



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THE BELL

1 Gilligan Road, East Greenbush, New York 12061-1780

VOLUME 23 ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY, 2021

At Church on Sundays:

- ♦ Early Informal Service
8:30am—Fellowship Hall
- ♦ Regular Service 9:30 am
- ♦ Live Stream on Facebook
and Available on YouTube
that same afternoon
- ♦ Sunday School to be announced

Visit us on the Web:

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Phone: (518) 477-9693

Fax: (518) 477-4336

Church Office Hours:

9:00 am to 2:30 pm M - F

Email:

office@fumceg.org

BELL/Bulletin (only) Email:

editor@fumceg.org

Children's Education Email:

egchristianedfumc@gmail.com

Youth Ministries Email:

youthleaderamber@gmail.com

Rev. Sundar R. Samuel,
Pastor

Gail Welkley,
Administrative Assistant

Dear Members and Friends,

There are many unusual tourist attractions in the U.S., but recently I heard of one that sounds both fascinating and depressing at the same time. There is a museum in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I understand, that has as its unofficial name, "The Museum of Failed Products. Think about that name for a few moments, "The Museum of Failed Products." The museum looks like a standard supermarket inside. However, all the items on the shelves are products that were taken off the market because nobody bought them.



I wonder why? Wouldn't you want to buy Clairol's Touch of Yogurt shampoo? Sounds yummy. Or Gillette's "For Oily Hair Only: Shampoo? Or Pepsi's AM Breakfast Cola. And why didn't we all get excited about Colgate-brand TV dinners? Or Fortune Snookies, the fortune cookies for dogs? Don't your pets like to read their fortune each day? Can you imagine the disappointment of the inventor who poured his or her time, energy, and intellect into creating a product no matter how unusual, only to have to fail? How disheartening to have your creation end up in the "Museum of Failed Products."

I wonder if God doesn't sometimes look at us, the pinnacle of God's creation, and wonder with disappointment how we turned out the way we did? Is humanity one of God's failed products? It's something to think about as we look at Genesis 9: 1-17. The OT is full of exhilarating stories of very ordinary people possessed by an extraordinary faith. Consider Noah, at God's direction Noah built an Ark that was of enormous proportions. The ark was over 450 feet long-the size of one and one-half football fields. Just like Noah we are a covenant people. What are some of the implications of this covenant relationship? What does it mean to our lives today? There are implications that glare at us. Implications that glare at us that we disappoint God -even the best of us. We let God down for not willingly love God and our fellowman as ourselves. In a speech made in 1863, Abraham Lincoln said, "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God...Intoxicated with broken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us." In other words, there is a battle within the human heart. None of us is

A Reconciling Congregation

immune. This sad truth presents a dilemma for our Creator. God made us from the clay of the earth, fashioned us in God's own image, breathed into us the breath of life, and gave us the ability to love, to desire, to will. More significantly God endowed us with the most precious gift of all, the freedom to choose. Unfortunately, sometimes we choose wrongly. Every one of us. Even at our best, we are not all God created us to be. None of us utilizes all of our potential, all of our ability, all of our talent in a constructive manner all the days of our life. We are not the mothers we ought to be, the fathers we ought to be, the citizens we ought to be, the church member we ought to be, the minister we ought to be; we all fall short of the mark. What does God do with God's children in the light of the fact that we all fall short, we all miss the mark, the bullseye? What is God to do?

For you see, God has another problem. It can be stated like this. Though God is disappointed even in the best of us, God is hopelessly, passionately, in love even with the worst of us. In one of his books, Theologian Jürgen Moltmann known for his theology of hope wrote, "but the ultimate reason for our hope is not to be found...in what we want, wish for and wait for; the ultimate reason is that we are wanted and wished for and waited for...God is our last hope because we are God's first love."

Think about that for a minute. "God is our last hope because we are God's first love." God, the Creator of all life...The source of all that is Good...the very definition of Good....God loves us. God created us in God's image. God breathed God's life into us, God made us to be the special focus of God love. And that was only the beginning of God's plan for us.

