsored youth groups can rattle off many of God's promises by heart.

For those of us who can't, a quick internet search for "God's promises to us in the Bible" reveals multiple options for searching out and discovering more of those promises. One of those options reveals an assertion from author Herbert Locklear, who in his book *All the Promises in the Bible*^[2] counted 7,147 promises from God to humanity within the pages of the Bible. That's a lot of promises for a book that, in its basic text form, runs about 1,200 pages long.

Finding God's Promises

Those people who, impacted by their recent personal and cultural experiences, look to the Bible to find help and inspiration are met with a plethora of statements of God's reassurance in the pages of the Bible. Those who find one of the Bible's 365 mentions of some variation of "Do not be afraid" can discover the context of those statements to begin their search. In doing so, they'll find reassurance of God's comforting presence, guidance, and wisdom to the following individuals:

- To Abraham in the desert: "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'" (Genesis 15:1)
- From Moses to Joshua before entering the promised land: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6)
- From God to Joshua as the nation of Israel approached the promised land: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)
- To Elijah as he prepared to confront King Ahaziah: "The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.' So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king." (2 Kings 1:15)
- God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel before they went into captivity: "'So do not be afraid, Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, Israel,' declares the Lord. 'I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid.'" (Jeremiah 30:10)
- To Mary, Jesus' mother: "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.'" (Luke 1:30)
- To the shepherds the night Jesus was born: "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'" (Luke 2:10)
- Jesus, speaking to his disciples about his opposition before sending them out on their mission: "So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known...Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:26-30)

The Bible includes these and many more reassurances of God's presence in the lives of his followers. Surely, the God who is the same "yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8) is still with us and can allay our fears today as well. But many who search for God's promises will quickly ask the next logical question, "So what does God think about me personally?"

For those living in America in 2022, this question has answers in many forms. Most pastors spend their weeks preparing sermons to help individuals discover what the answer to that question could be. Those who are searching the Bible for the answer to that question need to look no further than the writings of the apostle John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). John asserts over and over that the Bible tells the story of God’s great love for those who seek and follow him.

In the wake of the global pandemic, with all of its fear, chaos, and restriction, many who experienced the worst of its impacts may be wondering where this love is for them today? Where was it in the lives of their families and friends in the last two years?

Let’s read a sampling of what John recorded:

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (3:16)
- “It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (13:1)
- “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (13:34–35)
- “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” (14:21)
- “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” (15:9–10)
- “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (15:13)
- “The Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” (16:27)

John, in his Gospel, also records a prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father for every one of us who believe in him:

“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (17:20–26).

Perhaps most poignantly, John explains the relationship we can have with God our Father in another of his letters:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

“This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

“God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:7–19)

These are the kinds of promises that people are searching for in today’s world. The reminders of God’s love for his people are the great realities that help us cope with our difficult circumstances.

These and many other passages from the Bible reassure those of us who are seeking out God’s pathway for our lives that God is more than open to having a relationship with us. Not only does he say through the prophet Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart,” (Jeremiah 29:13), he also indicates that he pursues us as well:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name,
I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’ (Isaiah 65:1, also quoted in Romans 10)

For those who seek out an experience with God in their lives, the apostle Paul has these reassurances:

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (Romans 10:9–13)

Remembering God’s Promises

So how do those who have had an experience with God remember what he’s promised us in his Word? How do we keep those promises in the forefront of our minds when our lives are busy and we’re distracted with everything going on—and everything going wrong—in the world today?

First, we need to be aware that nothing happening in our personal lives or in the world today escapes God’s notice. God has a plan for his people and his kingdom, and the events of this world—even the most chaotic and seemingly unfair—have been allowed by God to weave into the tapestry of his greater Story for humanity. God is not surprised or shocked as the events of our lives unfold. He stands ready to help and support us in our joys and sorrows through his Word, through his followers, and through the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

All that said, what are some practical helps for people who are wanting more daily reminders of God’s love for us?

