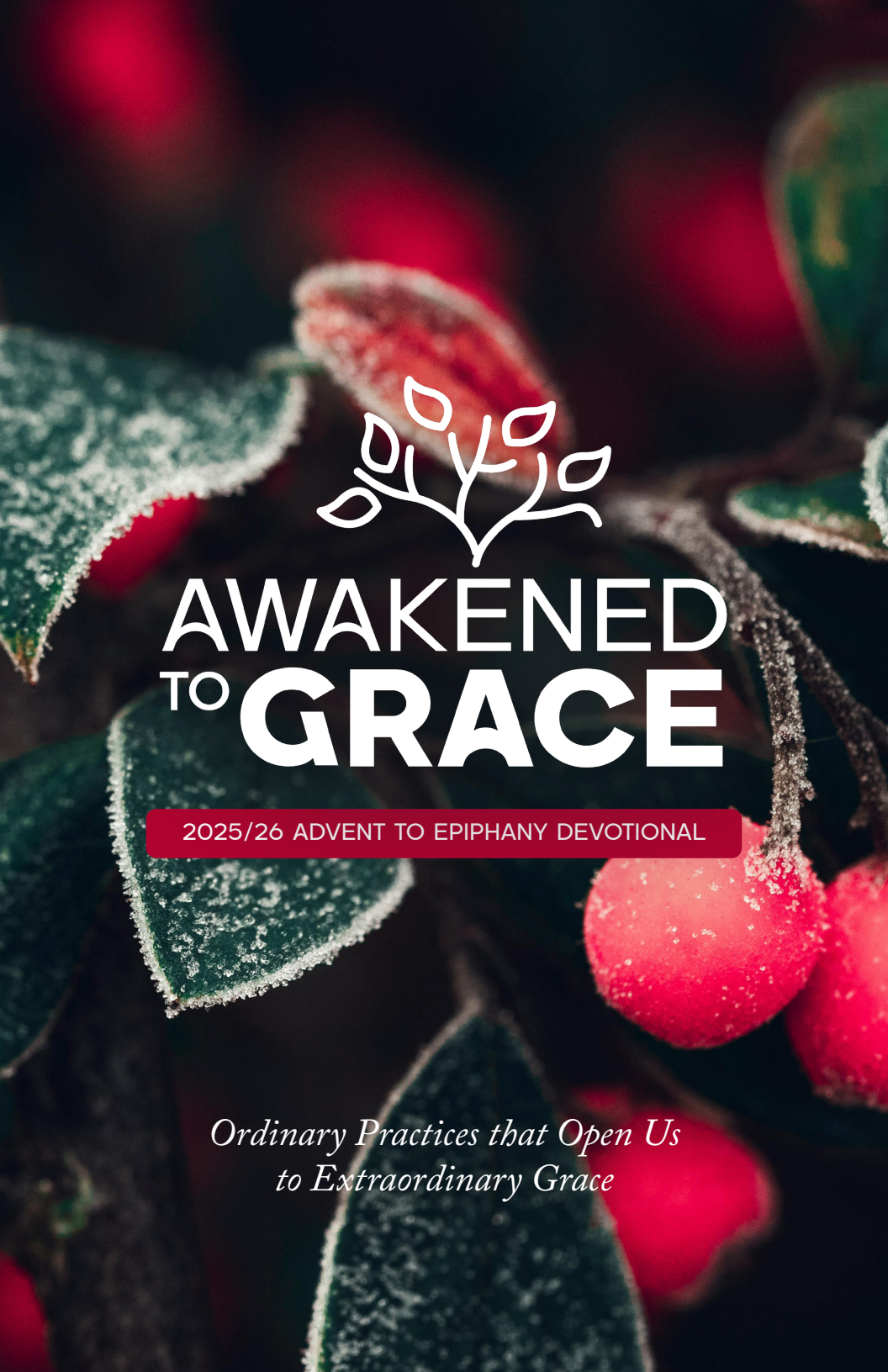

AWAKENED TO GRACE

2025/26 ADVENT TO EPIPHANY DEVOTIONAL

Ordinary Practices that Open Us to Extraordinary Grace

Awakened to Grace

Ordinary Practices that Open Us
to Extraordinary Grace

2025/26 Advent to Epiphany Devotional

The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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FOREWORD

Bishop Tom Berlin

We want to actually live the Christian life, rather than simply talk about it. Our goal is to become disciples of Jesus Christ, people whose lives reflect the love of God in the words we say as well and the things we do. We want to unite faith to action, and live in such a way that we develop loving relationships, help people in our communities, unite rather than divide our country, and honor Jesus as we follow his commandments and use our gifts to share the good news of his love with others. Awakened to Grace devotional materials are based on the assurance of the Apostle Paul, who told the Ephesians,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9 NRSVUE)

Here you will find devotional resources that will root you in scripture and help you consider the ways God wants to use your life to bless others. Awakened to Grace will enable you to develop weekly spiritual practices that will enable your life of prayer and devotion to God. Our hope is that you will encounter the Holy Spirit as you read the Bible, engage in refection with the devotional writing, and enjoy times of silent contemplation.

When we create the space to encounter the Holy Spirit, we find that God will offer us hope in times of despair, direction in times of confusion, forgiveness in times of remorse, and reminders of love when we feel distant from the Lord or people important to us. The key to being awakened to God's grace is to take time to participate in practices of prayer, reading the scripture, silence, and other spiritual disciplines so that we continue in the flow of God's grace and direction. Sunday worship is essential to our life in Christ. These resources allow you to continue to enjoy the presence of God in an intentional way throughout the week.

The early Methodist movement was vital. Lives were transformed as they became devoted to the way of Christ. People recovered from addiction to alcohol. They learned to work and save money to care for their families. They shared their faith with such integrity that their friends and neighbors entered the Christian life for the first time. They fed the hungry, visited prisoners, taught the illiterate to read, and organized against the institution of slavery in Britain. That was the fruit of their faith. The roots of their faith were their spiritual practices. They took time daily to be awakened to God's grace, which was new every morning in their lives. God guided them, which is why they gained an authentic faith with observable fruits that they shared with others.

Make a commitment to use these resources to be awakened to grace. Take time to step into the flow of God's love throughout the week and see what God can do in your life.

How to Use This Daily Guide

Each week centers on a theme that ties to the overall seasonal series. They are written by a wide variety of authors in Florida: clergy and laity, pastors of all orders, seminary students, and a diversity of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ministry contexts, and geographic location. Each author will follow this weekly progression:

Sunday: An introduction to the week's theme, with a preview of the texts and reflections ahead.

Monday: *"Seed."* A reflection on the theme from the most general, accessible perspective, particularly for "seeking" people who are newer to the faith.

Tuesday: *"Roots."* Common obstacles that prevent most people from growing in this area of their faith, including encouragement for you to push your roots deeper and trust in God.

Wednesday: *"Breakthrough."* A pivotal insight, surprise twist, or novel experience that will help you grow in your faith.

Thursday: *"Becoming."* Guidance for cultivating this aspect of your faith over the long haul of your spiritual journey.

Friday: *"Fruitfulness."* The impact you can make in the world and the lives of others once this aspect of faith bears full fruitfulness in your life.

Saturday: "Connections." This day is written by a representative of a Conference team or initiative, connecting you with the work and witness of United Methodists across the state. It may include upcoming events, ways to volunteer, and things to pray for.

Daily Prayers of Intercession are adapted from the *Irish Book of Common Prayer* (United Kingdom: Canterbury Press, 2018).

Advent & Christmas

Rev. Magrey deVega
Hyde Park UMC, Tampa

It's interesting that in the time of Wesley and 18th century England, Christians did not observe the Advent season the way we do today. This was likely due to the influence of the Puritans, who saw Christmas largely as an appropriation of a pagan holiday. We know from his journals that Wesley acknowledged Christmas, and he even preached sermons on that day. But we don't know that he ever observed Advent, let alone preached an Advent sermon. Nonetheless, Advent has become an important period of preparation for a fresh arrival of Jesus, and the central characters of the birth narrative—John the Baptist, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph—all point to aspects of self-reflection and renewed commitment to making room for Christ in our hearts. We journey toward Bethlehem with intentional focus on hope, peace, joy, and love as the signposts to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

HOPE

Week of November 30, 2025

Rev. Magrey deVega
Senior Pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist Church

Sunday, November 30

We begin this Advent journey with one of the most important aspects of the Christian faith: hope. From Genesis to Revelation, and on throughout thousands of years of history, the people of God have been motivated and comforted by the notion that God is working with us to create a future that is better than the present. On Monday, the reading from Isaiah is from the lectionary for Advent week one, and promises the people that "swords will be beaten to ploughshares."

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

God in the Future Tense

Rev. Magrey deVega

Monday, December 1

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, thank you for surrounding me with your love and filling me with your peace. Help me to experience the hope that you are offering in every moment, as I face an unknown future. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSVUE)

[1]The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and
Jerusalem.
[2]In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
[3]Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
[4]He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more.
[5]O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Reflection: Often the Bible calls people to remember what God has done in the past: the Israelites remembered their deliverance from enslavement under Pharaoh, and the extraordinary relationship God had with them through special covenant agreements with their ancestors. But there are many times, like in this passage from Isaiah, where the verbs associated with God are entirely in the future tense. God's mountain will be established. God will speak words of instruction. God will judge the nations and will turn weapons of violence into means of shared community. This is the essence of biblical hope: God has not only been faithful in the past, and is not only a constant presence in your life; God is already at work in your future, carving out a tomorrow that is better than today. Your responsibility is to awaken your soul to that possibility, and to walk faithfully toward that future, step by step.

How has God been faithful in my past? How will I open my eyes today to believe in what God is doing in my future?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God is teaching me how to live, that I might walk in God's path.

Evening Prayer: *God, as I reflect on this past day, bring to mind evidence of your love and grace at work in my life. Remind me that you are already at work in what will unfold for me tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Hand-Sized Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Tuesday, December 2

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, grant me a determined spirit, that when my spirit is weak and my soul feels crushed, I would place my trust in your hands, to move one step further in hope, guided by your hand. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 18:41-46 (NRSVUE)
41 Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of
rushing rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up
to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth
and put his face between his knees. 43 He said to his servant, "Go up
now, look toward the sea." He went up and looked and said, "There is
nothing." Then he said, "Go again seven times." 44 At the seventh time
he said, "Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand is rising out
of the sea." Then he said, "Go say to Ahab, 'Harness your chariot and
go down before the rain stops you.'" 45 In a little while the heavens grew
black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab rode off and
went to Jezreel. 46 But the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; he girded up
his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

Reflection: So many of the miracle stories in the Bible happen instantaneously: the blind receive sight, the hungry crowd is fed, the dead are raised to life. It might lead us to believe that the hope that God promises should always happen with that same immediacy. But we know that is not the case. Often, we need to practice patience and tenacity, two qualities that are hardest to exhibit when the times are toughest. After years of drought, Elijah was sensing that God would soon bring rain to replenish the earth. We can imagine that after the first six times his servant reported no evidence of change in the weather, both Elijah and his servant could have given up. It is easy to lose heart when God's promises don't fit with our timeline or

expectations. But if God always acted according to our inclinations, there would be no need for faith, right? That is the blessed, double-edged sword of biblical hope. It pushes us to trust God before there is supporting evidence. And the more we are able to trust God, the longer we are able to wait. Even for the seventh time, and beyond.

What areas of my life are summoning me to have more patience and fortitude? How will I demonstrate more faithfulness and trust in God, despite lack of evidence?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God is working, even though I cannot see it. And God's faithfulness is not contingent on my ability to believe it.

Evening Prayer: *Almighty God, you have worked in known and invisible ways today. Thank you for what you have shown me, and for what I have noticed. In moments of provision that I have yet to discover but in retrospect, I am grateful. May I face tomorrow with renewed trust in you. Amen.*

A Fuller Sense of Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Wednesday, December 3

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, just as you raised Jesus from the dead and welcomed him through his heavenly ascension, empower me to live a resurrected life, that I might believe in what I cannot yet see. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23 (NRSVUE)
17I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Reflection: Paul exhorts the Ephesians to have a hope that is empowered in the Spirit's wisdom and revelation, and rooted in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Connecting hope to the Ascension offers an insight into hope that we often disregard. Pope Leo I said that in the Ascension—in which Jesus left visible, earthly companionship with the disciples—we remember that "it takes great strength of mind and a faithful and enlightened heart to believe in what escapes the eye. Therefore, what was visible in our Redeemer on earth has been operative in sacramental signs." Hope is not just a guarantee that things will be better ("better," after all, is a relative condition, and can even be

temporary). Hope is the force that motivates us to keep going when we feel like quitting, with no guarantee of what will happen. Hope builds our strength and our capacity to endure tough times, enabling us to "believe in what escapes the eye." When all seems lost, hope stands tallest. And it enables us to keep believing.

How will I hope in God today, less in a way expects a certain outcome, and more in a way that strengthens me to keep going?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: My hope is rooted in what God has done through Jesus, and in what God will be faithful to do in me.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, your Spirit has seen me through another day, made more complex by events beyond my control, yet also simplified by your steady and ongoing presence. Help me to trust you as I process what has been, and face with courage what is still to come. Amen.*

Hope in a Straight Line

Rev. Magrey deVega

Thursday, December 4

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, you know I have so much to do today, I will wear a bunch of hats and run around from one responsibility to the next. So, help me to at least one thing right—the most important thing: to be as close to you in every moment as I can. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:1-6 (NRSVUE)
1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius
Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother
Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of
Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the
word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He
went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of
repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of
the words of Isaiah the prophet:
"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
5 Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
6 And all people will see God's salvation.'"

Reflection: John the Baptist, a regular companion on every Advent journey, quoted Isaiah's iconic line: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." John equated the maturity of our spirituality with our ability to walk a straight line. German scientist Jan Souman conducted a fascinating experiment in which he took his subjects to a large, open field, blindfolded them, asked them to walk for an hour

in a straight line. Without exception, people couldn't do it. Everybody thought they were walking in a straight line, until they remove the blindfolds to see their crooked path. Souman said there is only one way to walk a straight line: by focusing on something visible ahead of us and walking toward it. For John the Baptist, there was a clear connection between having hope and staying the course: confession. By repenting of our sins and staying fixed on Jesus, we can walk into the hope that the promised Messiah has in store for us. So, take off your blindfold through confession. Keep your head up and your eyes open. And take things one step at a time, along the straight and narrow.

What blindfolds am I wearing that need to be removed, enabling me to see my blind spots and my wayward steps? And how will I fix my eyes on God and walk into the hope that God promises?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: With every step forward in my life, I not only claim a future that has come, but I claim who I am becoming. May both be what God intends for me.

