



The Ambassador

February 2024

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From the Pastor

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. As we turn our calendars to February I am mindful that this is a year where Ash Wednesday shares the day with Valentine's Day. While commercials and advertising will emphasize and encourage expressions of love for one another, our spiritual life will heed the call to focus on our love of God. Lent is a call for us to return to God. Every year the words from Joel are read in Ash Wednesday worship services throughout the world:

Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord your God,
for God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love,
and relenting from punishment.

Joel 2:12-13

With these words our Lenten journey begins and we return to God realizing that although we fail to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, God is gracious and welcomes us still with open arms.

This return to God is not entirely an individual journey. While there is formational work that we do alone, Lent is a communal pilgrimage that is made with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Staff

Senior Pastor Kim Armentrout
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Worship With Us

Online & In Person
Worship @10:30 am
Sunday School @ 9

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 **first
church**
MIDDLETOWN
a united methodist community

We will worship together on Ash Wednesday with services at noon and 6 p.m. Our Sunday worship will help us as we deepen our discipleship with a worship series entitled "Forgiveness – Following the teachings of Jesus in an Unforgiving World" (see page 5). We will have opportunities to gather with other Christians in our community with Lenten Lunches (see page 3). There will also be a time for us to have extended spiritual formation together with a half day retreat on Saturday, March 2nd (see below).

I am looking forward to Lent – both in my personal spiritual formation and in our times of communal spiritual formation. Let me know if you have any questions about our Lenten activities. I hope to see you at several or all of them!

Peace,
Pastor Kim
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Young People's Christmas Program

It may seem like a long time ago but it was only mid-December when the young people of our church shared the poem "B is for Bethlehem" by Isabel Wilner. They did a wonderful job not only reciting their lines but also in sharing their original works of art for each letter of the alphabet. Let us still celebrate their commitment! When you see one of our young people – let them know that it was a blessing for them to share their gifts.

We are giving thanks to God for Danica, Robert, Raquel, Ryan, Liz, Daphne, Tommy, Silas, Dolly, Anthony, Maya, Tucker, Cooper, Larkin, Reese, Eliya, Ellie, Kavon, and Grant. You are a blessing!

Spiritual Formation Retreat Saturday March 2nd 9:30 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Have you ever tried to pray but then find that your mind had wandered and you are thinking about what happened yesterday instead of addressing God? You are not alone! Many times we limit our understanding of prayer to mean a formal time of addressing God in words. But prayer is so much more!

If you are interested in expanding your understanding and experience of prayer, please plan on coming to the church for a spiritual formation retreat on prayer. We will learn and practice different ways of praying as well as exploring and making tools that can help us in our prayer life. Fear not – YOU WILL NOT BE ASKED TO PRAY OUT LOUD! But you will be asked to stretch your thinking about prayer!

If you are interested in participating, please let the church office know or sign-up on the sheet in the North Foyer. Pastor Kim will need to know numbers so she knows how many participant resources she needs to provide. There is no cost to this day apart and lunch will be provided! Please see Pastor Kim if you have any questions!

Music and Worship Notes *by Mary Ellen Clinard*

How is it possible that we took the Christmas decorations down in the sanctuary and the choir has started music for Lent and Holy Week all in the same month?!

Easter Sunday can never be earlier than March 21st and the last time it was on March 22nd was in 1818 and the next time will be 2285. It always feels odd when Easter is in March.

Lent is a great time to give choir a try. We will have a few new musical pieces that reflect a great variety of styles and some old favorites as well. Try challenging yourself to grow closer to God through the music and ministry of being in the choir. We have 2 rehearsals each Wednesday – 3pm and 7pm to accommodate the busiest of schedules! You can even have a recording of your part sent to you for extra practice during the week. It's also possible to travel and still be able to sing when you are in town. During your "40 day trial period" you'll find fellowship and meaning in helping to create worship for our congregation.



Lenten Lunches

You are invited to join with other Christians in our community for a time of prayer and Reflection during the season of Lent. A few of the churches in Middletown are coming together on Wednesdays at noon, beginning February 21st. The hosting churches are:

February 21 st	First UMC with Rev. Scotty Robertson
February 28 th	First Baptist with Rev. Kim Armentrout
March 6 th	St. Paul's UCC with Rev. Daniel Cardenas
March 13 th	First Christian Church with Rev. Rich Luh
March 20 th	First Baptist Church with Rev. Jeff Wilder

Come to the hosting church at noon for a simple meal of soup and sandwiches, and a time of fellowship, reflection, and prayer based on a weekly focus on vices and virtues. Please call the church office or see Pastor Kim if you have any questions.

A Note from Rev. Daniel Cardenas, Associate Pastor

“There is no greater love...”



In 1972 a flight from Uruguay to Chile wrecked over The Andes mountain because of the bad weather conditions that day. Twenty nine people died on the crash day and following because of the deadly wounds and the freezing temperature. The rest of the team tried to survive with little food and water. When the weather improved, they tried to climb and walk to find some help. After several days up in the mountains with no hope, an expedition was planned: two of them were chosen to try to climb and walk over the high peaks to find a village, a radio station, or something that could help them get out. Every attempt was discouraging and unfruitful.