- *Sign up for daily inspiration from God’s Word.* When these daily verses pop up in your email or on your phone, take the time to read them as a daily reassurance of God’s love for you.
- *Embark on a daily Bible reading and devotion that highlights God’s goodness and promises to you.* Engaging in some light personal Bible reading and devotional time will whet your appetite to find out more about God’s presence and power in your life.
- *Make a habit of attending a worship service in your local church.* There’s no better way to position yourself to receive a constant reminder of God’s love for you than to sit under the teaching of a local pastor and participate in the ministry of a local congregation.
- *Keep your favorite passages in front of you.* Have you already come across verses that intrigue you? Write them out and post them in locations where you know you’ll see them regularly. Bathroom mirror? Car dashboard? On a wall in your house? All great places to help keep those passages in mind.
- *Spend time in daily prayer.* Do you have a spouse, friend, sibling, or significant other that you talk to regularly? As we saw above, God desires to have a similar relationship with you. He wants you to come to him in prayer. Talk to him. As you do, notice how and through whom he may be speaking to you. Ask for his direction. Invite him to be a part of your daily decision-making processes. Ask for his help and wisdom as you face difficult decisions. Pray that his love will flood your daily life.

- *Study God's Word.* The passages listed above are just a small sampling of the kind of instruction and affection from God that you'll begin to understand as you decide to dig more deeply into the Bible.

Yes, there is truth in Samuel Johnson's statement. Maybe we as Christians do need to be "reminded more than we need to be instructed." Beginning to understand the most complex concepts in the Bible starts with the three simple realities demonstrated above:

1. God's love and presence in our lives casts out fear
2. When we look for God, we will find him
3. "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Claiming God's Promises

The Bible is filled with God's promises. You can use this handy reference right now to claim his promises if you...

Feel Dejected

—*Psalm 130:7; Isaiah 65:24; Matthew 11:28–30; Romans 8:26–27; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:8,10*

Feel Guilty

—*2 Samuel 14:14; Psalm 130:3–4; Romans 8:1–2; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:22–23*

Feel Despair

—*Psalm 119:116; Isaiah 57:15; Jeremiah 32:17; Hebrews 10:35*

Are Disappointed

—*Psalm 22:4–5; Isaiah 49:23; Matthew 19:25–26; Mark 9:21–24; John 15:7; Ephesians 3:20*

Are Depressed

—*Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 49:13–15; Romans 5:5*

Are Persecuted

—*Genesis 50:20; Psalm 37:1–2; Matthew 5:10–12; 2 Corinthians 4:8–12; 2 Timothy 1:11–12; 1 Peter 3:13–14*

Are Anxious

—*Psalm 55:22; Isaiah 41:13; Matthew 6:25; Matthew 11:28–29; Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7*

Are Filled With Longing

—*Psalm 37:4; Psalm 84:11; Psalm 103:5; Luke 12:29–31*

Are Sick

—*Psalm 23:4; Psalm 73:26; Isaiah 57:18; Matthew 8:16–17; John 16:33; Romans 8:37–39; James 5:14–15*

Are Impatient

—*Psalm 27:13–14; Psalm 37:7, 9; Romans 2:7; 1 Timothy 1:16; Hebrews 6:12; 2 Peter 3:9*

Are Confused

—*Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 42:16; John 8:12; John 14:27; 1 Corinthians 2:15–16; James 1:5*

Are Tempted

—*Job 23:10–11; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:15–16; James 1:2–4, 13–14; 1 Peter 5:8–10*

Are Weak

—*Psalms 72:13; Isaiah 41:10; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 1:7–9; 2 Corinthians 4:7–9; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10*

Are Afraid

—*Psalms 4:8; Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 35:4; Romans 8:37–39; 2 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 13:6*

Obey

—*Exodus 14:23; Matthew 16:27; John 8:31–32; John 14:21, 23; James 1:25*

Are In Need

—*Isaiah 58:11; John 6:35; 2 Corinthians 9:10–11; Ephesians 3:20–21; Philippians 4:19;*

Grieve

—*Psalms 119:50, 76–77; Jeremiah 31:13; Matthew 5:4; John 16:20–22; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; Revelation 21:3–4*

Suffer

—*Psalms 34:19; Nahum 1:7; John 16:33; Romans 8:16–17; 1 Peter 2:20–21; 1 Peter 4:12–13*

Fail

—*Joshua 1:9; Romans 3:23–24; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 10:36; 1 John 1:8–9*

Doubt

—*Psalms 34:22; John 3:18; John 11:25–26; Romans 4:5; 1 John 4:15–16*

And check out, “What the Bible Says: Scripture for 25 Life Struggles” for a handy list of verse references offering encouragement, guidance and connection with God for twenty-five common life situations.