Evening Prayer: *God, this has been a full day, with both highs and lows, joys and regrets. Reveal to me the serendipities I have missed, and forgive me of the wrongs I have done. Renew my strength for the day ahead. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Joyful in Hope

Rev. Magrey deVega

Friday, December 5

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, strengthen me today through the power of community, that in my relationships with others, I might experience the love and hope revealed in your son Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9-21 (NRSVUE)
[9]Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good;
[10]love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. [11]Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. [12]Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. [13]Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. [14]Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. [15]Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.
[16]Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. [17]Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. [18]If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19]Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." [20]Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." [21]Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection: By the time we get to the twelfth chapter of Romans, we see that the tone of Paul's letter has shifted from first-order, high-level theology and doctrine to the practical, interpersonal implications of life in Christ. Because we have been saved by faith alone and by the love of God, we are free to demonstrate that love in our interactions with others. At the center of this exhortation is verse

12: "Rejoice in hope." Paul reminds us that hope is not something to be cornered and claimed privately and individually. It is to be shared with others and experienced in community. This is done through acts of generosity (verse 13), empathy (verse 15), peace and humility (verse 16), and forgiveness (verses 17–19). The hope that we long to see in the world can be the very hope we can enliven among those of us in community with each other, as together we strive to "not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good."

How will I be a conduit of hope for others today?
What hope will I be open to receiving from others?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The hope I am longing to see can be the hope that I create in community with others.

Evening Prayer: *God, may the words of Paul's letter to the Romans be an inventory for this day. Where I have failed to live up to its calling, I ask for your forgiveness, and I seek forgiveness from others. Where I have fulfilled its demands, I rejoice in the strength you have provided, and the benefits of putting your love into action. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Saturday, December 6

Warren Willis United Methodist Camp and Conference Center

What We Do

For 78 years, hope has been offered to children, youth, and adults through the ministry of the Warren Willis Camp and Conference Center. Our camp and conference center creates a sacred space for all to grow in community and connect with Christ. Our 300-acre lakeside campus offers opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship for guests, families, and campers of all backgrounds.

This past summer, we welcomed 1,700 overnight and day campers across six one-week sessions. A team of clergy creates the curriculum and theme to guide chapel services and small groups. The Summer Leadership Team is comprised of 60–70 college-aged counselors dedicated to helping campers experience moments of transformation. Together with adult volunteers, they bring learning to life through games, worship, and meaningful connections.

Our retreats strengthen the children, youth, and family ministries of local churches throughout the year. Our Created By God Retreat engages fourth and fifth grade students with their parents/guardians in conversations about faith and human sexuality. Confirmation Retreats deepen young people's connection to the church through powerful worship and small groups. Family Camp gives families time away to bond and grow spiritually and our Fall Retreat—Florida's largest gathering of United Methodist youth—packs a week of camp excitement into a single weekend.

We are honored to host guests of all backgrounds throughout the year, regardless of their religious affiliation. In tandem, we have the privilege of ministering to our local community through After

School Adventures. Each weekday, we pick up and care for local elementary schoolers who fill our the grounds with laughter each day.

Ways to Become Involved

Pray for young people in your church or neighborhood for whom a week of camp could bring hope. Invite the 4th–12th graders in your life to camp next summer! We have a Campership ministry to sponsor families with financial assistance. Consider giving a donation to this.

Maybe you are looking for a little hope in your life—consider volunteering:

- Become a Summer Camp Adult Volunteer. You will work alongside counselors to teach the small group curriculum and lead activities. Applications open in the new year.
- Consider applying to our Workampers Ministry in exchange for RV hookup. Our year-round staff connect resident volunteers with ministry areas that accompany their interests and skill sets
- Bring a group to volunteer during the year! We have dozens of projects ongoing at any given time.

Ways to Connect

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LOVE

Week of December 7, 2025

Rev. Amy Greene
Director of Spiritual Care, Metropolitan Ministries

Sunday, December 7

Love is more than a feeling or sentiment. In Advent, we are invited to remember that love took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. This week, we'll trace the shape of God's love—from the seed of desire to be known, to the deep roots of connection, the breakthrough of compassion, the becoming of beloved community, and the fruit of justice and joy. Through Scripture, prayer, and reflection, may we lean into the transforming power of Love made manifest in Christ.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Seed

Rev. Amy Greene

Monday, December 8

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of all longing, plant within us the first stirrings of your love. Let it grow in us and through us, even now. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:7-10 (NRSV)
Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Reflection: Before we ever loved God, God loved us. That's where love begins—not with us striving, but with God initiating. Today's scripture reminds us that God's love doesn't wait for us to be ready or worthy. Like a seed breaking open in the dark soil, love finds us right where we are—messy, uncertain, longing. And from that place, love begins to grow. If you've ever felt like you needed to "clean up" before God could love you, hear this clearly: God already does. Completely. Now. Always.

What would it mean to believe that God loves you, as you are, right now?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*

- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love takes root in the soil of our everyday lives—even before we notice it.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for loving me first. Let your love take root in my heart as I rest in your presence tonight. Amen.*

Roots

Rev. Amy Greene

Tuesday, December 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of mercy, help us name what holds us back from love—and sink our roots deeper into your grace. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:16-19 (CEB)
I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you'll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

Reflection: Love can feel risky—especially for those who have been let down, betrayed, or ignored. No wonder so many of us struggle to trust it. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is that they would have strong roots in love—a connection that holds firm even when storms come. God doesn't ask us to generate that kind of love from scratch. Instead, we're invited to ground ourselves in Christ's love, which is already deeper and wider than we can comprehend. From that rooted place, we grow strong—not because we never doubt, but because we keep returning to the Source.

What obstacles or fears keep you from trusting God's love more fully?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*

- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Deep roots in God's love help us stay grounded when everything else is shifting.

Evening Prayer: *Strengthen me, O God, when I am afraid to love or be loved. Let your Spirit steady my heart. Amen.*

Breakthrough

Rev. Amy Greene

Wednesday, December 10

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God who breaks through walls, surprise us today with love that opens new paths. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:36-39, 44-48 (NRSV)
One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment...

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears... Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love."

Reflection: Love is not always neat and tidy. Sometimes it looks like interrupting dinner with an open wound of a heart. The woman with the alabaster jar isn't named, but her love tells her story. She breaks through shame, judgment, and fear—and Jesus meets her there. When love breaks through, it often does so through vulnerability. When we let down our guard, healing happens. The breakthrough isn't just in her forgiveness—it's in the way Jesus sees her, truly and completely. Love sees. Love restores.

Where do you need a breakthrough of love in your life?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love breaks through where we are most vulnerable and brings healing.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, help me believe that I, too, am seen and loved. Let that truth soften and restore me. Amen.*

Becoming

Rev. Amy Greene

Thursday, December 11

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of transformation, shape me into someone who loves like You. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 15:9-12 (NRSV)
As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Reflection: Abiding in love takes practice. It's not just about feelings or grand gestures—it's about staying. Staying when it's hard. Staying when we're tired. Staying with each other through disagreement, disappointment, and discomfort. Jesus calls us to abide—to make our home—in the kind of love he embodied: generous, sacrificial, faithful. We don't become loving people overnight. But as we remain in Christ's love, it begins to shape our instincts and expand our capacity. Advent reminds us that love is coming... and love is also becoming—in us.

What practices help you stay grounded in love even when it's hard?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love is not a one-time decision, but a daily becoming.

Evening Prayer: *Faithful God, help me to abide in your love—and become a reflection of it in all I do. Amen.*

Fruitfulness

Rev. Amy Greene

Friday, December 12

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of justice and joy, let your love bear fruit through us for the healing of the world. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:22-25 (CEB)
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit.

Reflection: Love is not just something we feel—it's something we grow. And when it grows in us, it changes how we show up in the world. Paul names love first among the fruits of the Spirit, because everything else flows from it. In a world that often rewards anger, fear, and division, love is a radical act. But it's also a quiet one—found in kindness offered, dignity protected, joy shared. The fruit of love is not for us alone. It's for the neighbor, the stranger, the world God so deeply loves. What if the world saw our faith not by our arguments—but by our love?

What kind of fruit is your life bearing right now?
How might love be more visible in your actions?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The world will know we are Christ's disciples by the fruit of our love.

Evening Prayer: *Loving Spirit, let my life bear the fruit of your love tomorrow and always. Amen.*

Saturday, December 13

Multi-Ethnic Ministry Cohort

What We Do

Peace is another word for *Shalom*, wholeness. It's a promise that we feel internally through the peace of Christ that passes all understanding. It is also a concept we work toward around the world, living in shalom and wholeness across all of our beautiful diversity as a global people and denomination. What if peace became more apparent through the intentional work of our churches to reflect the beautiful diversity of God's Kingdom in our communities and across our state?

The work of the Multi-Ethnic Ministry Cohort began with the inspiration of the 2025 Annual Conference Session. Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, who led the bible study time, challenged the conference to envision what it would look like to be intentional toward the work of local churches reflecting the diversity of their neighborhood schools. Inspired by such a vision and the annual conference goal to innovate and revitalize existing churches, the Empowered Diversity Ministries of the Ministry Hub has created an opportunity for cohort learning toward this vision. We provide support and training to ministries and churches seeking to minister to cultural, ethnic, socially and economically diverse communities.

Ways to Become Involved

The "Building Thriving Multi-Ethnic Churches Cohort" will start in January 2026. The cohort seeks to equip participants with theological grounding for multi-ethnic ministry, enhance cultural competency and sensitivity, provide practical strategies for pastoring and leading in diverse contexts, and explore avenues for economic empowerment within multi-ethnic congregations. The cohort will be led by Rev. Rodrigo Cruz, founder of the NETT Church in Gwinnett county,

Georgia, and Executive Assistant to the Bishop in the Georgia Episcopal Area. This is a cohort for churches with a minimum representation of three church leaders per church. For information, contact Rev. José Nieves at jnieves@kissimmeefumc.org.

Ways to Connect

Rev. José Nieves
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First UMC in Downtown Kissimmee
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Rev. Dr. Sharon Austin
ds-ec@flumc.org

JOY AS THE FRUIT OF GRACE

Week of December 14, 2025

Rev. Scott Ehler
Associate Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Naples

Sunday, December 14

In the Wesleyan tradition, joy is not merely an emotion, it is the deep, abiding fruit of God's transforming grace. John Wesley taught that the Spirit's work in sanctification fills believers with love, peace, and joy as evidence of God's presence. This joy transcends circumstances because it flows from a heart fully alive in Christ. It is both a gift and a calling: we receive joy through faith, and we cultivate it through gratitude, worship, and service. As we journey through these devotions, may the God of all joy awaken within us a vibrant, contagious gladness that reflects God's Kingdom.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

The Seed: Planted in God's Presence

Rev. Scott Ehler

Monday, December 15

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, plant the seed of Your joy deep in my heart today. Help me rest in Your presence and trust that You are cultivating new life within me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 16:11 (NRSV)
You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Reflection: Wesleyans deeply connect joy with the presence of God. Psalm 16 reminds us that joy isn't a fleeting emotion; it's rooted in divine companionship. John Wesley taught that Christian perfection includes a heart filled with love and joy through union with Christ. Here, the psalmist describes joy as abundant and lasting, found not in circumstances but in God's presence. When we walk the "path of life" with Him, we receive an unshakeable joy that sustains us amid trials. This joy isn't naive or superficial; rather, it's deep and rooted in the pleasures and promises of God's covenant care. As you step into this week, let the promise of Psalm 16 shape your posture: in every decision and small moment, see and savor the joy that springs from dwelling with the Lord. Even in mundane routines, God's presence is accessible and life-transforming.

In what ways have you experienced deep,
abiding joy from God's presence this past week?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*

- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: True joy is not in what we hold, but in whose presence we dwell.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, God, for sowing Your joy in my soul. As I rest tonight, continue nurturing it with Your love and peace, preparing me for tomorrow's growth. Amen.*

The Shoot: Choosing Joy Daily

Rev. Scott Ehler

Tuesday, December 16

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Holy Spirit, kindle within me the joy of Christ so that others may see Your light shining. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4 (NRSV)
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Reflection: This verse is at the heart of Wesleyan life: rejoicing as a spiritual discipline. Our inner witness of the Spirit brings assurance and joy. Paul's exhortation, "again I will say, rejoice." This underscores joy as a continual choice, even when difficulties swirl around us. The Wesleyan stream emphasizes "grace-empowered living," meaning that joy isn't based on our circumstances but on the finished work of Christ and the ongoing presence of the Spirit. Embracing joy in the Lord always means cultivating gratitude in prayer and seeking the Spirit's work in daily life. This joy isn't a temporary high, but a steady fruit of the Spirit, visible in how we treat others and respond to hardship. As you engage in the rhythm of today, let Paul's imperative guide you: make joy your posture, your prayer, and your witness.

What practice today can help you choose joy
even in hard or routine moments?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*

- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Joy in the Lord is a choice rooted in grace, not around circumstances.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You for Your Spirit's joy within me, help me rest in that joy tonight. Amen.*

Blossom: Expressing Joy in Worship and Service

Rev. Scott Ehler

Wednesday, December 17

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Gracious Lord, let the joy of serving You renew my heart and uplift my spirit today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Chronicles 15:28 (NRSV)
So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.

Reflection: In Wesleyan practice, service and worship are intertwined with expressions of joy. David's exuberant celebration while bringing the Ark reminds us that worship is not somber, it's joyful. John Wesley encouraged festival gatherings, sacraments, and songs that uplift the spirit of the community. This scripture shows joy moving outward: shouts, music, whole-hearted engagement. It surfaces when we align our hearts with God's mission and celebrate God's presence among us. Worship isn't just internal, when we serve with joy, we draw others into the celebration of God's grace. Physical expressions, rhythm, voice, dance, are part of faithful living. Reflect today on the joy of serving and praising with your whole being. Let it be a catalyst for praise that changes you and those around you.

How can you express joy in your worship and service today through word, deed, or song?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **<u>personal relationships</u>**...

- *the home, and family life…*

- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Joy-filled service transforms routine worship into a feast of grace.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for the joy of praising and serving You today. Help it fuel my rest tonight. Amen.*

Fruit: Sustained by Hope and Grace

Rev. Scott Ehler

Thursday, December 18

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Spirit of Truth, plant the seeds of joy in every encounter and thought today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 15:13 (NRSV)
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: This verse echoes Wesley's emphasis on practical holiness and spiritual vitality. Romans 15:13 celebrates joy and peace as gifts that flow from faith in God's hopefulness. For Wesleyans, sanctification includes not just moral change but flourishing in the Spirit, the fruit of which is joy. God doesn't merely forgive; God fills us with hope that overflows into joy and peace. These aren't passive gifts, they anchor us during uncertainty. As we believe God's promises, faithfulness, presence, and power, our hearts become fertile ground for joy. Romans' "God of hope" points us to a source beyond ourselves. Even in season of doubt, we can trust in the One who guarantees tomorrow. Engage your today by focusing on hope-filled promises and allow joy to rise.