One day, when they were disheartened because one of them died. The other team members found a piece of paper in his hand that said: *“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13). With those words, their hearts were filled with courageousness and boldness to climb the peaks and find help for the rest of the team. They understood that a little sacrifice could bring a common wellness. So, after planning the long hike and after 10 days of intense walking against nature, the two of them made contact with a horseman who took the S.O.S message to the nearest village. Seventy two days after the crash, 16 young men were rescued from that mountain. If these two men decided to stay on the top of that mountain and never leave, all of them could have died and the world would never know this fantastic story of sacrifice and brotherhood. A real-life story of love, sacrifice, and unity.

When Jesus was having the Last Supper with his disciples, he prayed for them and for their discouraged hearts. Not only that, he tried to explain to them the tremendous sacrifice that he was going to make. Nobody was taking his life apart, he was giving his life on his own and free decision, Jesus loved all his friends and the world. Jesus knew that his sacrifice would bring a better and bigger wellness to all humankind. He never remained self-ish; he always thought of the wellness and the freedom that this sacrifice would bring to all. Jesus never gave up.

In the same way, Jesus still calling us to show that kind of love to others, to our neighbor, to our family, to our church. Jesus' sacrifice is always a reminder of the greatest love of all time. The Andes' tragedy shows us just a taste of this kind of love, but Jesus' passion shows us the entire piece.

This month will start the Lent Season with the Ash Wednesday paired with Valentine's Day. It is a perfect time to enjoy the company of our loved ones, but it is the perfect time to remind us the greatest love of all time showed us at the cross as well.

Never forget this: You are loved.

Con cariño y afecto.

Pastor Daniel Cardenas.

Lenten Series

Forgiveness – following the teachings of Jesus in an unforgiving world



Following Jesus is a challenge. His teachings can be difficult to understand and even harder to put into practice. This is certainly true for forgiveness. The world has been and is full of horrific wrongs that have been committed on a grand scale. When faced with the deep pain that wrongs can cause, retribution or vengeance seems like it is the right course of action. But God has a different idea – forgiveness. This series will explore this idea of God's – how it helps us be human, how it does not ignore or minimize wrongdoing, how it is not about pretending everything is ok, how it is essential for every relationship, and how it invites us into God's heart, God's grace. It is possible to both extend and experience forgiveness. And it is possible to follow the teachings of Jesus in an unforgiving world.

18 February	The Forgiving Nature of God	Mark 1:9-15
25 February	Letting Go	Mark 8:31-38
3 March	Everything Is Not Okay	John 2:13-21
10 March	Being About God's Business	John 3:14-21
17 March	Experiencing God's Grace	Psalms 51
24 March	Unconditional Forgiveness	Palm Sunday

Biblical Storytelling

**Sunday, February 25th and Sunday, March 17th
following worship**

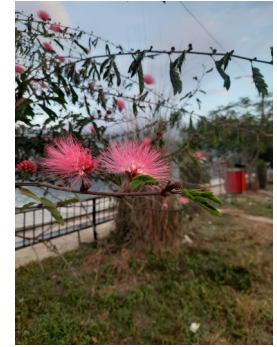


You are invited to join Pastor Kim for two half hour classes on Biblical storytelling. More than just memorizing a Bible passage, Biblical storytelling is learning how to internalize a story in the Bible so that it is relatable and meaningful to you. Participants will be asked (but not required) to help practice Biblical storytelling in worship on our Good Friday service on March 29th at noon. Please see Pastor Kim if you have any questions!

Mission Moment

An update from Dr. Les and Debbie Dornon, missionaries to Nepal working in the Tansen Hospital

Winter season in Tansen is quite different from Ohio and Indiana. It doesn't freeze, and we have very few, if any, cloudy or dreary, rainy days. We have no snow - except what we can see on the distant Himalayas (when they are not hidden by haze). The sun is bright most days and the flowers are blooming. - We often go out to sit in the sun during the day to get warm! Inside the houses there is no heating - so when the temperature outside is in the fifties - it is the same inside. We wear lots of layers of clothing, and the Sunday School class can vouch for the fact that Les is usually wearing a hat, scarf and quilted house coat when we are on the zoom call! :)



Usually during the cold months, we get a couple of days of rain, but that hasn't happened this year yet, so it is quite dry. Thanks for those of you who have joined us in prayer for that.