Finally, if you need a promise to stick in your pocket today, take this one with you:

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1).

[1] Philadelphia, PA: American Bible Society (April 2022)

[2] Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic; Revised edition (April 1990)

CITY-WIDE GARAGE SALE

Friday, May 3rd
Saturday, May 4th

CITY- WIDE CLEAN UP



MAY 16TH & 17TH
8 AM - 4 PM
MAY 18TH - 8 AM - 12 PM



church directory

UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO

- ✓ Has your address changed?
- ✓ Do you have a different phone number or no longer have a landline?
- ✓ Do we have your birthday?
- ✓ Do we have your anniversary date?
- ✓ If you have children do we have their birthday?
- ✓ Do we have a picture for our records? Remember it has been two years since we took pictures.

Help us keep our church records updated. You can check your church information two different way. The first you can log-in to OneChurch Software at <https://shenchurch.onechurchsoftware.com/> and check your own information and makes any necessary changes. If you choose to update your own information and have not logged in before you will need to create your log-in. You can even upload your picture. If you prefer you can call the office and Jeff will let you know what information you have on your profile. You can catch him after church or stop by the office. We appreciate you helping us update our church records.



St. Mary's Ladies Guild
ANNUAL SALAD BAR LUNCHEON

Thursday, May 9, 2024

11:00 am to 1:00 pm

Salads of all kinds!



*Featuring St Mary's
signature dish:*

Hot Chicken Salad

**And don't forget
dessert!**



St. Mary's Parish Hall—512 W. Thomas Ave., Shenandoah
\$12 per person or free will offering



As this is coming to you, The United Methodist Church's General Conference is nearing its end. The Conference began with 1600 pages of legislation to review, amend, adopt, or reject. On the floor, over 500 pieces of legislation are being considered, some of which are monumental and changing the future of our beloved denomination. You have undoubtedly seen the headlines from nearly every news outlet on Wednesday. Within the next few weeks, I will schedule a Q&A session to review what was passed at General Conference and talk through what implications it has for us in Shenandoah.

Acknowledging that there is still legislation to be considered and judicial reviews to be considered, these are some of the biggest changes that have already passed:

1. Regionalization. This is a constitutional change and must be ratified by Annual Conferences worldwide. Currently, The UMC is structured as a U.S.-centric denomination with multiple subordinate regions throughout the world including Europe, Africa, and Asia. The regionalization plan makes the U.S. a region on the same level as the other regions throughout the world. It allows for equity and parity throughout the denomination and it also allows for each region to adapt to their missional contexts.
2. Revised Social Principles. John Wesley held that there is no personal holiness without social holiness. The Social Principles are not binding church law, but they do offer direction and conversation starters for how our Methodist faith relates to issues in the world. These have been developed by over 4,000 different writers representing our worldwide body of The UMC. At the time that I am writing this, most of the Revised Social Principles have passed, with one final petition still to be voted on.
3. Removal of the bans on LGBTQ clergy and same-sex weddings. This removal of the bans was passed with an overwhelming majority (93%) on Wednesday morning. In addition to this, legislation is being passed that allows for the local discernment of both clergy and churches as to the practice of same-sex weddings. This means that while the ban is lifted, nothing is being forced upon either clergy or local churches.

If you have any questions about General Conference know that I am here as a resource. Please reach out. I will still be looking into all of the legislation that has been passed, listening to guidance from our delegation, and digging into what the implications are for us here in Shenandoah.

One thing that I keep hearing from the delegates at General Conference is that there is renewed unity, hope, and excitement for the future of the UMC. We have always been a big tent church in which all are welcome and we continue to be a church in which all are welcome (conservatives and progressives). We will continue to be the presence of Christ in our community in which our hearts, minds, and doors are open.

Grace and peace,
Pastor David B. Clark