What hope-filled promise of God can you hold onto today to stir your joy?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*

- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Hope in God is the root; joy and peace are the branches that flourish.

Evening Prayer: *God of hope, thank You for filling me with joy and peace today; make me a channel of that hope tonight. Amen.*

Overflow: Living in the Fullness of Joy

Rev. Scott Ehler

Friday, December 19

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Gracious Lord, may Your joy overflow in my gratitude as I close this week in worship. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:12 (NRSV)
For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Reflection: Isaiah paints a powerful picture of a people transformed by God's deliverance. Going out with joy, creation itself joining in song. Wesleyan holiness is transformative, not just moral restraint but suiting heart and life to God's Kingdom. When God liberates, our lives sing. This joy is both internal and visible, affecting our attitudes, our relationships, even the environment we inhabit. As this week draws to a close, be aware of how God's grace has moved you. Are you walking in hope? Serving with gladness? Allow that transformation to shape your going out: into rest, relationships, and mission. Let God's joy lead your weekend.

Reflect on one area where you've seen God's transforming joy this week. How will it shape your weekend?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*

- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...
- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God sets us free to walk out in joy. Let that joy guide your steps.

Evening Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for carrying me through this week in joy. May I rest in Your peace and wake renewed. Amen.*

Saturday, December 20

The Creation Care Task Team

What We Do

The mission of the Creation Care Task Team is to equip the local church with encouragement, training, and tools to support a thriving Creation Care ministry and to live into the call of being a steward of creation, loving our neighbors, and helping those in need by dedicating our time, talents, and gifts to advocating for the earth.

Ways to Become Involved

Sign up for our email list today! You'll receive 2–3 emails per month sharing our Creation Care news and events. To sign up, email Sarah Flint at earthsteward@harmonyhq.com.

Currently, Creation Care is partnering with Disaster Recovery with our "Buckets of Hope" campaign. We are asking churches to commit to making flood buckets, and the design of the campaign is meant to help people to make the connection between climate change and extreme weather events. You may see the campaign details and sign up at flumc.org/creationcare. As part of this campaign, we are offering monthly webinars during the evening.

In addition, we offer monthly "Eat, Pray, Grow" networking Zoom meetings on the fourth Tuesdays at noon, where we share information to help equip Creation Care leaders in our local churches.

Finally, our team is always looking for people to join us, especially to be District Representatives. District Reps provide a more local point of contact for churches starting Creation Care teams. All you need is a passion for Creation Care and the ability to use Zoom technology

for meetings—no experience required. Our team meets twice per month on Zoom to plan our webinars and other activities, and we meet in-person for an annual retreat in the season leading up to the Annual Conference.

Ways to Connect

Sarah Flint, Chairperson of Creation Care Ministry team
earthsteward@harmonyhq.com
904-206-3023
flumc.org/creationcare
Facebook Group: Florida UMC Creation Care Connection

THE ALREADY & THE NOT YET

December 21–24, 2025

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray
Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Jupiter

Sunday, December 21

This week in Advent, we focus on love—God's enduring, redemptive love revealed through the promises of the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ. As United Methodists, we live in the tension of the *"already and not yet"*: Christ has come, and yet we await the fullness of His kingdom. Through prophecy, poetry, and promise, these Scriptures invite us to reflect on a love that roots, grows, liberates, and transforms. May this week deepen your faith as you wait in love.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

God With Us

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Monday, December 22

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of love, as we begin this week, remind us that you are already with us—and yet we still await the fullness of your kingdom. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:14 (NRSVUE)
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

Reflection: The name *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us," holds profound weight during Advent. In Isaiah's day, this prophecy offered hope amid political instability and fear. It signaled that God had not abandoned God's people but was intervening in human history. Christians believe this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, whose birth was both a sign and substance of God's presence.

As Wesleyans, we live in the assurance of *prevenient grace*—God's love at work before we are even aware of it. The "already" is that Christ has come and God's love is among us. The "not yet" is our longing for the day when God's love is made complete in the world. Even now, we carry this love into a world still waiting to be made whole.

Where have you seen God's presence show up in unexpected places this year?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Love entered the world not as a force, but as a child—God already with us, and yet still coming.

Evening Prayer: *Emmanuel, thank you for walking with me today. As I rest tonight, anchor my heart in your presence and give me peace in knowing you are near. Amen.*

A Branch of New Life

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Tuesday, December 23

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, help us recognize the new growth you are bringing forth, even when it starts small and hidden. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1 (NRSVUE)
A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Reflection: This verse paints a picture of resurrection from ruin. Jesse, the father of David, represents a royal line that had been cut down—yet hope sprouts from the remnants. In Jesus, this prophecy comes alive as He emerges from David's line to bring justice, peace, and restoration.

For those living in exile or disappointment, the image of a shoot growing from a stump affirms that God's love finds a way, even from what looks dead. Grace is always at work seeking, redeeming, and restoring. Though the Kingdom has begun in Christ, we wait for it to bloom fully. God's love grows even now, and we are invited to participate in its flourishing.

What stumps in your life is God transforming into places of new growth?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*

- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Even when all seems lost, love breaks through like a shoot from a stump.

Evening Prayer: *God of renewal, thank you for the signs of new life you're growing in me. As I sleep, keep tending the soil of my heart with your faithful love. Amen.*

Light to the Nations

Rev. Dr. Susan Gray

Wednesday, December 24

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Open our hearts, O God, to the light of your love that shines beyond borders and barriers. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 42:6–7 (NRSVUE)
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Reflection: This Servant Song in Isaiah speaks of a coming one who will be a light not just for Israel, but for all nations. This global vision of redemption highlights God's expansive love—a love that liberates, heals, and restores. Christians see Jesus as the fulfillment of this promise, whose ministry brought sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed.

We live in the time between Christ's first coming and Christ's return. This "already and not yet" challenges us to be light bearers in a dark world, trusting that love is already victorious, even when darkness lingers. Our call to social holiness echoes this passage—our faith must express itself in acts of justice and compassion, embodying God's love today.

Where are you being called to bring God's liberating love to others?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love is a light that frees and heals—and we are called to carry it forward.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, Light of the world, thank you for shining into every shadow of this day. May your love lead me through the night and into deeper compassion tomorrow. Amen.*

Christmas

Rev. Nicholas Lee, Senior Pastor, Harvest UMC, Bradenton

Thursday, December 25

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *O almighty God, by the birth of your holy child Jesus you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness. Grant that in his light we may see light. Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people, so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us, and that we may have the ever brightening hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (United Methodist Book of Worship #277)*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.
[2]The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
[3]You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
[4]For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
[5]For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
[6]For a child has been born for us,

a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Reflection: Merry Christmas! I have always loved this day. When I was a kid, I couldn't sleep the night before, not because I was anticipating Santa Claus, but because I knew my parents had placed presents under the tree, and I couldn't wait to unwrap them. So, I uncharacteristically woke up early, rushed in front of the tree, and anxiously awaited my parents' awakening so the festivities could begin!

I am older now, and I still wake up early on Christmas morning, but for different reasons. I can't wait to see the light in my children's eyes as they unwrap presents that they had no idea were waiting for them. The light from their faces seems to pierce the darkness and chaos that exist all around, even if the moment is fleeting.

Isaiah is addressing people who find themselves surrounded by darkness. They have endured the hardships of oppression in various forms, and it is evident that they are overwhelmed by the presence of evil. However, Isaiah delivers a message of hope, proclaiming that a light will shine forth, illuminating the path for those who have been in the shadows for so long.

Today, we rejoice in the realization of Isaiah's prophecy that "A child is born, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This manifestation of

God among us signifies a significant change. A radiant light breaks through the darkness, and we need not wait for Christmas morning to celebrate. We hold onto hope because the light has entered our midst, and Christ is with us. Let us give thanks to God for His presence among us.

What gives you hope on this Christmas day?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: We hold onto hope because the light has entered our midst, and Christ is with us.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Amen. (Nunc Dimittis, United Methodist Hymnal, #225)*

Can the Thing You Need be the Thing You Don't Want?

Rev. Nicholas Lee

Friday, December 26

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *O almighty God, by the birth of your holy child Jesus you gave us a great light to dawn on our darkness. Grant that in his light we may see light. Bestow upon us that most excellent Christmas gift of love to all people, so that the likeness of your Son may be formed in us, and that we may have the ever brightening hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (United Methodist Book of Worship #277)*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14 (NRSV)
10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the Lord
your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said,
I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. 13 Then Isaiah[a]
said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary
mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself
will give you a sign. Look, the young woman[b] is with child and
shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Reflection: Is it possible that the very thing we need might be something that we don't want? I've been pondering what I would say if God gave me the opportunity to ask for whatever I wanted. What would I ask for? Would there be some type of magic genie paradox that could misconstrue my words and cause me more harm than good?

Isaiah's question to King Ahaz arose from the great fear in the Kingdom of Judah. Foreign powers, including the Kingdom of Israel, had risen up against them. God wanted the people to stop worrying and to trust God. Ahaz's response may have been for a plethora of reasons, but what we do know is that Ahaz would align with a

foreign power to fight his battles. Ahaz would make an alliance with the empire of Assyria and Tiglath-Pileser. In essence, he chose the power he could see versus the power of God.

Isaiah's response to Ahaz, the people of Judah, and us was to promise God embodied in the flesh and living amongst us. In the name of Immanuel, Isaiah was literally saying 'God is with us!"

I have been perplexed by the reality that a King in peril would turn down God being with him and the nation, but the more I think about it, the incarnation might be what we need, but it isn't always what we want. It might complicate things and even change our world in ways that we can't predict or control.

Nevertheless, God's promise is still true. He promises to dwell with us and to do the very thing we need: change our reality.

When have you experienced God's care in a way that you did not anticipate, or maybe even want?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The incarnation might be what we need, but it isn't always what we want.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Amen. (Nunc Dimittis, United Methodist Hymnal, #225)*

Residing Hope

(Formerly known as the Florida United Methodist Children's Home)

What We Do

As we celebrate the coming of the Christ child into a world where there was no room in the inn, we highlight the work of Residing Hope—a place of love and refuge for young people around our state. The mission of Residing Hope for more than 100 years is to enable children and their families to experience the transforming love of Christ through evidence-based care and holistic services through:

- Therapeutic Residential Care in two locations for abused, abandoned, neglected children ages 10–17 from across the state. A distinction of our Madison Youth Ranch is our Equine Therapy Program.

- Foster Care in four counties from infancy through 17 years of age.

- Outpatient Counseling in office and virtually across the state.

- Montessori School on our Enterprise campus working with children from infancy through Middle School.

- Independent Living in Enterprise for young adults 18 through 26 years of age.

- Spiritual Life activities on both campuses including mid-week youth programs and Sunday worship.

Many of our residents have shared over the years that the very first time they experienced unconditional love was when they arrived on our campuses. Through the sacrificial love of the Teaching Parents

in their cottage, therapists, and other staff, they came to know God's love in a way they never imagined.

Ways to Become Involved

- Host a special event, recreation activity, meal at a cottage or ice cream social.
- Sponsor an off campus activity such as bowling, miniature golf, roller skating, or other activity.
- Collect needed items such as hygiene products, comforters, suitcases, socks, and other items.
- Bring a group to volunteer to help with landscaping, painting, cleaning, or other projects.
- Sponsor a fundraiser such as a car wash, bake sale, fish fry, dessert auction, or linen shower.
- Christmas in July donation drive for our point store

(Time commitment varies with the activity ; Normally, no real special skills or training required.)

Ways to Connect

Lynn Bellomy, Volunteer Relations Supervisor
Lynn.Bellomy@ResidingHope.org
386-668-4774, ext. 2321

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EXPECTATION

Week of December 28, 2025

Carlene Johnson
Member of The Channel UMC and Florida Conference Parliamentarian

Sunday, December 28

It's interesting to have recently celebrated Christmas, the arrival of the Christ child, and to then reflect on expectation as an early focus of Christmastide. Mary spent nine months, and we just spent the season of advent, expecting the arrival of Jesus. He arrived! Isn't the expectation finished? Biblically, there are many kinds of expectation that occur after Jesus' birth. The Greek word used for expectation is *prosdokaó*, which Strong's Concordance defines as an "active, forward-leaning posture of 'looking for,' 'waiting for,' or 'expecting' something or someone. It is not passive resignation but a watchful readiness that shapes perception, priorities, and behavior. Throughout the New Testament the word marks moments when hearts are poised for an arrival—whether of a person, a provision, or the final consummation of God's purposes."

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Carlene Johnson

Monday, December 29

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: from Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus, UMH #196, vs. 1
Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:25-32 (TLB)
25That day a man named Simeon, a Jerusalem resident, was in the Temple. He was a good man, very devout, filled with the Holy Spirit and constantly expecting the Messiah[a] to come soon. 26For the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen him—God's anointed King. 27The Holy Spirit had impelled him to go to the Temple that day; and so, when Mary and Joseph arrived to present the baby Jesus to the Lord in obedience to the law, 28Simeon was there and took the child in his arms, praising God.

29-31"Lord," he said, "now I can die content! For I have seen him as you promised me I would. I have seen the Savior you have given to the world. 32He is the Light that will shine upon the nations, and he will be the glory of your people Israel!"

Reflection: Simeon waited SO LONG for the arrival of the Messiah! Depending on the translation of the Bible you read, he is usually described as "looking forward to" or "waiting on" the

consolation of Israel. The Greek word used is *prosdokaó* which translates more actively than just sitting around waiting. The Living Bible translates the verse as "constantly expecting," but even that doesn't quite cover the depth! Simeon wasn't just at home hoping wistfully for a Messiah, he was actively preparing for the certain eventuality. He was praying and showing up at the temple and being present and ready for Jesus' arrival there. It's a bit like hurricane season, we expect it every year; to really *prosdokaó* it, though, involves stocking up on batteries and canned goods and making sure we have plenty of water and gas and that we have our planned routes to elsewhere or our hunker in place plans up to date and ready to go. It is an expectation that informs our behavior, not just a passive thought for something that may or may not arrive. Much like shifting hurricane tracks, the outcome may or may not be obvious to the casual observer; it certainly wasn't for Simeon. He knew, just knew, that he wouldn't die before he saw the Messiah, and indeed, he saw the Messiah! Was he expecting a babe in arms? Perhaps not, but he recognized the fulfillment of God's promise, the answer to his prayers. Even though he didn't get to see Jesus grow up, or see his adult ministry, he was able to hold the Messiah in his arms and say, "OK, God, you kept your promise, I am now at peace."

