

Prayers, Condolences, Support

Our support and sympathies are with the Leila Merwin, whose grandmother Leila Downs Clark Wynn died this past October 31; and with Kathy Champion and family of Ritchie Champion who died on December 11. Joan Slaughter passed away on December 30. Joan and her husband Bill Slaughter were members of UPUMC and the Wedding Ring Class before they moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to be close to their daughter Sherri and her family. The children's library at UPUMC was named in memory of her oldest son Jim Slaughter.

Please keep the families and loved ones of these who have been dear to us in your prayers. Prayer is how we invoke the Holy Spirit, who consoles and ministers to us in ways that go beyond our words and understanding, who binds us together in love, and who binds up the wounds and sorrows that life dishes out. Let us always be ready to pray for one another.

Dede's Diamonds (By the Way...)

It's about time. It's about time, now that we have flipped the calendar to the New Year, to stop complaining about our isolation, our lack of income, the closed restaurants, our illnesses or griefs. Granted, we have been overwhelmed enough by these human heartaches to last a lifetime, but it's time we slam the door of history on 2020, and open our minds and hearts to the possibilities which lie ahead.

We are creeping closer and closer to being able to take off our Zoom shirts, come out of hiding behind our masks, having dinner at El Fenix and returning, in person, to our worship services at church. Just thinking about it gives us the hope we need to push us into the New Year with grace and excitement. It's what I call...FOREVER BEGINNING.

All beginnings have an ending, and we are about there. As soon as that all-clear signal rings out let us be prepared to make a grand re-entrance. Much is on the horizon to capture our interests and challenge our curiosity, causing us to leap for joy at the privilege of recommitting our lives to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and MIND." Hoorah and Hallelujah!

Christmas Eve Services & Christmas Tree Lighting



Stephen Fleming, Editor | Jennifer Stinchcomb, Layout & Printing | contact Stephen at 225-776-5753 or sfleming@upumc.org

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UPUMC
SENIORS

SENIOR *Spotlight*

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

The *IDEA* of a new year is so much easier to live into than actually *MAKING* it a new year, that is – one that's different than the year gone by. Surely, events and circumstances will change in the new year without us doing anything differently than we've done before. In that sense, it will be a new year, different from 2020.

We'll have a different president and many different elected officials at all levels. Hopefully the Covid-19 virus vaccine will be effectively distributed and successful in inoculating us against this infectious danger. Incidents of white law enforcement officers using lethal force against unarmed black suspects may, we pray, decrease – even to the point of zero. But these nation-size issues, and many others, will continue to run their courses with only minuscule influence or determination from us. In a nutshell, I'm saying that you can be the exact same person you were last year and it will still, technically, be a new year.

But what would it take for it to be a new year for you? Will there be anything different about how you will approach and interact with all the new events and challenges – as well as the same old ones – that will come your way? These are the ways in which A New Year takes on personal and meaningful significance. Sometimes we use the memorability of a certain date to mark a change in our lives. I quit smoking cigarettes on 7-7-88. I chose that date because I knew I'd be able to remember it. The first day of a new year can serve the same purpose, as can a birthday or holiday. In just a few weeks Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent will be upon us. Traditionally that is a time for Christians to make a commitment to give up an indulgent behavior or take on a new discipline, or both. Specific dates are helpful to some. John Wesley recommended we use the first of every new calendar year to renew our covenant with God. We used Wesley's Call and Response to Covenant Renewal in worship last Sunday. If you joined in you know what I'm talking about. If you didn't, I hope you will look it up and explore it further. Those were some solemn words we spoke together. And, although I truly meant those words sincerely, I also know I will fail at keeping them perfectly. Like the Apostle Paul, you and I (imperfect creatures that we are) "have the desire to do what is good, but do not carry it out. [We] do not do the good [we] want to do, but ... keep on doing the evil [we] do not want to do."

I don't know who said it first, but I'll agree with them and say this: "At least I don't lie, cheat, and steal near as much as I used to." Kind of a funny way of saying it, but in a broader sense, is it true about you? Are you "pressing on the upward way," "gaining new heights every day," as the old hymn puts it? I take heart that even as dedicated a servant of God as was the Apostle Paul, he still struggled with his limitations and imperfections. But throwing in the towel is not the solution.

Let's help each other and pray for each other that we make this more than a happy new year. Join with me in drawing strength from God's perfect love for us to make you and me just a little bit better at being the people God wants us to be in the new year ahead.

- Stephen

YEAH! – OH YEAH? – YEAH, BUT... (*readers respond*)

Occasionally ***The Senior Spotlight*** gets feedback and/or suggestions. Sharon Christen had some thoughts on a sentence in the director’s message in the November/December issue, the sentence that reads, “And one day we will be back in worship: together, unmasked, and un-distanced, and un-muted, and on our own to shake hands, hug, and kiss as we chaotically make our ways in and out of the sanctuary.” Sharon comments: I laughed at the word *chaotically*. Such an apt description of that familiar scene! It strikes me how significant the loss of being able to physically touch one another has been during this pandemic. We have to social distance and do elbow bumps instead of shaking hands. Perhaps it’s one of the reasons we are all mildly depressed. We experience community and connectivity through touch, be it a hand shake, a pat on the shoulder, a heartfelt hug when we sense it is needed, or even one of those crazy air kisses! We know babies raised in orphanages who don’t receive enough cuddling carry that loss throughout their lives.