This dilemma forces God into an unusual role. God's last word concerning this dilemma is not found in the Old Testament stories. It is found in the Gospels. Indeed, it is the Gospel. Here's what God did. God made a Covenant with us. God did that first with a rainbow and later with a cross. On February 17, 2021 we will celebrate Ash Wednesday, the day that marks the beginning of the Lenten season. At that time we prepare to face the cross and Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. The message is clear: God walks with us through the terrible firestorms of our lives, and we are lifted unharmed out of the ashes. We may be marked in some way, like the ash marks of the cross placed on our foreheads during Ash Wednesday. However, that mark is a symbol of God's love and protection.



Remember that the next time you see a rainbow in the heavens, will you? God's plan to save the world started before God ever created it. God sealed God's promise with a rainbow, and then made good on the promise with a cross. None of us are all we might be. But still somebody loves us and God send God's Son to die for us on the cross. That's the Gospel. A God willing to welcome home a disobedient child. A God willing to take that child's place on the cross of Calvary.

Please remember that we will broadcast live our Ash Wednesday service on February 17, 2021 at 7:00 pm over Facebook live. Won't you please join us from the safety of your home?

God's peace is with you!

Pastor Sundar

"O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen"
— Henri Nouwen

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The Church Staff: Rev. Sundar R. Samuel, **Pastor**; Amanda Trainor, **Director of Children's Christian Education**; Amber Biechman, **Youth Leader**; Jacqueline Krahforst, **Organist**; Herb Lamb, **Choir Director**; Cynthia Reineke, **Coordinator of EmBELLishments & Children's Music Program**; Gail Welkley, **Administrative Assistant**; Christopher Chartrand, **Custodian**; Beth Duncan, **Lay Leader**; Scott Bogart, **Peer Minister, Cornerstone Protestant Campus Ministry, The University at Albany**; Mozart M. K. Adevu, **Missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries, based in Accra, Ghana, West Africa.**

LECTIONARY FOR FEBRUARY

February 7 – 5th Sunday after the Epiphany – Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c;
I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

February 14 – UMC Scouting Sunday – Transfiguration Sunday – 2 Kings 2:1-12;
Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

February 17 – Ash Wednesday – Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17;
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

February 21 – 1st Sunday of Lent – Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10;
1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

February 28 – 2nd Sunday in Lent – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-18; Psalm 22:23-31;
Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38



SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH GROUP

January has come and gone. We will still be virtual for Friday Night Alive.

Friday Night Alive will be held on **February 5** and **February 19** at 6:30 pm. After Friday Night Alive we will do an activity from the Lent bags.

Lent Bags will be distributed on **January 31**. Please email Amber at Youthleaderamber@gmail.com to schedule a delivery or pick up of the bag. She is willing to travel to drop them off. Lent bags will have different items for the month's service projects, items for lent and more.



One of the church's favorite traditions to do before Lent starts is **Pretzel Sunday**, this year on **February 14**. Email Amber at youthleaderamber@gmail.com for a recipe for making your own pretzels. If you do make pretzels with your family or if you just want to skip the mess and eat a bag of pretzels in honor of Pretzel Sunday, do take some pictures and send them to Amber so that she can share them with the church.

Senior Youth Group grades 7 -12

February 28 at 1:00 pm we will have a zoom youth group meeting. Let's take some time to catch up.

All members of Church



We will be collecting items for **Love Kits**. Please drop off any items to the lobby of the church. We will be looking for the following: Deodorant - Men & Womens; Tooth Brush & Tooth Paste; Shampoo & Conditioner; Soap/Body Wash; Razors; socks; mittens; hats; hair brushes; hair ties; cross word puzzles; make-up; wash cloths & towels; q-tips; lotion; face wash; Underwear - men's or women's

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Blanket Sunday will be held on Sunday, February 28. You can contribute to Blanket Sunday all during February by sending or dropping off monies to the church office. Checks should be made out to the UMW.



The UMW has suspended our regular monthly meetings until further notice. However, if anyone has an issue they would like the UMW to be aware of please contact Patty Chartrand or Kathy Van Buren.