What does it mean for you to see God's salvation or the fulfillment of God's promises? What would it take for you to be ready to depart in peace?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's promises are fulfilled in God's own timing; and we trust God is at work, even in the waiting periods of our lives.

Evening Prayer: The *Nunc Dimittis*, or Song of Simeon, has been used in evening prayers or evening services, in a variety of translations, since at least the 4th century. This version comes from The Book of Common Prayer, Daily Evening Prayer, Rite One.
Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word;
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

What Are You Expecting?

Carlene Johnson

Tuesday, December 30

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: UMH #201
Merciful God, You sent Your messengers, the prophets, to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may celebrate aright the commemoration of the nativity, and may await with joy the coming in glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. AMEN!

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:15-18 (CEB)
15 The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered
whether John might be the Christ. 16 John replied to them all, "I
baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me
is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will
baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 The shovel he uses to
sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his
threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn
the husks with a fire that can't be put out." 18 With many other words
John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

Reflection: The thing about expectation is that it requires some foreknowledge; you can't really expect what you haven't heard about in some way. You can always have hope of an outcome but to truly expect anything requires an awareness that something is forthcoming. For instance, there's a big difference between expecting a baby and hoping for one, but they are not unrelated! And hope turns to expectation when there is finally confirmation, or awareness, that a baby is indeed more than mere possibility. In today's scripture, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry, but many wondered if John himself was actually the Messiah. They

were expecting a Messiah, because the scripture was clear in its promises that God would send a Messiah, and here came someone who seemed to check all the boxes! When we're eagerly expecting (or even just hoping for) something, it is easy to grab the first thing that feels close enough to right, to seize the "good enough" rather than continuing to wait for the actual right thing. Maybe you've experienced something like this in your life before; a job that came at the right time but wasn't a great match, or a partner after a dating drought who was perfectly nice but not the person to settle down with. It can be comforting to see "results" of our expectations, even if they wind up being false. That being said, the true conclusion of our expectations is worth the wait and the disappointments that come from false starts! Sometimes those false results even give rise and voice to that which is coming, they make clear what we can actually expect. John made himself clear to those who asked that he was NOT the Messiah, but he also was clear to them that the Messiah was coming and was so much better.

When and how have you revised your assumptions and expectations of who Jesus is and what he does?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's faithfulness does not depend on our perfect understanding.

Evening Prayer: from Common Prayer; a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, p 492
Lord, teach us that spiritual formation takes time and discipline just as a seed must be watered, nurtured, and pruned as it grows. Deepen our roots in spiritual growth even as we are extended in our passion for peace and justice. Amen.

People, Get Ready!

Carlene Johnson

Wednesday, December 31

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, help me stay ready and be faithful to the work you have entrusted to me. Give me the strength and wisdom to act in ways that are pleasing to you. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:42-51 (TLB)
42"So be prepared, for you don't know what day your Lord is coming.
43"Just as a man can prevent trouble from thieves by keeping watch for them, 44so you can avoid trouble by always being ready for my unannounced return. 45"Are you a wise and faithful servant of the Lord? Have I given you the task of managing my household, to feed my children day by day? 46Blessings on you if I return and find you faithfully doing your work. 47I will put such faithful ones in charge of everything I own! 48"But if you are evil and say to yourself, 'My Lord won't be coming for a while,' 49and begin oppressing your fellow servants, partying and getting drunk, 50your Lord will arrive unannounced and unexpected, 51and severely whip you and send you off to the judgment of the hypocrites; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Reflection: The past couple days as we've looked at expectation it has been in a positive sense - the coming of the Messiah, whoo!—but today's verses highlight the dangers of not living up to expectations. In this parable, which Jesus uses to explain the need for being ready for the day of God's coming, we hear the story of a master of a household who puts a servant in charge of the operations of the house while he goes away. When the master comes back at a time the servant didn't expect, and to a house not run to the master's expectations, consequences abound! This story, again, reflects the idea of expectation not being passivity, but rather an active state of being.

That's not to say that we must be constantly in a state of urgency whilst expecting, but rather that we should accustom ourselves to being more in a state of routine readiness. My mom makes it a point to always have the house "guest ready" rather than face a frantic flurry of activity when some family member or friend needs a place to stay unexpectedly. It's not like it takes any longer to make the bed or tidy the public spaces if it is done sooner rather than later, but it is much less stressful to make the house ready at our own pace if we're keeping up with it from the get-go. Similarly, the timing of God's return is absolutely and ultimately God's own, it isn't something we can pencil into our calendars, much as we might like to. We also can't assume that just because God's return isn't on our calendars, that it isn't happening. We just don't know! What we do know, and what today's scripture tells us, is that there is value in getting ready and STAYING ready.

What's preventing you from living in a state of readiness?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Living with routine readiness prevents a frantic last-minute flurry.

Evening Prayer: from Common Prayer; a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, p 174
"Lord, guide us to act, live, and pray as the times determine. Make our faith grow to accommodate the needs of your people and the fulfillment of your kingdom."

Promises, Promises

Carlene Johnson

Thursday, January 1

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: from Common Prayer; a Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, p 112
Lord, wherever we look today, allow us to catch a glimpse of you. And whenever others look at us today, allow them to catch a glimpse of you. Amen.

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-13 (CEB)
[8]Don't let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. [9]The Lord isn't slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. [10]But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a dreadful noise, the elements will be consumed by fire, and the earth and all the works done on it will be exposed.

[11]Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives, [12]waiting for and hastening the coming day of God. Because of that day, the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. [13]But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Reflection: When I was very young, my father was very deliberate about promising to do anything. When he actually promised to be somewhere or do something, without fail he was there or he did it! If he was even the slightest bit uncertain about something, no promise was offered, other than perhaps to try. This is actually still true for him to this day, 30+ years later. My dad has never, to my knowledge,

broken a promise to me, because he doesn't make promises he is unwilling or unable to keep. In much the same way, we can rely absolutely on the promises of God, though the timeline may be uncertain. God does not promise lightly. We can expect the promises of God to be fulfilled by virtue of God having been the one to make them. These verses from 2 Peter offer the reminder that God's promises will be kept, and that we should live our lives in such a way as to be ready for the fulfillment of said promises. This expectation of the end should inform our behavior along the way. We should live holy and godly lives because that is our part of the covenant with God. We know that God will uphold God's end of the bargain, thus we ought to uphold ours. We should live our lives in such a way that other people catch a glimpse of God's faithfulness through us.

Who has made God's love and faithfulness more believable to you?
How might you have done that for someone else?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: I carry and reflect the image and love of God to

others, just as others carry and reflect the image and love of God to me.

Evening Prayer: from "What Gift Can we Bring" UMH 87, vs. 37
Give thanks for tomorrow, full of surprises, for knowing whatever tomorrow may bring, the Word is our promise always, forever, we rest in God's keeping and live in God's love.

Onward to Perfection

Carlene Johnson

Friday, January 2

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: from "Love Divine, all loves excelling" UMH #384 vs 1
Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to Earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:8-10 (CEB)
[8]You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. [9]It's not something you did that you can be proud of. [10]Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

Reflection: At every Annual Conference, we ask the ordinands a series of questions, not least of which are: "are you going on to perfection?" and "do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?" These questions aren't meant exclusively for those seeking ordination, but rather they are relevant to all of us who seek to follow Jesus. The expectation is that each ordinand, and indeed each believer, will enthusiastically answer yes to both of these! It's a little easier to say yes to going on to perfection; first off, who wants to go on to fair to middling? Might as well aim for perfection! And secondly, going on to perfection is a journey, it's not an end point. It's going on to, not arriving at. The next question, though, is a little more challenging.

Expecting to be made perfect can be a little daunting! It's worth clarifying that when we talk about perfection, here, we're not talking about being completely free from mistakes, but rather being made perfect through and by God's love and the Holy Spirit working within us. Perfection in love is something we can expect not by any virtue of our own, but because of God. It is a gift given freely. In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," John Wesley speaks of salvation—being made perfect in love—as something we can expect by faith, as we are, and expect it now. Not in a later life or after we've done a certain number of good deeds or once we've shaped up, but here and now, in our current state. Being made perfect in love is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us; helping us to want what God wants and to love whom and how God loves. We can, according to Wesley, expect this in this life, it's not something we have to wait forever or die to achieve.

How and when have you experienced growth in your capacity or ability to love (and be loved) as God loves?
Where might you continue to explore growth in your capacity to love?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*

- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God loves us as we are, so God won't leave us as we are. God is always working in us and through us to grow our love for ourselves, our neighbors, and God.

Evening Prayer: from "Love Divine, all loves excelling" UMH #384 vs 3
Come, Almighty to deliver;
Let us all thy grace[10] receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy host above,
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Saturday, January 3

Ministry Hub of the Florida Annual Conference

What We Do

The Ministry Hub of the Annual Conference was created by the Realignment team in 2024 as a Leadership Council to the Annual Conference. The work of this team is to create strategy and alignment to help the work of the annual conference ministries to strengthen the local church to be the incarnate presence of Christ in their communities.

Through four strategic goals adopted at annual conference, the work of the ministries of our conference and districts will support local church laity and clergy as we focus on:

- Deeper Spiritual Formation for Individuals and Congregations
- New Diverse Generations—Including Young People and Intergenerational Ministry
- Connectional Collaboration
- Innovate Existing Churches and Create New Churches

This yearlong Awakened to Grace initiative meets three of these goals, and throughout the year, you will have opportunities to engage in trainings, focused conversations on best practices, idea sharing, and collaborative activities related to these goals. We hope to also help deepen your connection to the Incarnate Christ through these devotions as well as the two sermon series being created, podcasts around Wesleyan theology and leadership, bible studies and other initiatives to help us create vital United Methodists who impact our communities and state.

Ways to Become Involved

- Engage in the Awakened to Grace yearlong opportunities to

grow in our Wesleyan tradition. Keep an eye on the Conference website for more ministries available throughout the year.
- Watch your district and conference regular emails for more opportunities for training.
- Connect with each of the Saturday Conference Connections throughout this devotional. These ministries are offering the incarnation of Christ through their presence in our state and across our UM connection globally.

Ways to Connect

Jennifer Stiles Williams, Director of Conference Vitality and Leadership Development
Jstileswilliams@flumc.org

Magrey deVega, Co-Convener
Derrick Scott, Co-Convener

Epiphany: Spiritual Practices

Pastor Will Clark
Isle of Faith UMC, Jacksonville

Epiphany is a season of revelation, a light breaking through the ordinary, illuminating both Christ's glory and our call to live as His reflection in the world. In the Wesleyan tradition, spiritual practices are not static rituals but dynamic means of grace through which God shapes our hearts and transforms our lives. Prayer, Scripture, fasting, worship, and acts of mercy open space for the Spirit's ongoing work of renewal. As light guided the magi to Jesus, these practices guide us toward holy love, aligning our daily living with divine purpose. In attending to them faithfully, we participate in God's sanctifying grace, growing in likeness to Christ and recognizing His presence in unexpected moments. Epiphany reminds us that revelation leads to response—grace calls forth action, and discipleship becomes the radiant expression of light discovered, received, and shared.

COVENANT RENEWAL

Week of January 4, 2026

Rev. Melissa Cooper
Minister of Worship & Arts, St. Luke's UMC, Orlando

Sunday, January 4

The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Every year, countless Methodists across the world pause to say one of the boldest prayers ever written: "I am no longer my own, but thine." The Wesleyan Covenant Renewal Service invites us to start fresh, offering ourselves fully to God's purposes, even when we don't know what that might look like.

This week, we'll walk through the movements of the Covenant Service itself, beginning with praise, moving through confession and commitment, and ending with living out this covenant in our daily lives. Prepare your heart for a journey of grace, calling, and love—this week, and this year.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

"I am No Longer My Own, But Thine"

Rev. Melissa Cooper

Monday, January 5

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, help me start this day by remembering who you are, and who I am because of you. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 103:1-5 (NRSVUE)
[1]Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
[2]Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
[3]who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
[4]who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
[5]who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Reflection: The Covenant Service always starts here—with adoration. Before we dive into hard questions or heartfelt promises, we begin by remembering who God is. Not just some distant force, but the God who forgives, heals, rescues, crowns, and satisfies. A God who's wildly for us.

It's why we can pray the first line of the prayer: "I am no longer my own, but thine." We would not hand our lives over to just anyone; we offer ourselves to God because we have seen the goodness that God has already offered to us, and to those around us, and to those who have gone before us.

Maybe today you can start by naming two or three ways God has blessed or carried you recently. It doesn't have to be dramatic. Just

real. Because praise roots us in what we know to be true, allowing us to trust in a way that will carry us through the rest of this prayer.

What am I most grateful for today?
How has God's love shown up for me lately?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: I can trust this God with my life—God has already proven faithful.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for all the ways you've held me up today. Help me see your goodness even more clearly tomorrow. Amen.*

Forgiven

Rev. Melissa Cooper

Tuesday, January 6

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, show me my heart today, not to shame me, but to heal me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:23-24 (NRSVUE)
[23]Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
[24]See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Reflection: The tradition of holding this service each year is not just a "we've always done it that way" practice. This annual service of Covenant Renewal is one of practicality and self-awareness. No matter how committed we are in our discipleship, we are going to find ourselves at times drifting, whether by choice or circumstance. This service is a time for us both to re-commit, but also to offer confession.

Naming the ways in which we have missed the mark in the past year is not about shame or guilt: confession isn't about beating ourselves up. It's about being honest with ourselves, and with God, and acknowledging the possibility that those could continue to erode our faith journey if left unnamed.

Questions of confession are not simply "What did I do wrong?" Rather, "Where have I insisted on control?" "Where have I chosen comfort over calling?" "Where have I let fear write the story instead of faith?" And then we let God respond with the reminder of our belovedness, of who and whose we are, and that forgiveness has already been taken care of.

What do I need to confess as I begin this year
so that I can offer myself fully to God's callings?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love invites me to honesty, not hiding.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, give me the courage to honestly and authentically name what is keeping me from surrendering to you fully. Amen.*

Commitment: "Put Me, Rank Me, and Let Me..."

Rev. Melissa Cooper

Wednesday, January 7

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Jesus, today I want to trust you more than I trust myself. Help me say yes. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:24-25 (NRSVUE)
[24]Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.
[25]For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Reflection: Here's the heartbeat—and most challenging section—of the Covenant Prayer:

"Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing."