The hospital has been very close to running out of water on several days - but God keeps providing just enough from various other sources to keep us going. We are thankful. The outpatient numbers are less in the cold months usually, but the inpatient census continues at a steady rate. We have had stories of amazing recoveries - like the 27 year old mother of three who came in with abdominal pain. She had an ultrasound, and it was thought that she had an ovarian cyst - but when they opened her up, the OB/GYN team had to call for general surgeons as the problems were a huge mass of dead tissue behind the perfectly fine ovaries! They spent hours trying to remove and repair, and she was sitting up happily just a few days later! The OB/Gyn surgeon (volunteering for a brief time from the U.S.) said that she didn't know how that woman could have even been walking around alive with all that was wrong inside her! Miracles! However, we have our share of tragedies, as well - a 32 year old father who fell over dead from a heart attack, a 17 year old young man in grade 12 who committed suicide, and a man who had been discharged after treatment for meningitis and sepsis who returned to the hospital only to die in the ER, and we will probably never know why.

We miss you all, and enjoy being a small part of your worship services online. Thank you so much for your prayers and for your support for us. We could not be here without you.

Love, Debbie & Les

Confirmation Happenings:


Our Confirmation class is continuing to meet this winter and into the spring. We have a class scheduled for February 4th and our lock-in that was supposed to happen on Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend has been moved to the Sunday of President's Day Weekend. Our spiritual formation time expands as we explore and learn about prayer, being the body of Christ, and spiritual disciplines during the season of Lent. Please keep our confirmands in your prayers: Raquel, Maya, Liz, Danica, Robert, and Ryan. And while you are at it - pray for Pastor Kim, Pastor Daniel & Anahi (especially during that lock-in!).

Birthdays

February 2024

- 1 Matt Dixon,
- Christian McLaughlin
- 3 Kathy Lambert,
- 5 Dr. Mark Frazer
- 8 Anita McLaughlin
- 9 Mary Davis,
- Lynda Goecke
- Kim Stephens
- 10 John McDaniel
- 16 Mary Ellen Clinard,
- Daphne Murphy
- Darryl Fairchild
- 19 Bill Alderton,
- 20 Marilyn Clark
- 21 Johnny Schmitt
- 28 Donna Burley

Happy Birthday!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
<p>Dates to Remember in March:</p> <p>March 2: Spiritual Formation Retreat</p> <p>March 10: Daylight Saving Time begins (SPRING FORWARD)</p> <p>UMCOR Sunday/Confirmation Class</p> <p>March 28: Maundy Thursday Service 7 pm</p> <p>March 31: Easter Sunday</p>							
<p>4 COMMUNION</p> <p>9:00 Sunday School</p> <p>10:30 Worship</p> <p>UMC Informational Meeting</p>	<p>5</p> <p>8:00 Breakfast Club</p> <p>6:00 Bible Study</p>	<p>6</p> <p>2:00 Pantry</p>	<p>7</p> <p>3 & 7 pm Choir Rhrls</p> <p>6:00 Hispanic Bible Study</p>	<p>8</p> <p>10:00 UWF Board Mtg</p> <p>6:00 ELS @Rosa Parks</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p>	
<p>11</p> <p>9:00 Sunday School</p> <p>10:30 Worship</p>	<p>12</p> <p>8:00 Breakfast Club</p> <p>5:00 Immigration Clinic</p> <p>6:00 Bible Study</p>	<p>13</p> <p>11:00 Memorials</p> <p>1:00 SPRC</p> <p>2:00 Pantry</p>	<p>14 ASH WEDNESDAY/ VALENTINE'S DAY</p> <p>Services: 12:00 & 6:00</p> <p>3 & 7 pm Choir Rhrls</p>	<p>15</p>	<p>16 AMBASSADOR ARTICLES DUE</p>	<p>17</p> <p>9:00 Hope Circle @ Bob Evans</p> <p>10:00 Elizabeth Circle</p>	
<p>18 1st SUNDAY IN LENT</p> <p>9:00 Sunday School</p> <p>10:30 Worship</p> <p>Confirmation Overnight</p>	<p>19 PRESIDENT'S DAY</p> <p>8:00 Breakfast Club</p> <p>6:00 Bible Study</p>	<p>20</p> <p>2:00 Pantry</p> <p>5:30 Finance Mtg</p> <p>6:00 Council Mtg</p>	<p>21</p> <p>12:00 Lenten Lunch FUMC</p> <p>3 & 7 pm Choir Rhrls</p>	<p>22</p> <p>6:00 ELS @Rosa Parks</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>	
<p>25</p> <p>9:00 Sunday School</p> <p>10:30 Worship</p> <p>Biblical Storytelling Workshop</p> <p>SHALOM @ FUMC</p>	<p>26</p> <p>8:00 Breakfast Club</p> <p>6:00 Bible Study</p>	<p>27</p> <p>2:00 Pantry</p> <p>6:30 Trustees</p>	<p>28</p> <p>12:00 Lenten Lunch</p> <p>3 & 7 pm Choir Rhrls</p> <p>6:00 Hispanic Bible Study</p>				



2024 First Friday Concert & Artist Series

**February 2, 2024
Joe Knight**

**Come be transported to a world of
calmness and peace as Joe performs
classical and Spanish favorites on guitar.**

**First UMC - Middletown
@noon
Free Admission**