



AWAKENED TO GRACE

2026 LENT & EASTERTIDE DEVOTIONAL

*Ordinary Practices that Open Us
to Extraordinary Grace*

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to Extraordinary Grace



2026 Lent & Eastertide 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 reflection 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).



Lent: Obstacles to Grace

Rev. Magrey deVega

Senior Pastor, Hyde Park UMC, Tampa



Lent is a season of deep self-reflection, to hear with clarity the call of Jesus to take up the cross and follow him. Though these days will culminate in the recognition of how Jesus' death on the cross saves us from our sins, they will also summon us to an equal recognition of how our sins necessitated his death to begin with. They also name our human frailties, which block our awareness and appreciation of God's love and power within us. The weeks ahead name these challenges as "Obstacles to Grace." Each of them are natural, human emotions and conditions. They are value neutral: they can be legitimate responses to the situations we face. But when they become all-encompassing in our lives, they can prevent us from seeing the presence and power of God, who strengthens us to follow Jesus, one faithful step at a time. Each week, open your heart to recognizing these obstacles within yourself, and entrust them to Jesus, whose resurrection can raise you to new life.

FEAR & ANXIETY

Week of February 22, 2026

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Director & Pastor of The Portico - Hyde Park UMC, Tampa



Sunday, February 22

Everyone battles fear and anxiety. Our culture is saturated with them. It is peddled—through news, social media, politics, and even at times from church pulpits. Fear emerges when there is a real and present danger that confronts us. It often fades when it passes. Anxiety seems to linger over time. It grows from imagined or future threats that stoke uncertainty and loss of control. Faith in Jesus Christ doesn't promise freedom from fear and anxiety—it promises God's presence in the midst of them. This week's scriptures invite us to connect to God's presence, claim difficult hope, and to engage in practical ways to live unafraid.

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...*

Needless Rocking

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Monday, February 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: *God, I worry about many things. My mind runs and ruminates about the future. I question whether there will be enough. Ground me in believing in that I can radically trust in Your presence and provision. Orient my life around love. The love of You and others. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:25-34 (NRSVUE)

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[1] ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Reflection: It’s been said that worry is like a rocking chair—it gives you something to do but doesn’t get you anywhere. Jesus declares, “Do not worry.” Yet honestly, who doesn’t? For many of us, worry has become a persistent mental habit that keeps us rocking back

and forth, but nothing changes. Jesus first spoke these words to poor peasants living day to day, uncertain where their next meal might come from. Their hardships may differ from ours, but we share their tendency to worry about tomorrow. *Will there be enough?* Jesus acknowledges that trouble will come but reminds us that God already knows our needs. He challenges our priorities, our scarcity mindset, and invites deep trust in God's care. Worry adds not a single hour to life, and today's troubles are enough. The birds, lilies, and grass become vivid illustrations of divine provision and care.

Take a moment to name a worry before God. Then look at creation—a flower, a tree, a bird—and let it remind you of God's extraordinary care. When you catch yourself rocking again, return to that image of trust.

What worries continue to have me focus on the future and things that haven't happened yet? In what ways can I invite God into the rocking back and forth and practice trust in the moment?

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 knows my needs. God will not abandon me. When I seek God and God's will for my life first, I will discover that my needs are provided for.

Evening Prayer: *As the day concludes, I give thanks to you God for all the ways that You prompt me to remember to trust you and not worry. Amen.*

Claiming Presence

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Tuesday, February 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: *God, when things are difficult in the world or in my life, give me strength when I weaken. Give me hope when I despair, give me courage when I am afraid. Show me that even during uncertainty, You will not depart from me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 41:10 (NRSVUE)

...do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Reflection: A people in exile first heard these words while living under the rule and reign of a hostile foreign power. Everything they believed about God's presence, promises and hopes for Israel seemed shattered. They felt abandoned, forgotten, and powerless—longing for what was and what could be—yet losing hope. Through Isaiah, God proclaims that he has not forgotten his covenant and will redeem them.

In our lives, nation, and world, circumstances can turn things upside down, leaving us uncertain and afraid of the future. When we don't see a way out, words like Isaiah's may sound hollow to skeptical ears or weary hearts. Or they might reach us at just the right moment. Jesus said that all that is required is a mustard seed of faith. Where do you feel doubt or despair? Where do you wonder, "How long God? When will you show up?"