It's radical, isn't it? We're basically saying, "God, I want to offer my whole life to what is most likely to reveal your kingdom to the world. I trust you enough to let you decide what my life looks like." Some days that's thrilling. Other days it's terrifying.

Jesus says if we try to cling tightly to our comfort zones, we miss out. It's in loosening our grip that we actually discover just how abundant and meaningful life and be.

Read through the "put me" and "let me" lines and think about where you've experienced each one. In what ways have each of those experiences helped you grow in faith or your understanding of God?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Surrender isn't losing; it's embracing a life of purpose.

Evening Prayer: *God, tonight I offer my life to you again. Lead me into the places I can best be your hands and feet. Amen.*

"Freely and Heartily"

Rev. Melissa Cooper

Thursday, January 8

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Holy Spirit, help me keep my promises to you, not by my own willpower, but by your power alive in me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 13:20-21 (NRSVUE)
[20]Now may the God of peace...[21]equip you with everything good so that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.

Reflection: "I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine, and I am yours."

As we reach the second half of the prayer, we come to the heart of the covenant. Saying "I am yours" is more than just yielding or surrendering—it's a declaration of belonging. God gives us free will to choose whether or not we'll live into God's dreams for us. That choice is intentional, never forced.

The freedom with which we make this covenant is essential: there is no place for coercion in God's kingdom. And the way we make it matters, too. God desires us to come willingly, even joyfully. That doesn't mean we won't also come with some hesitation. If we truly grasp the weight of this promise, we may pause before stepping forward.

Today, you might picture placing your open hands in God's, simply saying, "Here I am. Do with me what I wouldn't choose on my own." That's covenant life: our promise held inside God's even greater promise.

What will I need to do to help me keep my part of this covenant with God?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Covenant must be made by intentional choice. God has intentionally chosen us, and we intentionally choose God.

Evening Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for choosing to be in covenant with me. Amen.*

Living It Out: "So Be It"

Rev. Melissa Cooper

Friday, January 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, help my life reflect your love today in real, tangible ways. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSVUE)
14"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
15No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.
16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Reflection: "So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

By the end of the Covenant Service, the hope is that we'll live differently: not just more pious, but more purposeful, more generous, more loving. This whole journey isn't about private spirituality; it's meant to spill out into the world.

"So be it" is a declaration that the covenant we are making with God does not stay in a prayer, but that it will now be the focus of our lives. We change how we show up for others. We change how we use our voice to speak up for the oppressed and marginalized. We change how we walk around in the world.

We shine with compassion, with integrity, with courage. People see that light, and it points them to the God who lit it in us. That's covenant life: not stuck in fear or self-preservation, but freed to glow.

What's one simple way I can let God's love shine through me today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The best evidence of my covenant with God is how I love others.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for letting me be part of your story today. Keep my heart tender so that tomorrow, your light shines even brighter through me. Amen.*

Fresh Expressions Florida

What We Do

Just as Wesleyan covenant renewal invites us to recommit our lives to God's mission, Fresh Expressions Florida helps congregations and communities live out that covenant in everyday places, joining God's work in neighborhoods, parks, cafés, and beyond.

Fresh Expressions Florida exists to help leaders and congregations discover new ways of being church in the everyday spaces of life. Our purpose is to form faith communities in unexpected places, from dog parks, burrito shops, and tattoo parlors to recovery meetings and neighborhood dinner tables.

We serve both congregations and communities. For congregations, we provide training, coaching, and resources to equip leaders and laypeople to start new forms of church while strengthening existing ones. For communities, we create safe, welcoming spaces where people can experience belonging, explore faith, and grow in relationship with Jesus.

Our main activities include equipping leaders through workshops and cohorts, resourcing districts and congregations with contextual tools, and supporting grassroots practitioners who start fresh expressions of church. These communities are shaped by listening, loving, serving, and sharing life together in ways that fit the unique context.

Ways to Become Involved

- **Pray:** Join us in praying for adventurers, congregations, and the many new communities forming across Florida.

- **Learn:** Explore our trainings, podcasts, and resources that

introduce the Fresh Expressions journey.

- **Participate:** Visit a fresh expression in your area, whether it's at a park, café, dinner table, or recovery meeting.

- **Start Something New:** If God is stirring your heart, we'll walk alongside you with coaching and tools to help you launch a fresh expression in your own community.

- **Support:** Give financially or volunteer your time to strengthen this movement of new Christian communities.

- **Connect:** Stay up to date through our website, social media, and join district gatherings to meet others who share the vision.

Ways to Connect

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PRAYER

Week of January 11, 2026

Rev. Corey Jones
Senior Pastor, St. Luke's UMC, Orlando

Sunday, January 11

Prayer is more than words we speak into the air. Prayer is the daily living water that quenches our thirst, cleanses our hearts, and sustains our souls. In John 4, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well, and in that ordinary moment she discovered extraordinary grace. This week, we will walk slowly through their conversation, and along the way, discover five essentials that prayer offers us: Presence, Conversation, Acceptance, Assurance, and Purpose. Each day is an invitation to drink deeply of living water, and to let your life be shaped by prayer.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Presence

Rev. Corey Jones

Monday, January 12

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Living God, as I rise to meet this day, open my heart to your presence. Quench my thirst with your living water and help me to listen for your voice in every moment. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 4:1-10 (NIV)

[1]Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was
gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—[2]although in fact
it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. [3]So he left Judea
and went back once more to Galilee. [4]Now he had to go through
Samaria. [5]So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the
plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6]Jacob's well was
there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the
well. It was about noon. [7]When a Samaritan woman came to draw
water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" [8](His disciples
had gone into the town to buy food.) [9]The Samaritan woman said
to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you
ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)
[10]Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is
that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would
have given you living water."

Reflection: Jesus was tired, thirsty, and fully human when he sat at Jacob's well at noon. It was there, in the heat of the day, that a Samaritan woman arrived for her daily task of drawing water. He asked her, "Will you give me a drink?" (v. 7). This simple question carried divine weight: it was an invitation into God's presence. Prayer always begins with God's initiative. Jesus speaks first, reaching across boundaries of culture, gender, and religion to begin a relationship.

When we think of prayer, we often imagine what we need to say. Yet this story reminds us that the first act of prayer is listening. Jesus is already present in our everyday routines, waiting for us to notice. He initiates, and we are invited to respond. Entering God's presence requires quieting distractions, opening Scripture, and creating space to listen. Prayer is not about using God for our needs; it is offering ourselves to God so we may be shaped by Divine love and purpose. When we listen first, we find that prayer is not a duty, but a gift of living water for a thirsty soul.

How can I create more space in my life this week to listen for God's voice, rather than only speaking my own words?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Prayer begins with listening for the voice of Jesus, who is already present.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, as this day comes to a close, help me to remember that you were with me in every moment. Quiet my heart and let me rest in your presence, trusting that you will meet me again tomorrow with living water. Amen.*

Conversation

Rev. Corey Jones

Tuesday, January 13

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Gracious Lord, thank you for speaking to me with kindness and love. Open my heart to receive your living water today, and help me to respond with honesty and faith. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 4:11-15 (NIV)
11"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" 13Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Reflection: Many of us hesitate in prayer because we think our questions, doubts, or even complaints are unwelcome. But Jesus welcomes them. He does not require polished words or perfect faith. He offers us living water right where we are. Prayer is not a one-sided monologue; it is a dialogue filled with grace. The woman brought her uncertainty and longing, and Jesus met her there.

In prayer, we are invited to bring our whole selves—our hopes, our fears, our questions, our needs, our laments. And just as the living water Jesus offered could quench thirst in a way no well could, so prayer refreshes us with God's presence and grace in ways nothing else can. The conversation is the gift, and in it, we find we are being changed.

What questions, doubts, or longings do I need to bring honestly into my conversation with Jesus today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Prayer is a grace-filled conversation, where my questions meet God's living water.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, thank you for meeting me in the conversations of this day. Receive the words I have spoken and the silences I have kept. Quench my thirst with your living water, and grant me rest in your grace. Amen.*

Acceptance

Rev. Corey Jones

Wednesday, January 14

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Merciful God, you know my past, my present, and my future. Thank you for meeting me with compassion instead of judgment. Help me to accept your forgiveness and walk in your grace today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 4:16-19 (NIV)
16He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." 17"I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." 19"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet."

Reflection: Jesus asked the woman to go call her husband, and in doing so, brought her painful truth to the surface. She had no husband, and her past carried shame and/or grief (this could be about her unfortunate circumstance or behavior). Jesus didn't condemn her, instead, he spoke with honesty and compassion. His words were not meant to expose her in judgment, but to free her for acceptance and grace.

This is a breakthrough moment. Prayer often brings us face to face with our sins, wounds, regrets, disappointments, and grief. It is not always comfortable, but it is always redemptive. God already knows our past and present; confession (of our sin and/or need for Jesus) is our way of opening ourselves to receive the living water of forgiveness. When we confess honestly before God, we discover that Christ meets us not with scorn but with love. Prayer becomes the place where we learn we are truly forgiven and deeply accepted. That is the breakthrough of grace.

What part of my life do I need to bring honestly before God in prayer today, trusting that I will be met with compassion and acceptance?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Prayer is the place where confession meets God's forgiveness and acceptance.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, thank you for receiving me just as I am. Where I have failed, forgive me. Where I have endured loss, comfort me. Where I carried shame, lift me. Help me to rest tonight in the freedom of your love and acceptance. Amen.*

Assurance

Rev. Corey Jones

Thursday, January 15

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Faithful God, anchor me in your truth today. Let my worship be filled with Spirit and truth, and assure me once more that you are with me always. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 4:20-26 (NIV)
20"Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim
that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21"Woman,"
Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship
the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You
Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we
do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23Yet a time is coming and
has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father
in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the
Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the
Spirit and in truth." 25The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called
Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."
26Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

Reflection: The Samaritan woman asked Jesus a question that divided her world: Where is the right place to worship? Was it on the mountain of her ancestors, or in Jerusalem as the Jews claimed? Jesus' answer redefined worship—not a matter of location, but of Spirit and truth. In that moment, he revealed himself as Messiah: "I, the one speaking to you—I am he" (v. 26).

Prayer offers this same assurance. In our questions and uncertainties, Jesus meets us with the truth of who he is and reminds us that God is Spirit, always present, and always faithful. The more we persist in prayer, the more our perspective shifts from anxiety to assurance. We

learn that our faith is not rooted in a place or circumstance but in the presence of Christ.

Where do I need God's assurance most in my life right now?
How can I root my worship in Spirit and truth
rather than outward circumstances?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Prayer assures me that Jesus is who he says he is—and that he is with me.

Evening Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing yourself as the Christ. As I lay down to rest, give me assurance that your Spirit is with me, your truth surrounds me, and your love will sustain me into tomorrow. Amen.*

Purpose

Rev. Corey Jones

Friday, January 16

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of mission, thank you for filling me with living water. Send me out with purpose today, to share your love with others through my words, actions, and presence. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 4:27-42 (NIV)

27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking
with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are
you talking with her?" 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went
back to the town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who
told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" 30 They
came out of the town and made their way toward him. 31 Meanwhile
his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." 32 But he said to
them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his
disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"
34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and
to finish his work. 35 Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months
until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They
are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and
harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may
be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is
true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have
done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."
39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of
the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when
the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and
he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became
believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because
of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that
this man really is the Savior of the world."

Reflection: When the Samaritan woman's life was transformed by her encounter with Jesus, she left her water jar behind and ran to tell her neighbors, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did" (v. 28). Her story became a testimony, and through her witness, many came to believe. Prayer had moved her from isolation to purpose.

This is the fruit of a prayerful life: God not only refreshes us but equips us to participate in his mission. Prayer shapes our hearts so that we see the world through God's eyes. It compels us to share grace, invite others, and live as vessels of living water.

Our purpose is not only to pray, but to live prayerfully—to embody faith, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication in daily life. When prayer transforms us, it naturally flows outward into service, witness, and love. The woman at the well reminds us that even the most unlikely person can become a bold witness. God has given each of us a purpose that springs from the well of prayer.

Where is God calling me to live out my purpose as a witness of God's love today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*

- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Prayer equips me with purpose, sending me to share living water with others.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, thank you for shaping me through prayer. As I close this week, remind me that my life is not my own—it is yours, filled with your Spirit and sent for your purpose. Amen.*

Shade and Fresh Water

What We Do

At its core, prayer is about connecting with God. In speaking and listening to the Lord, we are able to tune our ear to the voice of the Spirit and through the regular communion with God, tune our hearts to the rhythms of Christ. Prayer is not a weekly activity of worship, but a daily if not unceasingly conversation. Prayer not only petitions God with the desires of our hearts, but it also grounds us in humility knowing that we are not the center of the universe—God is.

Henri Nouwen wrote that, "In solitary prayer we become aware that our identity does not depend on what we have accomplished or possess, that our productivity does not define us, and that our worth is not the same as our usefulness." (Spiritual Formation, 19) In our fast-paced lives and ministries, this can be an easy lesson to lose sight of without a regular practice of prayer.

Shade and Fresh Water exists to provide pastors, as well as anyone who is professionally associated with The United Methodist Church in Florida, an opportunity to find rest, renewal, and a transformative sanctuary to re-connect with God and be restored in body, mind, and spirit. We provide personal and group retreats as well as helpful tools such as spiritual direction.

Serving in the church can be deeply rewarding, but also uniquely draining to our spiritual lives. Shade and Fresh Water seeks to support those who need to get away and recharge by providing a place to do so in a way that best fits them.

Ways to Become Involved

If you are a pastor, church staff, or otherwise employed in the UMC, we would love to help you find a time of retreat and renewal. These

are tailored to your needs and budget. If you are a lay leader in your church, please encourage your pastors and staff to find times of rest and retreat. These can be difficult to take without lay leaders willing to give permission and step up to care for the church in their absence.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Lenora Rousseau, Chair of Shade and Fresh Water Ministries
Shadeandfreshwater@gmail.com
flumc.org/aboutshadeandfreshwater

SCRIPTURE READING

Week of January 18, 2026

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen
SW District Superintendent & Director of the Office of Clergy Excellence

Sunday, January 18

The study of Scripture is a fundamental spiritual discipline that helps us awaken to God's grace. But the goal of reading or studying Scripture is not simply the acquisition of knowledge. The real treasure comes when we engage with the text and allow God's Word to shape our hearts more in the image of Jesus. The readings this week are all reminders of the importance of being in the Word (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalm 1:1-3), how to read Scripture in the light of Jesus (John 1:1-5, 14), and the power of the Word to transform us (2 Timothy 3:14-17, Hebrews 4:12).