OUR CHURCH HAS A NEED

Our Church is in need of a Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. The Treasurer duties include entering information into the Church Windows Accounting System, balancing the church checking account, producing various reports, and attending Finance Committee and Church Council meetings. An Assistant Treasurer performs some of the duties of the Treasurer. If you might be interested in one of these positions or need more information, please contact Pastor Sundar at the church or Len Finke, Chair of the Church Council. Len's phone number is 518-477-7365 and his email is len.finke@gmail.com.



MISSIONS

The Missions Ministry would like to thank all those who donated in December to the Church-Wide Christmas Card, \$1063, was received, exceeding last year's total. This will be split between our Family Assistance Ministry and the local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).



Family Assistance helps those in our congregation in need of food, rent and other necessities. NAMI provides mental health support, education and services. To learn more about the good work that NAMI does, go to NAMI.org. We also want to thank everyone who participated in the Reverse Advent Calendar by donating items to the local food pantry. Thank you for your continued generosity.

JOSEPH'S HOUSE AND SHELTER OUTREACH VAN

Thank you to the volunteers who signed up to provide lunches on Mondays. We are covered through February, but need volunteers for each of the Mondays in March. If you can sign up to prepare and deliver 17 sandwiches to the shelter for distribution, along with vegetables or potato chips and a dessert, please contact Kevin Conley (e.kevin.conley@gmail.com, 518.253.4907). Assistance with delivering lunches to the Joseph's House administrative offices is available, if needed, and you can be reimbursed for purchased food.

Earth Week Recycling Event

Thank you for bringing batteries and Styrofoam last month. Our next big recycling event is Sunday, April 18. You may bring Styrofoam, batteries and medicine bottles on that day. If you are at church before then, medicine bottles or batteries can be placed in the bin or box located in the foyer. Please note: we have stopped collecting sneakers because Nike has discontinued its recycling during the pandemic.

MISSIONS (cont'd)

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS AND INVITES

Town of East Greenbush Environmental Activities

You are invited to an Eco-Team meeting on February 2 at 7:00 pm via ZOOM to hear East Greenbush Town Supervisor Jack Conway and Councilor Rick Matters discuss the town's recent initiatives related to environmental conservation, including their plans as a Participating Climate Smart Community. They expressed their openness to hearing any suggestions that the Eco-Team may have relative to future activities that the town may undertake. Please contact e.kevin.conley@gmail.com to register for the ZOOM link.

MEDICINE (PILL) BOTTLE DONATIONS

The Eco-Team is expanding its recycling activities to include medicine bottles. We have set up a bin in the foyer of the church for donated bottles and caps. They will be sent to Matthew Ministries for inclusion in shipments of medical supplies to developing countries and for shredding and recycling. The pill bottle program fulfills the dual needs of improving medical care in developing countries and caring for the environment.

Acceptable collection items include: • Prescription and over-the-counter pill bottles, • Large and small pill bottles • Pill Bottles with and without secure caps (child-resistant)

We ask that the donated bottles and caps be treated as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1—Remove labels, leaving no glue or residue | 2- Wash bottles in very hot water and dish soap |
| 3—Rinse and dry thoroughly | 4—Replace lids on clean, dried bottles |

OVERFLOWING LOVE

The church bin in the hallway was labeled "Three Kings Celebration". By Christmas, it was filled with toys for the children in Pastor Mariana Rodriguez' Hispanic and Latino congregation. All around it were more bags filled with toys. Two-hundred dollars' worth of gift cards were also donated! When I looked at the overflowing bin, it reminded me of God's overflowing love for us. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." Thessalonians 3:12. As we know, last year was a difficult one, especially for those who are less fortunate. Thank you for your "overflowing" generosity which made last year's holiday celebration much brighter.



- John Schmidt, Missions Ministry co-chair

ANNUAL CONFERENCE DATES ANNOUNCED

Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb has announced that the UNY 2021 Annual Conference (AC2021) session will be held remotely on **June 17-19**. The Committee on Agenda and the Committee on Sessions will continue to create the framework of our time together during these three days.

