



Vol. XXVI Issue 2 FALL 2026

Deda's Knife



It's hard to believe that it's been a little over three years since Dr. Dede W. Casad departed this mortal coil (July 23, 2023). Dede was a visionary and that vision was crisp, clear, and unrelenting. It is thanks to that vision that you are reading this newsletter. The School of Essential Wisdom was her brainchild, and she was instrumental in developing our Sunday Evening Bible Studies. She is ever-present at your Forever Beginning council meetings, where decisions are made regarding the many programs offered to you throughout the year. We frequently refer to our invisible "WWDDD" bracelets. From January of this year through the end of August, we have put together 22 SEW presentations and 20 Bible Study sessions. That keeps our bracelets warm.

For some strange reason, this got me to thinking about my Deda's pocketknife. My grandfather was a simple carpenter by trade. If there was an addition made to their house, he built it. I am in proud possession of the knife you see to the right. He was retired by the time I was born and most of my memories of him involve gardening, watching (or listening to) baseball, and sitting on the front porch (which he built) of the house where he and Nana lived in Mexia. He would watch the traffic go by and smoke his pipe. There were two pecan trees in the yard. In the fall, he would watch the nuts drop and collect them. He never cracked his pecans. That may have been too brutal. He carefully carved them open with his pocketknife, gently retrieving the meat of the nut in two perfect halves. This endeavor required a sharp blade. His whetstone and oil can were always nearby so he could sharpen the blades while waiting for the next pecan to fall. The main blade of the knife you see was originally 2-1/2 inches long. Deda did a lot of honing on that knife over the years (decades), always prepared for the next addition to Nana's pecan pie.



This seemingly odd analogy to Dede's vision does have a point. She didn't see our later years as any reason to grow dull or any less useful, nor did she believe that was anyone's desire. We owe it to each other (and ourselves) to stay sharp. To rub against the whetstone of continued learning. To carve out the best life for all our days. We hope that your Forever Beginning team can play a meaningful role to that end.

Thank you for bearing with me on this. I hope the Dede/Deda juxtaposition didn't cause too much confusion.

Until next time, Blessings (and stay sharp), Mark S. Parker

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." - Mark Twain

Forever Beginning – Summer 2026

It was a mind-boggling Summer for the School of Essential Wisdom.



On June 18, Almas Muscatwalla opened our minds with her presentation on “Pluralism in the Quran – The Key Messages.”

On July 9, Fred Dobbs mesmerized us with magic and mind games while teaching on the topic of “Thinking about Thinking.”



Our summer sessions concluded on August 6 with Tony Pederson discussing his mindful video interview with the late Bishop John Wesley Hardt in a program entitled “Memories of Bishop Hardt and the Civil Rights Movement in Beaumont.”

Not only were the programs outstanding and well attended, the luncheons were fabulous.

Happy Birthday, Phyllis!!!



Chrys Franklin, Diana Wilson and Maryam Mathis delighted Phyllis Baker with a surprise visit on August 22nd in anticipation of her 101st birthday on August 26th. Phyllis, a UPUMC member since 1966, is an avid reader of this periodical. Please join us in wishing her Happy Birthday and many more.

SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting each Sunday afternoon from September 13 to November 22 at 4 PM in Rm. 101

Please join us this Fall for three Bible study series addressing these intriguing topics:



On September 6, 13, 20 and 27, and October 4, Dr. Keith Boone, retired former Senior Pastor of UPUMC, will present the “Marks of Faithfulness.” Dr. Boone will examine the four Gospels with us and provide us with assessments to help us identify which Gospel we most closely relate to.



On October 11, 18 and 25, Ellie Ford, UPUMC's Minister of Children/Families, will lead a series titled “Women of the Old Testament.” Ellie will be highlighting the little known (but not insignificant) stories of Miriam, Huldah, and Jael.



On November 1, 8, 18 and 25, Rev. Alex Williams, Senior Pastor at Ridgewood Park UMC (and husband of Rev. Emma Williams) will present lessons on “Church History: The First 1,000 Years.” Rev. Williams will be tracing through the development of the early Church and its lasting impact on Christianity.

Blues Brothers?



In case you missed it, those attending SEW last Spring had a real treat when Pastor Joe and Mark Pope presented us with “The History of Rock and Roll.” These guys were in their element as they walked us through the gospel, jazz, blues and country influences that led to Chuck Berry and Elvis. We hope they keep their day jobs.



WTTW Delivery Update: You may have noticed that the Words to the Wise newsletter is no longer being mailed to all recipients as in the past. The cost of postage along with the folding and envelope-stuffing for 250+ copies became too burdensome. We hope you understand. Copies will be made available at the front desk and in the appropriate adult Sunday School classrooms. We will, of course, continue to mail individual copies to our home-bound readers. If you, or someone you know, needs to have a copy delivered by mail, please contact Maryam Mathis at mmathis@upumc.org, or Mary Jo McCurley at mjmccurley@upumc.org. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

SCHOOL OF ESSENTIAL WISDOM

Fall Series

The School of Essential Wisdom begins its fall series of weekly programs on September 3 at 11 AM in the Parlor.

Speaker Schedule:



Bishop James Stanton, retired bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas and frequent contributor to SEW and the Sunday Bible Study, will kick off the Fall with a series based on his book *Women of Faith* entitled “Women of Faith Who Have Changed the World.”

Sept. 3 - Mary, Mother of Jesus

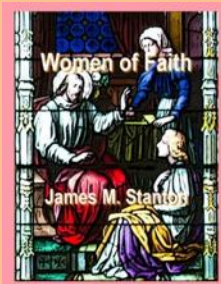
Sept. 10 – Mary Magdalene

Sept. 17 – Sisters, Mary & Martha

Sept. 24 – Priscilla

Oct. 1 - Phoebe & Friends

Oct. 8 – Overview of Women in Biblical Times



Beginning on October 15, UPUMC's favorite son, Rev. Johnny Mollett, will present a series he calls “Owning Your Faith.” Rev. Mollett will be speaking on the importance of and process of creating your own creed based on his experience of "personalizing" the Nicene Creed for his own faith. These sessions will be on Oct. 15 (includes the Clergy Appreciation Luncheon), Oct. 22, Oct. 29 and Nov. 5.



On November 12, a special series will start up called “Children of Abraham: A Conversation of How We Connect.” Our speakers from the Abrahamic traditions will be our own Rev. Dr. Joe Stobaugh

(Nov. 12), Rabbi Ari Sunshine (Nov. 19), and Almas Muscatwalla (Dec. 3). These three will join together in an enlightening panel discussion on December 10.