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Finding Our Rhythm

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen

Monday, January 19

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *As we spend time in Scripture, may your Holy Spirit open your Word to us and open us to your Word. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NRSV)
[4]Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. [5]You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6]Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. [7]Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. [8]Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, [9]and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Reflection: The Shema in verse 4 is a well-known and often recited Jewish prayer: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." This passage comes from one of Moses' last sermons to the Israelites before they moved into the "Promised Land." It is a timely reminder because the land of Canaan that they were entering was full of people groups already, many of whom worshiped multiple gods and idols. While the Israelites did not have written Scriptures besides the ten commandments at this point, Moses is encouraging the people to keep God's commandments fresh in their minds and hearts. They are encouraged to recite them, to talk about them, to think about them, and to put reminders of them where they will be frequently seen. This is a great reminder for us today as well. If we want to draw closer to God (love God with all that we are) and be awakened to God's grace, it is helpful to develop a regular rhythm and pattern of spending time in God's Word. Just like our physical muscles benefit from regular exercise, our spiritual muscles develop over time with regular use.

What practices or reminders might help keep God's commandments fresh in my heart and mind, especially in a world filled with distractions and competing influences?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Regular time spent in God's Word strengthens our spiritual lives, keeping us Awakened to God's grace throughout the day.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, help me to keep your Word close to my heart, that I may love you with all my being, and let your truth guide my thoughts, words, and actions.*

Slow Growth Over Time

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen

Tuesday, January 20

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *As we spend time in Scripture, may your Holy Spirit open your Word to us and open us to your Word. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1:1-3 (NRSV)
[1]Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread or sit in the seat of scoffers, [2]but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. [3]They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Reflection: Today's passage is a call to meditate, or reflect, upon God's word continuously "day and night." Have you ever begun a Bible reading plan with great enthusiasm in Genesis, only to drop out somewhere in Leviticus or Numbers? Those long lists of laws and genealogies which do not seem on the surface to be relevant to our lives today often become an obstacle. And then we might feel bad for being "behind" and we are even less enthusiastic about picking the Bible back up to read again. The good news is that there are no Bible police coming to check your progress. But what you find as you keep going and continue reading and engaging with Scripture over time is that you become more rooted and grounded in the things of God than of this world. There is no way to fast forward and microwave our spiritual development; it takes time to develop with a regular pattern like a meal in a slow cooker. That's how you become like "a tree planted by streams of water, which yield fruit…and their leaves do not wither."

What might it look like to trust in the long-term growth that comes from being rooted in Scripture, even when the process feels slow or challenging?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: My spiritual growth flourishes when I stay rooted in Scripture through consistent moments of daily reflection.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, help me to remain rooted in Scripture, trusting that with patience and perseverance, I will grow in faith and wisdom, bearing fruit in your perfect timing.*

The Word Made Flesh

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen

Wednesday, January 21

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *As we spend time in Scripture, may your Holy Spirit open your Word to us and open us to your Word. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-5, 14 (NRSV)
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being [4]in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. [5]The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it…. [14]And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection: John Wesley called the Methodists "a people of one book," meaning that we are committed to the authority of Scripture in our lives. It is important though to remember that we cannot separate our devotion to the book (Bible) from our devotion to Jesus. Because as the Gospel of John makes clear, Jesus is the Word of God who became "flesh and dwelt among us." While we each approach the words of Scripture from different backgrounds and contexts that influence our reading, practically speaking this means that the person and work of Jesus should be the lens through which we read, understand and interpret all the words of the Scriptures. Jesus is not just one of the characters in our Biblical story. As the Word made flesh, Jesus is our fullest and most perfect revelation of God's character and will for our lives. This makes the Bible far more living and active for us as readers than other fiction or non-fiction book we might pick up off a shelf.

How might understanding Jesus as the Word made flesh shift my perspective and transform the way I engage with and apply Scripture to my daily life?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Jesus is the central lens through which Scripture is read, understood and applied.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, thank You for dwelling among us; may your grace and truth shape my heart as I rest in you tonight.*

The Word Equips Us

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen

Thursday, January 22

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *As we spend time in Scripture, may your Holy Spirit open your Word to us and open us to your Word. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NRSV)
[14]But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15]and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17]so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Reflection: Sometimes we might be tempted to read this passage from 2 Timothy and think that every single thing we ever would want to know about how to live a Christian life is contained within the Scriptures. But the Bible is not a "how-to" manual where we can look up our issue in the index and find an exact answer or solution. Many of the things we encounter today were not conceived of in Biblical times or were simply not addressed. The Bible is also not a scientific textbook; Genesis is more of a theological explanation of who was at work behind the creation we observe. What is the purpose of the Bible then? Scripture is more like a series of Holy Spirit inspired letters demonstrating God's presence, love, grace and redemption throughout history in the lives of ordinary people. Woven through all of these Biblical stories is what we need to know in order to profess Jesus as our Savior and our Lord. And it offers us a framework for how to put our faith into action and practice in the world, in the light of Jesus.

How can I better understand the purpose of Scripture as a guide for living out my faith? What practices might help me apply its timeless truths to my daily life, even when it doesn't provide direct answers to modern challenges?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Scripture is a living testament to God's love and guidance, equipping me to live out my faith in a complex world.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, may the wisdom and grace found in Scripture continue to shape my understanding of you and guide my life.*

A Light Unto My Path

Rev. Dr. Debbie Allen

Friday, January 23

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *As we spend time in Scripture, may your Holy Spirit open your Word to us and open us to your Word. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:97-105 (NRSV)
97Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. 98Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. 99I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation. 100I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. 101I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. 102I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me. 103How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. 105Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Reflection: Imagine you receive a beautifully wrapped present from a friend and you take the gift and set it on a table in your house but you never open it. It just sits there as you walk past it and admire the wrapping but you never look inside. That misses the whole point of giving the gift, does it not? We intend a gift to be opened and used by the recipient. Scripture is not intended for us to read like any other book from a shelf. Rather, its purpose is that we become open to God's presence in our lives and that we be transformed by the reading to act differently as the people of God in the world. In today's Psalm, engaging with Scripture helps the writer to keep their "feet from every evil," and to grow to love holiness and hate sin ("every false way"). The ancient practice of *lectio divina* or sacred reading can helps us shift from reading for information (what does the text say?) to reading for transformation (what is God saying to

me through this text?). In this way the Bible becomes a light to help guide our feet in action along the path of faith.

How can I shift from reading Scripture for information to transformation? In what ways might Scripture illuminate my path and guide my actions today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Scripture isn't just meant to be admired from a distance, but opened and lived out.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, open my heart to receive the gift of your Word, that it may guide my steps as I seek to live according to your truth and holiness.*

Candler Foundry, Be A Disciple

What We Do

United Methodist seminaries train clergy and religious professionals in how to read, study, teach and proclaim scripture. For many, scripture reading can seem intimidating and should be left to those who have professionally studied.

United Methodist seminaries are seeking to take the study of Scripture and theology beyond the classroom and reach laity through a wide range of offerings, including podcasts, online courses, and short-term studies.

The Candler Foundry of Candler School of Theology at Emory University aims to make theological education accessible to everyone—believers and seekers, Sunday School attendees and lay ministers, community organizers and non-profit leaders, regular church goers and those just curious about faith. Their offerings are designed to be equal parts accessible and rigorous, providing wise, reliable, and relevant teaching in formats that can be integrated into everyday life and faith. Short-term courses, classes on demand, TheoEd videos of theologians and religious leaders around the nation as well as podcasts help disciples to grow spiritually and develop practices to better serve the church, advocate for justice, have meaningful conversations, ask difficult questions, and engage issues that matter to the world.

BeADisciple.com is an online resource that has provided quality educational experiences rooted in Wesleyan theology since 2006. It is a ministry of the Richard and Julia Wilke Institute for Discipleship at Southwestern College, a United Methodist–affiliated four-year university in Kansas. Here, laity and clergy can find online studies, workshops, and courses on a variety of ministry, formation and leadership topics. All courses offer CEU credits. Their goal is to make

rich learning experiences accessible to church leaders and laity, no matter their location or life situation.

Ways to Connect

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beadisciple.com

SILENCE

Week of January 25, 2026

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins
Senior Pastor, McCabe UMC, St. Petersburg

Sunday, January 25

This week, we will reflect together on the theme of silence. Silence is often understood as stillness, quietness, and the absence of sound. Sometimes we associate silence in our spiritual lives with a lack of God's presence, response or activity. When life becomes too silent, we begin to wonder what God is up to or whether God is even listening. Silence is not merely empty, quiet space where nothing happens. Silence is often the sacred space where God speaks, comforts, heals, and calls us to justice. Silence helps us listen more attentively, discern more clearly, and respond more faithfully.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Silence That Invites Us In

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins

Monday, January 26

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, help me to be still and soak in your presence. Quiet my restless thoughts and anxious heart. Help me lean in and listen, that I may hear your voice in the silence and know that you are God. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46:10 (NRSVUE)
Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.

Reflection: We tend to understand silence as a space or moment where things are quiet, motionless, and still. In our busy world filled with jam-packed lists of things to do and places to go, stillness and silence may feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Sometimes it may not feel like the best use of our time. However, silence is more than an empty space where nothing happens. It is often in moments of stillness and silence that God invites us into relationship. Psalm 46 extends an invitation to the reader, to be still and silent. The original Hebrew language translates more along the lines of "relax and soak in God's presence." It reminds me of a Florida alligator, basking in the sun. It is in this stillness and silence that we are invited to slow down from our busyness and soak in God's presence. It is in this stillness and silence that we are invited to come to a knowledge of God as a source of strength and help in troubling times, a source of peace in times of conflict, and much more. Silence is a *means of grace*, a space in which God invites us, and God's presence and Spirit shapes us.

How can I create space for moments of silence this week, so that my heart can be anchored in God's presence?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Silence is the soil of God's grace where confidence in God grows.

Evening Prayer: *God of grace, as I prepare to rest tonight, help my soul find stillness in you. Teach me to trust in your saving grace and wake with a heart centered on you. Amen.*

Silence That Slows Us Down

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins

Tuesday, January 27

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Good morning God. Today, would you help me identify the distractions that sometimes keep me from hearing your voice. Give me the strength and wisdom to lay them aside and choose your gift of silence. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1;7b (NRSVUE)
For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to keep silent, and a time to speak.

Reflection: When we really stop to think about it, we live in a world filled with quite a bit of noise! Constant notifications ding on our phones and watches. Social media makes endless scrolling through a constant stream of videos easier than we'd ever imagined. Conversations are constantly happening around us or with us. And on top of it all, our inner train of thought is constantly rolling. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that life has rhythms, seasons that come and go. In verse seven, silence is an important part of this rhythm of life. Silence is a discipline, a practice that we get to choose. Silence requires intention. Practicing silence may look like turning off the notifications on our phones and watches, stepping outside for a moment to connect with God through creation, or simply sitting somewhere quietly with God. Silence can be challenging. But, it is worth the effort! Practicing silence creates spaces in our lives where we can shift our attention from the noise and distractions to God. Practicing silence helps quiet our hearts and minds. Silence helps us lean in to God's presence and hear God's still, small voice more clearly.

What distractions and noise can I lay aside today
so that I can practice moments of silence with God?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's grace meets us in the busyness and noise of life and invites us to shift our attention to the peace of God's still, small voice.

Evening Prayer: *God of grace, forgive me when I fill my life with noise, busyness and distractions. Quiet my heart and mind tonight, that I may find peace in your steady presence. Amen.*

Silence That Draws Us Deeper

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins

Wednesday, January 28

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, meet me in the silence today. Change my stillness into holy listening, that I might discover your wisdom and guidance. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19:11–13 (NRSVUE)
[11]He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, [12]and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. [13]When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Reflection: In this passage, the prophet Elijah expected God to show up or speak in a myriad of dramatic displays. Some of these are named in the text: whirling winds, a violent earthquake, and a raging fire. But after all of the noise subsided, there was "sheer silence." God spoke to Elijah in the silence, and invited Elijah into a transformative conversation. This text shows us that God does not always meet us in loud, flashy displays of power. God does not always meet us in the ways that feel familiar to us. Sometimes God meets us in the quiet, hidden, and unassuming spaces and moments we can easily overlook. In these moments and spaces, silence becomes a doorway into deeper intimacy with God. When we learn to stop searching for God in the loud and flashy, we discover the God who whispers truth, healing, and direction in silence. Transformation happens when we realize: silence is not emptiness, it is an encounter with God and God's grace.

Where have I been looking for God in the dramatic displays of life?
How might silence be a doorway to deeper intimacy with God?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's gentle, silent whispers carry more weight and power than the world's loudest noise.

Evening Prayer: *God of gentle whispers, thank you for speaking in the silence. Help me hear the wisdom and guidance in your still, small voice. Draw me in deeper today. Amen.*

Silence That We Share with Others

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins

Thursday, January 29

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of grace, teach me to trust that your Spirit speaks in silence, both personally and communally. Help me understand that I don't always have to know the right thing to say in every situation. Teach me the ministry of silent companionship and presence with the people around me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Job 2:11–13 (NRSVUE)
11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had
come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the
Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met
together to go and console and comfort him. 12 When they saw him
from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their
voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air
upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and
seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his
suffering was very great.

Reflection: Wesleyan theology suggests that a life of faith is not merely about you and God alone. Our faith is deeply relational. The wisdom, grace, strength, love, etc. that you receive in moments of silent meditation with God are then shared with others around you as you live out these realities in your relationships. Sometimes the most powerful gift you can offer another person is not something you can purchase, or words that you can speak. Sometimes it is your silent presence. When Job's friends heard about his suffering, they came to comfort him. They observed that his suffering was so immense that no words could suffice. So, they sat with him in silence. For seven whole days! Job's friends practiced what we often call a "ministry of silent presence." This type of silence reflects the love of Jesus, who

entered into human suffering with no easy answers, but with shared humanity and love. Silent presence in your relationships is not emptiness. Your silent presence can be full of solidarity, empathy, and the quiet assurance that no one goes through tough moments alone. Sometimes God's love is best shared with others when we simply show up: silent and present.

When have I experienced the gift of someone simply being present with me during a challenging time? How might I offer that same gift to others?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The solidarity of shared silence can carry more grace and love than the most eloquent words or expensive gifts.

Evening Prayer: *God of compassion, teach me to be present with others in their pain, trusting that your grace and love are revealed in silence shared together. Amen.*

Silence As Our Witness in the World

Rev. Jana Hall-Perkins

Friday, January 30

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of justice and peace, let the silence I practice with you shape my witness in the world. May my holy listening lead to loving action. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Amos 5:13 (NRSVUE)
Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.