Those who walk in the way of Jesus, practicing love for God, neighbor, and even enemy claim the conviction that a benevolent God is still mysteriously at work amid suffering, pain, and malevolence. None of these will get the last word. Read Isaiah's words again—and believe.

Where have I seen God strengthen me in the past? Where can I claim God's presence in my life or in the challenges of the world?

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 with me in all things, closer to me than I am to myself.

Evening Prayer: *God, I give thanks that You were with me throughout the day, helping me, strengthening me and giving me hope. Continue to attune my awareness to your presence, your love, and help. Amen.*

Care Beyond Measure

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Wednesday, February 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: *Caring God, help me rest in your steadfast care. Enable me to see your care for my loved ones, the community, and the world. Teach me to release my fears, to trust your timing and to find peace in struggle. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1 Peter 5:6-11 (NRSV)

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

Reflection: Peter wrote to believers facing rejection, and pressure in a world that prized power, prestige, and possessions and dismissed humility. They wondered if God truly cared. Peter counters with a promise: Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

These words can reach us. You might need reminding... Whatever burdens you, whether it is fear of the future, relentless grief, financial pressure, or any other uncertainty—God invites you to offer it and hand it over. Because God cares for YOU. Take that in. No anxiety is too small or too heavy to be cast upon Jesus Christ. He knows you, sees you, and loves you. The same mighty hand that lifted Christ from suffering to resurrection is with you now.

Peter also reminds us: we are not alone. Across the world and time, others have shared in these struggles and this faith. Resisting, standing firm, and trusting in God's presence and timing allow us to be restored, supported, strengthened and established. Until then, believe that God cares deeply for you and will not let you go.

*Where in my life have I experienced God caring for me?
My loved ones? The world?*

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: This too shall pass.

Evening Prayer: *The day is done and night has come. I give thanks for your care for me and all of your creation.*

Between Doubt & Belief

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Thursday, February 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: *Patient God, be with me today. Remind me that faith in you is what enables transformation, healing, and life. May I continue to lift to you my vulnerability and fear. Grant me willingness, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:21-24 (NRSV)

²¹Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²²It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, help us! Have compassion on us!” ²³Jesus said to him, “If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes.” ²⁴Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Reflection: A young boy, unable to speak and tormented by seizures since childhood, was brought by his desperate father to the disciples for healing. After years of watching his son suffer and trying everything, the father was likely at the end of his rope. Perhaps he came with flickering hope or skepticism. Yet, he still comes. Maybe he thinks, What do I have to lose? I would do anything possible for my child to be cured.

When the disciples couldn't heal his son, the father's fragile hope must have shattered. Then Jesus entered the scene. In the tension between hope and heartbreak, the father blurts out honest and holy words: “I believe; help my unbelief!” His prayer of raw faith is a confession that belief and doubt can coexist. Jesus responds to both doubt and belief.

Where do you feel like this father—tired, uncertain, caught between faith and fear? When have you tried everything, felt a spark of hope,

only to watch it extinguish? Jesus invites you to bring even your unbelief to Him, trusting that His presence can hold what your faith cannot yet sustain.

Where do I have tension of heartbreak and hope? What's the raw prayer you can offer? Speak it or write a prayer like the desperate father.

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 already knows my doubts, I don't need to hide them. God can hold both. At any time, I can invite God into my unbelief, doubt, and struggle.

Evening Prayer: *God, I believe, help my unbelief. I want to believe, but there is evidence to the contrary. May the Holy Spirit to enable me. Show me the way. Amen.*

Power & Perseverance

Rev. Justin LaRosa

Friday, February 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: *Powerful God, help me to burn brightly and boldly. When fear whispers, connect me to your power, your love and discipline.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:3-7 (NRSVUE)

³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Reflection: Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him; he needs it. Timothy is facing opposition, pressure, and efforts to undermine his leadership and authority shepherding the church. The voices around him and in him whisper that he's not enough. Paul's in his own predicament. In prison and staring down death by execution, Paul offers what Timothy most needs: perseverance. He reminds Timothy of his prayers for him, and that his grandmother and mother had a sincere faith that is already within him. *It just needs a spark.* Paul insists that fear is not from God. What is from God is a Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline, which is the divine strength to keep going.

Paul gives him a vision of not what he can do, but what God can do *through him* because the gift of God that is *in him*. This is the same Spirit that dwells within you. When fear consumes you and tells

you to run, remember that God's power is within you. While the flame may appear extinguished or flickering, it isn't out. Ask God to fan it again. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is in you... You can persevere.