Several years ago I read a book by Desmond Morris, an English zoologist as well as a popular author in human sociobiology. It was called ***Intimate Behavior*** (1971). No, it wasn’t about sex but about our need to be touched. He equated the loss of this with the rise of businesses such as massage therapists, manicure and pedicure spas, and hair salons — all hands-on services — where clients are being touched. In Romans, 1st Corinthians, and 1st Thessalonians, Paul mentions greeting each other (or saying goodbye) with “a holy kiss.” According to my favorite source, Google, a *holy kiss* was to display a kindred spirit ... a purity of love for one another. It was a greeting one family member used with another member on an arrival or a departure. Be it with a holy kiss, a hug, or a hearty slap on the back, I know we all look forward to gathering together in person (instead of virtually) in our beautiful sanctuary for communal worship as one part of the body of Christ.

– Sharon Christen
23 November 2020

Poems & Prose

[A Reminder: This section of ***The Senior Spotlight*** is a place for you to share a poem or passage of prose that has some special meaning to you. Add to it a brief reflection on what it has meant to you and why, and mail submissions to “Senior Spotlight Poems & Prose; 4024 Caruth Blvd.; Dallas TX 75225,” or email “sfleming@upumc.org,” subject line “Senior Spotlight Poems & Prose.” Submissions may be edited for formatting and available space.]

A few months ago, our friend Bill Matthews submitted the following reflection on “The Light That Shines In The Darkness.” For this issue of ***The Senior Spotlight***, published on The Day of Epiphany, January 6th, it seems like the perfect occasion to enjoy it and be reminded of what this season we’re in is all about.

The light . . . the light that shines in the darkness penetrates the denseness, an unquenchable reality that enables our vision, so that we can see what was hidden in mystery, to discern the proper pathway and avoid secret pitfalls.

We see dimly until the light reveals the face of God, the steadfast love that dispels the shadows, to assure us that all is all right in the divine purposes of our being.

The light that shines in the darkness always overcomes it . . . to guide our footsteps along pathways of peril into glowing places of compassion, peace, justice and tranquility.

This is where I come from: Having received the light, we use it for ourselves and for others, to light the path for others to follow. “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” We take our part as we project God’s love through all that we do.

Poems & Prose cont.

“No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house” (Matthew 5:15).

“Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you” (Luke 11:36).

Even as the flickering flame of the candle sputters in the changing breezes, so we may falter in our following. But the stable light of God’s steadfast love disperses the darkness of our confusion. And so we walk, advancing in the light, and by means of the light, towards ever more light. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

And the gates of eternity swing slowly open before our eyes to reveal the unquenchable light of the love that God spreads over us and for all creation.

– Bill Matthews

Pause & Ponder

Are you thinking or feeling that offering a reflection on a bit of prose or poetry is too much for you? How about, then, just sharing some good words of encouragement you’ve run across recently. I’m sure there are “words you live by” you know by heart, or are written on a bookmark, or hold up a photo on your refrigerator. Send it in!

Keep in Mind

UPUMC PODCASTS: Now that Advent and Christmas are past, our Podcasts have returned to Dr. Dede Casad and Rev. Stephen Fleming interviewing some of our wise and willing seniors in a series we call ***Wisdom of the Sages***. A new podcast is offered each week. Our January interviews began with Robert Rhoads, and continue with Bob Myers, Nelson Pruett, and George Pearson. (We are not interviewing men only; it just happened that way this month.) Previous interviews (Leon Miller, Marilyn Hamilton, Mary Jo McCurley, Martha Squibb, Betsy Hickman, and Kathy McCarty) are listed and available. You are encouraged to listen and get to know some of your fellow seniors and church members better, living into our vision of a community where we will “know and be known.” If you are a regular podcast user, you can find the ones from UPUMC on your internet device’s podcast app. If you prefer, you can link to the podcasts via our church’s podcast website: <https://upumc.podbean.com>.

MONTHLY STAFF PICKS BOOK CLUB: On January 12 our Staff Picks Book is ***The New Jim Crow*** by Michelle Alexander. Clinton Bray is the presenter. February’s Staff Pick is ***Dining in the Kingdom of God*** by Eugene LaVerdiere, with Laurie Eckerberger presenting. There is a new book, presenter, and meeting every second Tuesday of the month at 8 pm. Double-click on the event on our online church calendar (upumc.org/calendar).

LIVE SUNDAY WORSHIP ONLINE: Facebook, Sundays at 11am or at www.upumc.org/onlineworship.

MID-WEEK BIBLE STUDY: Wednesdays at noon on our Facebook page.

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: Sign-up at www.upumc.org/newsletter.

PRAYER REQUESTS: www.upumc.org/prayer

Church information is available to you 24 hours, 7 days a week at UPUMC.ORG. There are other mailing lists from the church, too, which you can ask to be added to which will suit your individual interests best. Your church staff and many, many volunteers are keeping our church up and running even though the building use is still restricted. Help us address your needs – for fellowship, for education, for spiritual renewal and growth – by letting us know how well, or how poorly, you think we’re doing. Honest feedback is most welcome!