Reflection: Silence is not always a retreat into a calm, quiet moment or space. Silence is also God's way of preparing us for action. The prophet Amos spoke during a time of injustice, when the loudest voices were those of the powerful and oppressive. The "prudent" or wise people kept silent, not out of fear, but out of discernment for next steps. Silence gives us space to listen for God's direction before we speak or act. When we pause *before* God and *with* God, we gain clarity and courage to love our neighbors, to speak truth to power, and to live justly in the world. Silence is not avoidance. And, we must be aware of when our silence becomes a form compliance with the injustice around us. Silence is the discipline that gives our words weight and our actions depth. When our silence is rooted in seeking God's wisdom, guidance and direction, our witness becomes a voice for justice, mercy, love and hope.

How might silence before God and with God strengthen my ability to be a voice for justice in the world?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Silence is the discipline that gives our words weight and our actions depth.

Evening Prayer: *God of justice and peace, as I rest tonight, may the silence I've practiced this week shape my words and actions tomorrow. Let my life bear witness to your love, mercy and justice in the world. Amen.*

Spiritual Personal Retreats and Spiritual Directors

What We Do

In a world filled with distraction and chaos, the spiritual discipline of silence is not only needed, but it must be an intentional practice we schedule. We are constantly being pulled with the noise of social media, marketing, 24-hour news cycles, and growing division between ideologies, theologies and a multitude of "noise."

The Florida Annual Conference has two ministries to help form faith and spiritual practices in laity and clergy. According to Leslie Hay, Spiritual Direction is an ancient practice that offers a way to attend to God's presence in one's life in the context of a trusted relationship. Spiritual Directors International states, "Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories everyday."

Personal Spiritual Retreats are held at the Warren Willis Camp and Conference Center. The purpose is to provide an environment that helps a clergy person (and spouse if desired) or church staff person associated with the conference to restore their body, mind, and spirit toward more abundant living. To facilitate this environment, Shade and Fresh Water will provide a healing space, spiritual companion, or spiritual director to work with the person or persons on retreat. Personal Retreats are provided by request of the individual. A standard retreat is three days and two nights. Longer retreats are available. A Spiritual Director is assigned to meet with the individual (and spouse if attending).

Ways to Connect

flumc.org/directory-of-counselors-spiritual-directors-coaches
florida-reg.brtapp.com/ShadeandFreshWaterRetreats

FASTING

Week of February 1, 2026

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau
School Chaplain, Berkeley Preparatory School, Tampa

Sunday, February 1

Fasting is one of the Spiritual Disciplines, a way in which we can connect with God in a new way. We have an example of Jesus fasting during his 40 days in the desert. Often, fasting is turned to during the Lenten season to prepare one's heart for the miracle of Easter.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

The Greatest Hunger

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau

Monday, February 2

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, as I fast, I pray that the hunger of my spirit for connection with you be greater than any physical hunger in my body.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:16-18 (NRSV)
16And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Reflection: Spiritual Disciplines are tools we have been blessed with to connect with God in a variety of ways. Fasting never seems to be the discipline that we get excited about stepping into. The idea of missing a meal, taking a break from chocolate, or changing our eating habits are not things that lead us, or at least me, to jump for joy. And many times that lack of enthusiasm is shown in how I fast. I let my hunger for chocolate drown out my hunger for a closer connection with God. If we step into the discipline of fasting with a hunger for knowing and worshiping God greater than all other hungers, else, our fasting looks differently. It is a place that, while may be difficult, is expectant and full of joy.

What are your hopes for fasting?
What hunger do you most need God to satisfy?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The hunger to know God and be with God should always be our greatest hunger.

Evening Prayer: *Keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening, a night free from sin; and bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we offer you all glory, honor, and worship, now and for ever. Amen. (BOW, p. 575)*

More than Food

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau

Tuesday, February 3

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God you know the distractions in my life. You know the things that distract me from you and all you have for me, sometimes even better than I do. Open my mind and heart to hear you. Direct me how to free space in my life for you. Knowing you is my greatest desire.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:6 (ESV)
Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Reflection: I love food. Not just for the food itself, but for the romanticism that comes along with it. Growing up in a family with Southern roots, a meal is more than the food on the plate. It is an experience, a ritual, a communal experience. It is the dishes, the centerpiece, the people, the conversation. My grandmother could turn a cup of coffee into a memory with a china cup, a floral centerpiece, and a cookie she had in the pantry.

Maybe the lore I tie to food is part of the reason fasting seems intimidating to me.

Fasting is about more than food. There are so many things we can fast from- phones, television, social media, distractions. Fasting is about creating time and space. Instead of sitting at a meal, we sit in prayer. Instead of time on social media, we spend time in scripture.

Fasting isn't about what we place to the side, it is about what we place in front of us.

What do you need to create space for?
What so you need to set aside so that space is available?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: The things from which we fast are the things that stop us from connecting with God and God's plan for the renewal of creation.

Evening Prayer: *Keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening, a night free from sin; and bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we offer you all glory, honor, and worship, now and for ever. Amen. (BOW, p. 575)*

Fasting for Healing

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau

Wednesday, February 4

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, the world is full of pain and hurt. Your people are not loved, seen and treated in a way that brings you glory. We come to you in a spirit of fasting to hear your voice. Speak to us. Give us a vision of the healing you have for the world.*

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1:4 (ESV)
As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Reflection: The world around us is aching. It seems that there is always another school shooting, another political fight, or another group of God's children facing discrimination. It feels that we are in a time of mourning as a society.

Nehemiah felt the same. He mourned the plight of God's people and the disgrace facing Jerusalem. In the face of this tragedy, Nehemiah turns to fasting.

Before he has the plan to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, Nehemiah fasts. Before he helps the poor, Nehemiah fasts. Before Jerusalem is rebuilt, Nehemiah fasts.

God has good things for us. Before we get there, let's fasts and prepare our hearts for what is ahead.

What are the things in our world that lead your heart to ache? Where is your heart mourning that time with God can open your heart to healing?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: We fast in hope when we see the pains of our broken world. Our hope is for a world renewed to God's healing.

Evening Prayer: *Keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening, a night free from sin; and bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we offer you all glory, honor, and worship, now and for ever. Amen. (BOW, p. 575)*

Fasting For

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau

Thursday, February 5

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Jesus, your way is love. As we begin this new day, transform our hearts to love as you do, as a blessing for the moment and trust for a future built upon that same love. May we begin living today, as if your future was already here in its fullness. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ezra 8:21-23 (NIV)
21 There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. 22 I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." 23 So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

Reflection: I see a need for change in how we characterize fasting- from "fasting from" to "fasting for." Fasting is about setting aside the things taking space in our lives to create space God's intention for us. I wonder if I looked at fasting from the vantage point of "fasting for" instead of "fasting from" if my relationship with fasting would evolve. If I could "give up" something with joy and expectation for what will come to be.

Think of it like stepping away from the crowded table to sit at a table set for two-you and God. A place where the conversation can be more personal. The thoughts more intimate. A place where silence can be welcomed.

What is it in your life that is taking space from your connection with God?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God has good things for us, because God loves us. Fasting creates a way for us to get nearer to those things.

Evening Prayer: *Keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening, a night free from sin; and bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we offer you all glory, honor, and worship, now and for ever. Amen. (BOW, p. 575)*

Fasting for the Community

Chaplain Carlene Barbeau

Friday, February 6

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, thank you for all the ways you bring success to my life and to your Kingdom. When I celebrate with joy, may I celebrate with you. May I hear your calling loudly to put aside the things that take my attention from you. In my moments of celebration, make my greatest desire to celebrate with you.*

Scripture Reading: Acts 14:21-23 (NIV)
21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number
of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,
22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to
the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom
of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them
in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the
Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Reflection: The early church was growing, in size and number. Great things were happening, and in the midst of joy, Paul and Barnabus fast. I can often tie the idea of fasting to sackcloth and mourning. I can often think of fasting as a discipline done in sadness. This scripture reminds us of a time when fasting is a response to growth. We always need more time and space for God. Including when we are succeeding. Paul and Barnabus remind us of this.

When you are experiencing success, what is your first thought to do?
When you face success, do you prioritize praise?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: In seasons of joy, I will create space to be present in God's goodness.

Evening Prayer: *Keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening, a night free from sin; and bring us at last to eternal life. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we offer you all glory, honor, and worship, now and for ever. Amen. (BOW, p. 575)*

Saturday, February 7

Spiritual Formation

What We Do

The practice of fasting can be found in both the Old and New Testaments as a way of marking a sacred season of time with the practice of abstaining from food or other activity or substance with the intention of growing closer to God and limiting the power of that thing over you. Lenten fasts are a common way of setting aside that season for holy preparation. John Wesley fasted twice a day not eating food from after dinner until 3 p.m. the next day on Wednesday and Friday.

The Spiritual Formation team serves to help mark special seasons in the Conference life with worship and sacred disciplines. Recently this has been focused on maintaining a prayer room at Annual Conference and holding morning communion services on Thursday and Friday before the regular Conference day begins. These services led by lay and clergy leaders from around the state are an opportunity to focus our hearts of the Holy Spirit and awaken ourselves to the grace of God that is new every morning.

Ways to Become Involved

We would welcome you to come and join us for worship at Annual Conference each year. If you would like to be a part of planning those services, we also welcome more people on our team in a variety of roles, both large and small.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Drew Weseman, Chair of Spiritual Formation Ministry Team
Pastordreww@gmail.com

SABBATH

Week of February 8, 2026

Rev. Debbie Casanzio
Senior Pastor, Lady Lake UMC

Sunday, February 8

We begin this week with the spiritual practices of Sabbath. Yes, it is plural as the Old Testament records several different types of Sabbath rhythms for our relationship with God. Each of these practices were designed to draw the people closer to God and to each other so that they might be strengthened in faith, sustained by hope, and equipped to live out their purpose to be a blessing.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

The Sabbath Day

Rev. Debbie Casanzio

Monday, February 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your great love for us O God. We give you thanks for this day! As we begin this day may we find ways to focus our hearts and minds upon you so that we might be awakened to your Spirit with and among us today.*

Scripture Reading: Lev. 23: 1-3 (CEB)
[1]The Lord said to Moses: [2]Speak to the Israelites and say to them: These are my appointed times, the Lord's appointed times, which you will declare to be holy occasions: [3]Work can be done for six days, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of special rest, a holy occasion. You must not do any work on it; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord.

Reflection: In Genesis 2:2 we read, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." God built the Sabbath principle from the beginning of time and made it into the maintenance schedule of our life. This sabbath day ritual began at sundown on Friday night. There was to be no working during this 24hr period, and this includes working of the animals and land.

I find this practice to be a deeply personal way in which God works to connect with humanity, calling us to pattern our week in such a way that we get some 'alone time' to intentionally listen to God. God created patterns, rituals you might call them, so that the people of faith could find ways to connect to God's holy presence more deeply. From the beginning God longed to be in a real relationship with humankind and God provided pathways for us to do so. While the idea of 'not working' at all may seem foreign to us in our culture. What might it look like for you to begin to lean into

this practice to connect with God more deeply each week?

Over the next 5 days we are going to reflect on the spiritual disciplines of the sabbath we find in scripture. (Yes, there are more than one!) How do you currently practice the sabbath in your week or how might you begin to practice this discipline?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: If you currently practice the sabbath, what do you find the most meaningful? If have not stepped into this practice, is there anything that is keeping you from exploring this?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I wind down my day, relax any tensions I carry in my body and calm the restlessness of my mind. Help me rest in you as I sleep today. May your Spirit awaken me to find a renewed strength for the tasks ahead, and your peaceful presence within me.*

The Sabbath Year

Rev. Debbie Casanzio

Tuesday, February 10

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your great love for us O God. We give you thanks for this day! As we begin this day may we find ways to focus our hearts and minds upon you so that we might be awakened to your Spirit with and among us today.*

Scripture Reading: Lev. 25: 1-7 (CEB)
[1]The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, [2]speak to the Israelites and say to them: Once you enter the land that I am giving you, the land must celebrate a sabbath rest to the Lord. [3]You will plant your fields for six years and prune your vineyards and gather their crops for six years. [4]But in the seventh year the land will have a special sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord: You must not plant your fields or prune your vineyards. [5]You must not harvest the secondary growth of your produce or gather the grapes of your freely growing vines. It will be a year of special rest for the land. [6]Whatever the land produces during its sabbath will be your food—for you, for your male and female servants, and for your hired laborers and foreign guests who live with you, [7]as well as for your livestock and for the wild animals in your land. All of the land's produce can be eaten.

Reflection: In our reading today from Leviticus 25 we learn that God ordained a sabbath year. Every seventh year each field was to lie fallow. This sounds like a good agricultural practice. Overworking land can ring all sorts of havoc on nature and the land itself. This practice provided a rest and recuperation for the land, the animals, and a care for all of God's creation. Like the Sabbath day, this required preparation and planning. It required storing up a harvest so you and the poor could eat during this time.

This practice in principle makes sense, God wants us to order our lives in such a way that we place our faith and trust solely in God. But in practice to devote a whole year of resting, not producing anything almost seems nonsensical in our world today. I have had a hard time imagining how I could live into this practice in any meaningful way. But five years ago, when the world slowed down, we saw rivers become clear, dirty fog in the air was lifted and even in the sadness of death, new life continued to unfold. Watching this unfold made me more aware of God's creation and my role in its care. It began to birth some new practices of creation care into my life.

How might your actions of slowing down and changing your way of work influence all of creation, the earth, the animals, the water? How might you be more intentional to care for all of God's earth today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: How have I seen God at work in creation today?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I wind down my day, relax any tensions I carry in my body and calm the restlessness of my mind. Help me rest in you as I sleep today. May your Spirit awaken me to find a renewed strength for the tasks ahead, and your peaceful presence within me.*

The Sabbath Jubilee

Rev. Debbie Casanzio

Wednesday, February 11

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your great love for us O God. We give you thanks for this day! As we begin this day may we find ways to focus our hearts and minds upon you so that we might be awakened to your Spirit with and among us today.*

Scripture Reading: Lev. 25:11-18 (CEB)
11The fiftieth year will be a Jubilee year for you. Do not plant, do not harvest the secondary growth, and do not gather from the freely growing vines 12because it is a Jubilee: it will be holy to you. You can eat only the produce directly out of the field. 13Each of you must return to your family property in this year of Jubilee. 14When you sell something to or buy something from your fellow citizen, you must not cheat each other. 15You will buy from your fellow citizen according to the number of years since the Jubilee; he will sell to you according to the number of years left for harvests. 16You will raise the price if there are more years or lower the price if there are less years because it is the number of harvests that are being sold to you. 17You must not cheat each other but fear your God because I am the Lord your God. 18You will observe my rules, and you will keep my regulations and do them so that you can live securely on the land.