What gift of God within you needs rekindling so that you can persevere?

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 Holy Spirit lives within you and is greater

than fear. Rekindle the gift within me.

Evening Prayer: *God, rekindle my courage each day to live boldly, full of love and discipline to carry out Your will. Amen.*

Saturday, February 28

Social Justice Ministries



What We Do

Remember this excerpt from our baptismal vows: *Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?* (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 1992)

We live in a world where people daily live in anxiety and fear. Fear of violence, inequity and injustice in their communities, in warring nations or based on who they are due to race, culture, gender or orientation. What can we do to be good neighbors and live into our baptismal vows to combat the systems of violence and injustice that lead to people's fear?

The mission of the Social Justice Committee is to enable The Florida Conference of the UMC to live out the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church in word and action, by seeking justice and resisting evil, and by equipping churches, clergy, and laity to wrestle with and act upon justice issues in their own communities. Social Justice Ministries take on many forms at The Florida Conference: anti-racism, immigration, disability, human sexuality, creation care and so on. Feel free to visit our team sites at www.flumc.org/justice-ministries for more information.

We serve as the coordinating and conversation table for other Conference justice and advocacy ministries. We lean into The General Board of Church and Society theme, which reminds us that "Justice Takes Courage." We observe the realities of the society in which we live as we seek to name, explore, and address inequities among people and in communities. We seek to love our neighbors and serve together by engaging grassroots organizing methods to encourage people in every community and walk of life to become involved across a spectrum of social issues.

Ways to Become Involved

- Use the 2025-2028 Social Principles, the newest editions of the Faith and Fact Cards, and The 2020/2024 Book of Resolutions to learn about The United Methodist Church's work on justice issues around the world.
- Volunteer to serve on Florida Conference and District boards, agencies, and commissions.
- Advocate for the voiceless, powerless, and the oppressed. Show up, speak out. Participate in United Methodist partnerships (such as the Methodist Federation for Social Action) and consider participating in letter-writing campaigns to elected officials, rallies, marches, vigils, and Florida Advocacy Days to learn about grassroots organizing.
- Create opportunities to interact with people across lines of difference. Assume they have something that you can learn and not just teach others.

Remember, justice is not *'just us.'* Justice is for all of us! *"He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God."* — Micah 6:8 CEB

Ways to Connect

Rev. Dr. Sharon G. Austin, Director of Justice Ministries
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flumc.org/justice-ministries

ISOLATION & LONELINESS

Week of March 1, 2026

Mirhonda Studevart

District Co-Lay Leader, East Central District



Sunday, March 1

We continue this Lenten season with an exploration of isolation and loneliness. God designed humans for community, yet throughout history, people up to and including Jesus Christ, have grappled with feelings of isolation. Today, 1 in 6 adults worldwide experience loneliness. In 2023, the US Surgeon General declared a loneliness and isolation epidemic, publishing an advisory about the healing effects of social connection and community. That same year, the World Health Organization (WHO) formed a Commission on Social Connection, recognizing connection as a key component for a healthier society. Author Timothy Keller shared that “to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God.”

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...*

All By Myself

Mirhonda Studevant

Monday, March 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: *Gracious God, sometimes my emotional pain feels heavy and unbearable. Let me abide in your peace as you touch every hurting place.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 142 (NIV)

¹I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.

²I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.

³When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me.

⁴Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

⁵I cry to you, Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

⁶Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

⁷Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

Reflection: Analytical psychology founder Carl Jung said that loneliness does not come from having no people around you, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to you. The frustration of feeling invisible can burden our hearts with an overwhelming sense of isolation. Loneliness can be a trap as it potentially serves as a gateway inviting a host of other negative feelings including hopelessness and depression. The first step to escaping the trap of loneliness is acknowledging those feelings. Even great spiritual champions like David acknowledged suffering with feelings of loneliness. The second step is to invite godly wisdom and healing. Fortunately, we can boldly approach God's throne with every

feeling—no matter how joyous or sorrowful. Rather than comparing our situation to others and attempting to “size” our troubles as we carry them, we can release them to The One who created us and knows us intimately.

*What's one emotional burden that seems to “boomerang”
where you release it, then pick it up again?*

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 Lord knows me fully and loves me unconditionally. I am never alone.