Rev. Gottschalk-Fielding, the Annual Conference Agenda Chair said, "It is our intention to create an environment as similar to being in person as possible, with debate, amendments, and action being allowed on all the necessary and vital work that is before us.

Remember we are Methodists. You, as an individual, may submit a petition to the Annual Conference seeking a change in how the church operates, what stand the church should take on a particular issue or other matters that can properly be brought to the Annual Conference. See the Pastor or contact the church office for more information on the process. Deadline for submissions is March 15.

COVID-19 RELATED UPDATES

FUMCEG Services Are Now On YouTube!

If you would like to view our church services on YouTube rather than Facebook, now you can!

A video of the service will be uploaded to YouTube each week and should be available on Sunday afternoons. Check out the recent service at the church's YouTube channel:

Worship Service FUMCEG - YouTube. That's the same site where the "Cookies and Carols" concert was posted last month. **We encourage everyone to subscribe to the church YouTube channel to assure getting updates.** At this point we can't livestream to both Facebook and YouTube at the same time, but we hope to be able to do that eventually.

COVID-19 Vaccine Availability

New York State recently expanded the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine to adults age 65 and older. See the Department of Health's website at <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/> for more information, to check if you're eligible to get the vaccine, and to use the online tool to find a vaccine location. **You can also call the NY COVID-19 Vaccination Hotline at 1-833-697-4829 from 7AM - 10PM, 7 days a week, to schedule a vaccination appointment if you're eligible.** As with any medical treatment, you may wish to discuss whether you should get the COVID-19 vaccine with your doctor.

COVID-19 Necessitated Difficult Choices

We as members of the Reopening Task Force have had to make difficult choices. Our primary goal is to keep everyone safe, healthy, and well during this highly contagious pandemic. Every week we sit after the service and discuss the worship service, the technology being used, and, most of all, what the laws are, the CDC rulings, and the Bishop's recommendations to keep our congregation well. It gets frustrating at times when the case numbers keep going up and up. All of us would love to see the parking lot full, no red ribbons on the pews, the children running around, a full choir, coffee hour, thrift sale, dinners, hugs... but to reach this we are doing what we can. We need your help: social distance, wear a mask, keep hands clean, and consider getting the vaccine. We want all of you back to church, but only when it is safe.

--Dave Caneen, Patty Chartrand, Jackie Krahforst, Herb Lamb, Colleen Rumsey, Jean Sheviak (January 10, 2021)

"Lent is the time for trimming the soul and scrapping the sludge off a life turned slipshod. Lent is about taking stock of time, even religious time. Lent is about exercising the control that enables us to say no to ourselves so that when life turns hard of its own accord we have the stamina to yes to its twists and turns with faith and hope... Lent is the time to make new efforts to be what we say we want to be."

- Joan D. Chittister

BLACK HISTORY MONTH AND MORE

For all of February, United Methodists will be celebrating **BLACK HISTORY MONTH**.

Let's get a bit more familiar with the topic. First, take this Black History quiz. Click on

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-black-history-quiz>

Now, read through **Who Am I?** written by Stephon Carlisle Void. What's the meaning of the first sentence in the fourth paragraph of the lines that follow? One more, same paragraph, the fourth sentence is a reference to what?

Who Am I?

When someone asks me "who I am," I tell them:

I am the great mind that was taken from the Motherland. I am the one that survived the Middle Passage. I am the one that built a nation with my blood, sweat, and tears. I am the visionary that built and invented things that changed modern America.



I am Claflin, South Carolina State, Benedict, Allen, Howard, Clark, Spelman, Morehouse, Bethune-Cookman, Tuskegee, Paine, and other Historically Black Colleges or Universities that taught young people that they are great.

I am the Divine 9. I am the Harlem Renaissance. I am jazz, soul, blues, gospel, and hip-hop. I am the sharecropper, the maid, and the nanny. I am the farmer, the seamstress, the factory worker, and the teacher. I am the midwife, the doctor, and the nurse.