Reflection: The year of jubilee was a spiritual practice that was much more radical in application than the other two sabbath rituals. Every fiftieth year, all leased or mortgaged lands were to be returned to their original owners, and all bonded laborers were to be freed. This naturally imposed difficulties. It is important to remember that the year of jubilee operated within the context of Israel's social system. They understood the land to be owned by

God and to be enjoyed as a benefit of their relationship with God. And it was clear they were to share with others in need.

The thing is, today, the same social and economic conditions no longer exist in the same form. In practical terms, the jubilee year reflected their trust that God would provide for their immediate needs and for the future of their families. At the same time, it called on the rich to trust that treating creditors and servants among them with compassion would still yield an adequate return. While we don't engage in this practice the same way today, what would it look like for us as faith communities to consider how to share our resources with the community around us to be a blessing? How would we offer your land/resources to be used for the benefit of others, particularly the poor and vulnerable among us?

What would it look like for your church, after 50 years give it away to the community? Maybe it is a literal gift, but might there be other ways as well? What does it say about how you care for church staff? Somethings to ponder and even share with other leaders in the church.

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Is there something in my personal life that I might share with my community?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I wind down my day, relax any tensions I carry in my body and calm the restlessness of my mind. Help me rest in you as I sleep today. May your Spirit awaken me to find a renewed strength for the tasks ahead, and your peaceful presence within me.*

The Sabbath Moments

Rev. Debbie Casanzio

Thursday, February 12

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your great love for us O God. We give you thanks for this day! As we begin this day may we find ways to focus our hearts and minds upon you so that we might be awakened to your Spirit with and among us today.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28 (CEB)
Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.

Reflection: Jesus sees our struggles and the weight of the world we are carrying. He knows our pain and our worries, and he welcomes us. When we take time to pray to God, to listen for God's voice, we create sabbath moments in our lives. These moments can create a welcome space for Christ to enter and heal our souls. God's presence is always there waiting for us to not resist it.

In the movie, *Christopher Robin*, the lead character (all grown up) has made his work his life at all costs. He is so busy doing he is missing out on the joy of his life and things are crumbling around him. Much to his surprise, Winnie the Pooh shows up not just to remind him of the joy of his youth but with the invitation to correct his life so that he might live now. The wisdom from Winnie the Pooh says, I have always found that "Doing nothing can often lead to the best kind of something." Maybe during some of our Sabbath time we too might be invited to a place of doing nothing so that we can focus on the One who can do all kinds of somethings.

Jesus welcomes us in love to come, to sit a spell and to just rest.
What does 'doing nothing' look like for you?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: What would it look like for you to set aside time later today, to close our eyes and know that all is well with Christ, and all will be well in him?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I wind down my day, relax any tensions I carry in my body and calm the restlessness of my mind. Help me rest in you as I sleep today. May your Spirit awaken me to find a renewed strength for the tasks ahead, and your peaceful presence within me.*

The Sabbath Rhythm

Rev. Debbie Casanzio

Friday, February 13

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your great love for us O God. We give you thanks for this day! As we begin this day may we find ways to focus our hearts and minds upon you so that we might be awakened to your Spirit with and among us today.*

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:9-11 (CEB)
9So you see that a sabbath rest is left open for God's people. 10The one who entered God's rest also rested from his works, just as God rested from his own. 11Therefore, let's make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience.

Reflection: In today's fast-paced 24/7 world, sabbath-keeping is often seen as an inconvenience. Our busy-ness is often the clash of our economic livelihood birthed from the non-observance of the Sabbath. Jesus' statement on the Sabbath found in Mark 2:27-28 says, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.' Sabbath is both a God designed rest and restoration, as well as a remembrance of who God is. Sabbath keeping is an act of faith.

Jesus himself withdraw to deserted places for prayer. While Jesus was confronted with people coming to him with important work, healing work, Jesus stayed committed to time away to pray and time of rest. Might this be the challenge for us, to build into our rhythm of life, a day with prayer, a break and rest so that we might connect with God. If Jesus can make time, then so can we. Sabbath was meant as a gift. It takes preparation. The Sabbath links us to creation and suggests that it is part of the fabric of the world that God has created.

What would it take for us to adjust a part of our week in a similar way?
What would it look like to set apart a whole 24hrs for no work,
no chores, or asking others to work for us?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: What is one thing I might do today to get ready for a sabbath day?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I wind down my day, relax any tensions I carry in my body and calm the restlessness of my mind. Help me rest in you as I sleep today. May your Spirit awaken me to find a renewed strength for the tasks ahead, and your peaceful presence within me.*

Saturday, February 14

Mission Covenants of The Florida Conference

What We Do

Mission covenants call us to live faithfully in ways that are relational, grace-filled, and rooted in shared purpose. Sabbath is a guiding rhythm—reminding us to rest in God, honor one another, and serve from renewal rather than exhaustion. The covenants lift up values such as God's love, prayer, spiritual development, mutuality, respect, and collaboration, each pointing us toward wholeness in our life together. These commitments remind us that ministry is sustained not by constant striving but by choosing to pause, listen, and allow God's Spirit to guide our relationships and work. We also honor specific partnerships such as the **Haiti/Florida Covenant** and the **Methodists United in Prayer/Cuba Covenant**, which embody Sabbath by rooting mission in prayer, fostering mutual support across borders, and reminding us that renewal comes when we share both burdens and joys together as one body in Christ.

Ways to Become Involved

There are many ways to take part in our covenant partnerships. Congregations can join the Haiti/Florida Covenant, the Cuba/Methodists United in Prayer Covenant, or the East Angola Covenant, committing to walk alongside partner churches through prayer, encouragement, and shared mission. Individuals and groups may support covenant partners by participating in mission trips, hosting visiting leaders, or sharing resources that strengthen ministry across borders.

Churches can lift up covenant relationships in worship, educate their members about the global connection, and encourage prayer for partner congregations each week. Even simple acts—such as writing letters, exchanging videos, or telling the stories of covenant churches—deepen relationships and remind us of our shared faith.

By participating in mission covenants, we live into the connection that defines us as United Methodists and strengthen bonds that extend far beyond our own communities.

Ways to Connect

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SERVICE

Week of February 15, 2026

Molly McEntire
FLUMC Director of Connectional and Missions Ministries

Sunday, February 15

This week we will reflect together on the theme of service. Service is central to the way we follow Jesus, who modeled humility by washing the disciples' feet and by caring for the most vulnerable. In the United Methodist Church, we believe faith is lived out through love of God and neighbor, transforming lives and communities. Whether through our local churches meeting needs in their neighborhoods or through global partnerships, service is how we put God's love into action every day.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Serving with Humility

Molly McEntire

Monday, February 16

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, open my eyes today to see where I can serve with humility and joy. May my hands and heart reflect Christ's love in both small acts of kindness and greater works of justice. Use me as your servant. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 13:12–15 (NRSV)
12After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. 14So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

Reflection: Jesus' words in John 13 remind us that true service begins in humility. When He washed the disciples' feet, He demonstrated that no act of love is too small, no task beneath our care. Even simple gestures—listening deeply, offering encouragement, or lending a helping hand—can profoundly impact the lives of those around us. Take a moment to reflect on your own family, community, or workplace: where is Christ calling you to serve today? While programs like ZOE Empowers or local church ministries provide examples of organized service, the heart of discipleship lies in your personal choices. Each time you help a neighbor, mentor a child, or offer presence and kindness, you embody Christ's love in tangible ways. Service is not a duty to checkoff a list; it is a way of living that reflects God's heart in your surroundings. In every humble act, no matter how ordinary, we participate in God's kingdom and reveal the transformative power of love in the world.

Where is God inviting me to act with humility in service today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Look around what opportunity is there where you can step in and make a difference? Consider joining a local service project, volunteering your time, or supporting an initiative that brings hope and care to your community.

Evening Prayer: *God of grace, thank you for the opportunities to serve today. Keep my eyes open and my hands ready for tomorrow. Amen.*

Service as Love in Action

Molly McEntire

Tuesday, February 17

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of love, guide me to put my faith into action. May my love reach those who need it most today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: James 2:14–17 (NRSV)
[14]What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? [15]If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, [16]and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? [17]So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Reflection: Faith comes alive when it moves from words into action. Look closely at your own life how have you offered a listening ear, shared your time, or extended a hand to a neighbor, friend, or colleague in need? Even the smallest gestures a heartfelt message, a warm meal, a helping hand become powerful expressions of God's love. The heart of discipleship is personal, rooted in how you respond today. Each choice to act with kindness, compassion, and generosity ripples far beyond what you can see. Service transforms not only the lives of those you touch, but also your own heart, drawing you closer to Christ. When love becomes action, faith becomes visible, and the ordinary moments of life become sacred opportunities to reveal God's kingdom.

How can I turn my faith into practical acts of love today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*

- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Even small actions of love make a difference.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, thank you for the opportunities I had to serve today. May I continue to put love into action tomorrow. Amen.*

Serving with Joy

Molly McEntire

Wednesday, February 18

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Joyful God, help me see service as a gift and fill my heart with gladness as I give. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 9:7–8 (NRSV)
7Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
8And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

Reflection: Service offered with joy has the power to transform both the giver and the receiver. Reflect on your own life: where do you find opportunities to serve others—family, coworkers, friends, or neighbors? Perhaps it is through volunteering, mentoring, or simply offering a word of encouragement. Even the smallest acts a smile, a note of kindness, a moment of listening can illuminate someone's day in ways you may never fully see. True joy in service does not depend on recognition or reward; it springs from a heart aligned with God's love, willing to step into the needs of others. Ask yourself: am I serving out of obligation, or am I embracing the chance to share God's love with gladness? When we choose to serve joyfully, even in ordinary moments, we become channels of God's grace, spreading hope, healing, and light into a world in desperate need of love.

Which acts of service bring me joy, and how can I share that joy today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...
- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*

- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Serve with joy your attitude can change the impact of every action.

Evening Prayer: *God of abundance, thank you for the joy of serving today. Renew my heart for tomorrow. Amen.*

Service as Justice

Molly McEntire

Thursday, February 19

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God of justice, open my eyes to serve in ways that bring dignity and fairness. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Micah 6:8 (NRSV)
He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Reflection: Service is not only about meeting immediate needs; it's also about promoting justice and fairness. Reflect on your own community: where can you advocate, mentor, or stand with those who need support? Even small actions listening, volunteering, or offering encouragement are meaningful. An example of a group doing this type of service is Florida Immigration Law and Justice Center they are committed to welcoming immigrants by providing affordable, high- quality immigration legal services. They actively advocate for immigrants' rights on both local and national levels. Through dedicated education initiatives, they aim to enlighten both immigrant and non-immigrant communities about the issues facing our immigrant populations, fostering understanding, compassion, and unity within our diverse society. Is that a way you can be part of service as justice? Each, decision to act with fairness, kindness, and humility helps bring God's kingdom closer to those around you.

Where is God calling me to act with justice and compassion today?
Who can you partner with on this?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*

- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Even small acts of fairness bring God's justice into the world.

Evening Prayer: *Merciful God, thank you for guiding me to serve with kindness and justice. Strengthen me to continue tomorrow. Amen.*

Service as a Daily Practice

Molly McEntire

Friday, February 20

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, help me see service not as occasional, but as part of daily life. May my actions reflect your love in every moment. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:37–40 (NRSV)
37Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Reflection: Jesus reminds us that every act of service, no matter how small, matters. The hungry fed, the thirsty given a drink, the stranger welcomed, the sick visited—each moment of care is a moment where we encounter Christ Himself. Service is not limited to extraordinary circumstances or grand gestures; it is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. Our routines—at home, at work, in our neighborhoods, or at church—are filled with countless opportunities to love others. A kind word to a coworker, a helping hand to a neighbor, a phone call to someone feeling alone, or even a smile to a stranger can embody God's presence in ways we may never fully know. When we embrace service as a habit, not an obligation, ordinary moments become sacred acts of discipleship. Each choice to act with love, patience, and generosity becomes part of God's transforming work in the world, shaping not only the lives of others but also our own hearts. Living a life of daily service is a calling, a privilege, and a pathway to becoming more like Christ in every moment.

What ordinary action can I commit to as a daily practice of service?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Every small act of service is a chance to meet Christ in someone else.

Evening Prayer: *Faithful God, thank you for the ways I served today. Keep me attentive to new opportunities tomorrow. Amen.*

Saturday, February 21

Zoe Empowers

What We Do

Creating a world where vulnerable youth become secure, healthy, and connected, Zoe Empowers works with vulnerable youth and their families impacted by the global orphan crisis. Through a three-year, locally-led program, participants become safe and healthy, skilled for long-term success, and able to lead meaningful lives within a supportive community providing them with a positive impact. We serve orphaned and vulnerable children in Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Liberia, Tanzania, Mozambique, India, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, and Eswatini.

Ways to Become Involved

- **Become a Prayer Partner:** We welcome all who would support our empowerment programs through prayer. You are invited to join a volunteer-led group of Prayer Partners who receive email updates once a week with prayer request related to our work.

- **Become an Empowerment Group Partner:** Create a group partnership. Empower a group of 60–100 orphaned youth in three years in the country of your choice.

- **Travel- either in person or virtually:** Meet an empowerment group on a live virtual trip. Virtual trips give you the opportunity to meet youth on their personal journey out of poverty. Hear stories, offer encouragement, and ask questions directly to young people in the Zoe Empowers program. Experience the impact of Zoe Empowers in person. Witness firsthand how group members are thriving in the midst of adversity.

- **Guest Speaker:** Have a guest speaker come and speak to your congregation or ministry about Zoe Empowers.

Ways to Connect

Molly McEntire, Director of Connectional & Mission Ministries
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AWAKENED TO GRACE

Grow more deeply into the love of God.
Live out God's grace in meaningful ways.

Discover the beauty of grace unfolding through the seasons of faith. This first volume of *Awakened to Grace* invites you on a spiritual journey that begins in the quiet anticipation of Advent and moves through the wonder of Christmas and the revealing light of Epiphany.

Each day offers a prayer or reflection centered on timeless gifts—Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, Incarnation, and Expectation—and continues into the practices that shape a Wesleyan way of life—Prayer, Scripture, Silence, Fasting, Sabbath, and Service.

More than a devotional, *Awakened to Grace* is an invitation to slow down, to listen, and to live each day as a response to God's transforming presence. Let its rhythm guide you from hope to service and awaken your heart to the grace already at work in you.

The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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