Evening Prayer: *Omniscient God, you have searched me and know my heart. Create in me a clean heart. Give me a mind to know you better and a heart to trust you more. Let my plans align with yours. I trust you to bring about every form of healing and restoration to my life.*

Somewhere Out There

Mirhonda Studevant

Tuesday, March 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: *Boundless God, I thank you that there is no distance in the spirit realm and prayers never expire. Bless those who I are physically far away or gone, yet close in my heart.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:3-11 (NIV)

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Reflection: Missing someone you love can feel like a quiet ache. Whether the separation is temporary or permanent, your daily routine may be full of reminders about the space that they would typically fill. The ache that can make their absence feel unbearable is also a blessing because it serves as proof of strong and genuine connection. Regardless of whether distance, time, or loss keeps us apart, the bond remains the same. We carry pieces of those we miss within us, and even in moments of isolation, their presence shapes our view of the world.

Which three words best describe the person you're missing?

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: I am known and loved. God can step into the void of those I love and miss.

Evening Prayer: *Omnipresent God, thank you for your glorious gift of love. I am grateful for those you've sent me to love and those you sent who love me. I trust you to provide for my every need from moment to moment. Help me to give thanks each time I fondly remember someone that I miss.*

Light Up My Life

Mirhonda Studevant

Wednesday, March 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: *Brilliant God, I invite you to flood my life with your magnificent light. Bless those who find themselves in dark places. Let us rejoice over you, our Creator, as you rejoice in us, your creations.*

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:5-7 (HCSB)

⁵Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him.

⁶If we say, “We have fellowship with Him,” yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

⁷But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Reflection: Everyone feels lonely at some time—no one is immune. We may be isolated by choice or isolated by circumstance. Yet, when loneliness presses in and the world feels distant, we must remind ourselves that God’s light is still near. Fortunately for us, God’s presence is not limited by physical barriers or distance. The everlasting light of God’s love shines into the quiet places of our lives where we may otherwise feel unseen or uncertain. Even in times of what feels like utter isolation, God’s loving light pursues us, gently comforting us and reminding us that we are never abandoned.

What is a dark area where I need to invite God’s light?

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 is light, truth, and power. Nothing is hidden from God. Nothing takes God by surprise.

Evening Prayer: *Omnipotent God, thank you for your miraculous power working in my life. I am grateful that you never leave nor forsake me. Even when situations seem dark, thank you for being a source of hope and peace. Help my light to shine brightly, bringing glory to your name.*

Stay with Me

Mirhonda Studevant

Thursday, March 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: *Everlasting God, in challenging moments, remind me that you are with me always. Grant me wisdom and strength to love courageously and bring honor to your name.*

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 31:6-8 (NASB)

⁶Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or in dread of them, for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you.”⁷Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you will go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you will give it to them as an inheritance.⁸And the Lord is the one who is going ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not desert you or abandon you. Do not fear and do not be dismayed.”

Reflection: When life feels heavy, we may wonder whether anyone truly sees or understands our struggles. It is easy to elevate and amplify every difficulty which sets the stages for a defeatist mentality. We need courage in daily doses, not just big moments or major battles. It takes courage to persist in any endeavor. The very nature of God offers comfort by virtue of His steadfast character. God’s presence is not fleeting nor conditional. God is everlasting and infinite. His love for us is unwavering and hold us in every circumstance. We can approach even the most challenging situations with a great anticipation of seeing God at work.

When have you dreaded a situation, only to find that it went far better than anticipated?

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 take refuge in the Lord, operating in His strength, realizing that God is always with me.

Evening Prayer: *Sovereign God, thank you for being with me always. You are a Way maker who hears and answers my prayers. Your solutions are far better than my own. Thank you for preparing the way ahead for me and giving me favor with those in positions of authority.*

We Are Family

Mirhonda Studevant

Friday, March 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: *Lord, thank you for adopting me into your family. Let me courageously share your love, grace and peace with everyone.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:19-22 (NLT)

¹⁹So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

²⁰Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

²¹We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

²²Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Reflection: Family is more than common biology, it is belonging. Journalist and writer Edna Buchanan famously said that friends are the family we choose for ourselves. Throughout our lives, God sends people to walk alongside us in the midst of challenging circumstances. Oftentimes, moments of isolation become a testament to the God's power and perfectly divine timing. It is delightful to receive encouragement in ordinary and exceptional ways. Being a Believer means joining the family of God and living for purposes far greater than ourselves. Receiving God's gift of grace and salvation means being brought into a community with a rich spiritual heritage and bright future. Despite our human frailties, we are renewed and encouraged daily through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Believers can navigate each day with great expectations of receiving divine assignments and sensing God at work in the world. We are new creatures who experience the

transformation from outsiders to insiders, and join an uplifting community where God dwells by His Holy Spirit.