I am the strange fruit that hung from southern trees. I am the marcher, the freedom rider, and the children that died in Birmingham. I am the Civil Rights Movement. I am the future that Martin dreamed about. I am the hope and change that Obama spoke of.

I am strong. I am great. I am blessed. I am a child of God. I am Black America. ###

For information on what is happening today in the church to answer racism issues, go to our Upper New York Annual Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CCORR) at

<https://www.unyumc.org/ministries/corr/inr>. And when you get to that page, click on the video, **Racism is Real**. Some of the numbers may surprise you.

One more suggestion. A new (2020) book from Abingdon Press, **I'M BLACK I'M CHRISTIAN I'M METHODIST** might be a good starting point to help understand racism today. Here is part of a comment from *Ministry Matters* about the book.

"Racism continues to be the unacceptable scandal of American society and the American churches. In spite of some gains such as the diversity of supporters for 'Black Lives Matter,' even the best intentioned among us remain largely ignorant of the actual life experience of those who are other than ourselves. This collection of testimonies, edited by Rudy Rasmus, helps remedy that by simply recounting personal stories of being Black, Christian, and Methodist in the United States."

—Bruce C. Birch, Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Theology,
Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC

We here in East Greenbush really started our thinking about Black History on January 17 with the morning message I gave for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. What didn't get mentioned at that service was, the Capital Area Council of Churches and the Troy Area United Ministries each usually have a worship service honoring the memory of Dr. King. This year, with COVID19, the CACC service is on your computer at You Tube. Click on <https://youtu.be/gUzsPyZCosw>. Let's hope that next year will be able to gather together and be a part of this very uplifting time of worship. Last item. If you get the chance, please write a check for the MLK Jr scholarship fund.

- George Herrick



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zoom, or telephone. We are here to help!

Reminiscing—by Carrie Larson

For 16 years, many of us met either the 3rd or 4th Friday in January at **the Cabin Fever Coffee House**. One year, we had a “pretend” campfire and sat around it telling stories, singing and eating our just desserts. Every year we had talented singers, dancers, story tellers, poets and audience members join together for an evening of old fashioned fun and fellowship. Steve Berger always handed out instruments at the end of the program so we, as one, sang a rousing closing sing-a-long song. Proceeds from contributions went to support the purchase of boats for victims of the Tsunami in Shri Lanka. Funds supported people at Joseph’s House, local food pantries, and the Family Assistant Ministries of our church. Although I realized what a blessing performers and audiences were, not until COVID did I realize what a fabulous gift our Coffee Houses are in the lives of so many. Thirty-six performers and audiences ranging from 30 to 110 never thought it strange to come together, sitting close to each other, sharing pastries and drink, singing loudly and having conversations with friends...all activities we would love to participate in now but can’t due to the pandemic..



I, who have very little humor, assumed the role of Emcee and story/teller of jokes at fill-in times. I also tried to find closing material that was sometimes serious and often not. Today, I came across The Alaska Blessing by Don Elbert, a blessing I might have used if we had a Coffee House this month. I first heard this blessing in Alaska in 2006 and share it with you now.

The Alaska Blessing

May your cabin be snug and cozy,
May your fingers and toes stay warm,
May your snow shoes walk in safety,
May God bless you through the storm.

May your life be full and rewarding,
May your dog team never fail,
May you reach the goals you strive for,
Good health and wisdom on the trail.

May the winter winds be at your back,
May the summer sun warm your face,
May your needs be few, your blessing many,
May God fill your life with grace.

Amen

A CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Lottie Brown Grant Scholarship applications for 2021 are now being considered. Preference is given to those preparing to enter a career in **Christian service (many occupations may qualify)**. Applicants must be an active, full member of a United Methodist Church within the Upper New York Annual Conference for at least one year prior to applying. Applicants also must be accepted in an accredited two or four-year college or university as an undergraduate student. If you are a college student who could use a little extra financial support for your education, the Lottie Brown Grant Scholarship is worth a look. All application paperwork must be received in the Conference Office postmarked no later than **March 15, 2021**. Contact Pastor Sundar or the church office for more information.