*Who was the first person outside of your family who encouraged you?
How did it make you feel?*

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: I am a member of God's family; part of a royal priesthood and holy nation.

Evening Prayer: *Loving Abba, I thank you for the gift of connection. I am honored to be part of your kin-dom. I trust in your plans for me which are better than any I could imagine. Thank you for reminders that you are always with me and love me unconditionally.*

Saturday, March 7

Methodist Federation for Social Action (MSFA)



What We Do

Isolation and loneliness is an epidemic in our society. Many times, loneliness has happened because people have been isolated and harmed by the church. MFSA is a national social justice nonprofit seeking to empower justice-seeking persons of faith to make a difference in global issues of peace, poverty, and civil rights. The mission of MFSA is to “mobilize, lead and sustain a justice-seeking United Methodist movement, energizing people to be agents of God’s justice, peace and reconciliation.”

Originally known as the Methodist Federation for Social Service, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) was founded in 1907 by several Methodist Episcopal clergy (including Frank Mason North, author of *Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life*) to direct church attention to the enormous human suffering among the working class. Immediately, the Federation became Methodism’s unofficial rallying point for the Social Gospel and achieved the adoption of the first denominational social creed in 1908. Current issues tackle justice issues of climate, economics, gender, LGBTQ+ and other issues that cause loneliness and isolation among our neighbors.

Ways to Become Involved

Congregations can become justice-seeking churches and individuals can join the Florida chapter of MFSA.

Each year at Annual Conference, MSFA hosts a dinner offering laity and clergy ways to be involved in justice-seeking ministries that benefit our communities and state.

ANGER & VIOLENCE

Week of March 8, 2026

Elise Caton

Pediatric Occupational Therapist, FLUMC Certified Deacon Candidate,
Candler School of Theology Student



Sunday, March 8

There is much violence. There is much to be angry about. Many are surprised to hear my struggle with anger. Most notice my peaceful demeanor and hear my soothing voice, but do not realize the rage that can boil beneath such a calm exterior. It can be frightening to know such things about a person, let alone to live in a body that is fully aware of the powerful potential anger has for action. Especially when action may be violent. But anger also has energies for nonviolent action, too. I used to be ashamed of my anger. But with much soul work and soul crafting, anger is a gift and a guide. And especially necessary for violent times.

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...*

Afraid of Anger

Elise Caton

Monday, March 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: *Divine One, I arose into a violent world. I arose and found a violence towards my own self. How can I love when I struggle to love myself? Teach me to love, starting with me so violence can finally transform into love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 17:7 (ESV)

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise and have no fear.”

Reflection: Anger wants attention. It is trying to tell you that something is wrong. Some boundary was crossed, something sacred was violated. Anger is a protective and loyal emotion that does not want to see you or anyone or anything you love be hurt. Anger left lonely becomes scary. It has two choices if it is not being heard. One is to be loud as a violent explosion. The other is to try to manage and control itself. It simmers until its forceful energy can no longer contain itself, and it boils over, burning whatever is within its reach. We can try to ignore anger, but it makes itself known. We ignore what we are afraid of, and we cannot be afraid of anger. When we are afraid to touch our anger, our fear keeps us from discovering what is important to us. Fear keeps us from knowing what we really love. Fear keeps us silent and comfortable even when anger is alerting us to the injustice right before us. We are afraid of our anger because we are afraid of our power. The very power that energizes loving action. Don't be afraid. Learn to listen to, discern, and be guided by anger.

What does anger want me to hear, to know, to wake up to?

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: When I listen to my anger and care for its needs, I do not need to be afraid of its wisdom or power.

Evening Prayer: *Divine One, I moved today through an angry world. I moved today planting and tending to many kinds of seeds. As the sun sets, did I listen to my seed of anger? What did my anger say? Was it calmed as it was heard? May it be transformed into something beautiful, something healing, some form of justice and love. Amen.*

Thick Darkness

Elise Caton

Tuesday, March 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: *Divine One, The world is afraid of the dark. I am afraid of the dark. We light the dark with artificial light. But how can we find true light when we are never in the dark? Show me how to find an inner light to meet you in the dark, where you are. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:21 (ESV)

The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Reflection: We are going to be angry. We need to be angry. If we are not experiencing some anger in times like these, then we are unaware of what is happening. Maybe we are even comfortable with our complicity. We can't be afraid of our anger. But we have to learn how to be with our burning anger without being consumed by it. This is scary and can feel like darkness. We may need professionals to guide and counsel us through the darkness. We cannot be afraid to try. We try because, very often, the darkness is where God is.

It is in the darkness where many things are transformed. A seed grows roots and begins to emerge toward the warmth of the light above. Jesus entered the darkness of the tomb and re-emerged transformed and teaching us the way through the darkness and into redemption. Anger does not want to stay angry. Our anger would like to guide us away from violence and towards nonviolent, loving action. We can befriend our anger, even when it feels like thick darkness.

Have I met God in the thick darkness to discover my inner light?

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 in the thick darkness, God is there.

Evening Prayer: *Divine One, You meet me in my darkness even if it is angry and raging. You are able. May this darkness and this rage transform in me. May it be the tilling for fertile ground where the Holy Spirit may cultivate its fruits. Seeds and roots grow in the dark. May I have the power of the seed to be broken open to grow deep roots. Amen.*

Commitment to Nonviolence

Elise Caton

Wednesday, March 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: *Divine One, I arose into a violent world. I arose and found a violence towards my own self. How can I love when I struggle to love myself? Teach me to love, starting with me so violence can finally transform into love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Mark 3:5 (ESV)

And he (Jesus) looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Reflection: Violence begets violence. Anger, if not transformed, will lead to some form of death and destruction. Nonviolence is not passive. Non-violence is an inner action that is cultivated. Committing to nonviolence is not just a commitment to do no harm. Committing to nonviolence is a commitment to transform anger and the pain of injustice into healing and wholeness. It does not stop at just calming the situation down. It works from the inside out for restoration and reparation. Nonviolence is the way of redemption. The inner, dark tomb is where the work is done. It is not our work, though; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. In the inner darkness, she transforms our suffering so that her fruits are revealed in us. The Holy Spirit can do this with any part of us, even our anger, and even with the pain of violence we have suffered.

*What if anger, channeled non-violently, was not an obstacle,
but a means to grace?*

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: Commitment to nonviolence is committing to restoration and healing.

Evening Prayer: *Divine One, I am weary of the violence. Hold me, please. Bones ache and heavy, marrowed of grief and sorrow. Eyes so dry, a desert carved from a sea of tears. When will this terrible pain end? Hold me now in the dark, quietness. Tend to my dark, beautiful soul. I need You now and always. For as You promise, another day comes. Amen.*

Violent Realities

Elise Caton

Thursday, March 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: *Divine One, I arise and I remember. I have ancestors who have known violent times. I have ancestors who have known love. I know Love right now. I know you. How grateful I am for a thousand generations ago, someone loved. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: : Exodus 20:5-6 (NIV)

⁵I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Reflection: If violence is not happening directly to us, we are a witness to violence, even if it is through a screen. When violence is all around, it is hard to see the light. In these kinds of times, we must know the way to our inner light. We can trust that our anger is alerting us and awakening us to the dangers that seek to bury our light. We must trust that the Divine is in the darkness with us. We can trust that the dark powers and their destruction will be limited.

Violence is a tragic reality. We will have to cope with the unfolding violence and its aftermath. We know the realities of trauma and the violations of our sacredness are real and consequential. We are also told that the sins of these fathers will be evident for a few generations—real, but limited. We can remember and trust that love will be shown to a thousand generations—real and unlimited.

Who showed love so that I know it now?

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: My acts of love will live on for a thousand generations. Maybe someone will think of me a millennia from now.

Evening Prayer: *Divine One, I will be an ancestor one day. Will my descendants know that I loved? I want them to know. Create a new heart and mind in me that knows how to love, a light that knows how to shine even in the darkness. May this love and this light shine through a thousand generations and more. Amen.*

Forming the Heavenly Reality

Elise Caton

Friday, March 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: *Divine One, I arise knowing the potentials of the day. There are choices to make and many choices already made. Some I participated in. Some thrust upon me. Give me courage and wisdom and the help of the Holy Spirit to transform it all into love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB 2020)

¹⁹Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit ²⁰teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Reflection: Perhaps we can learn not to fear our anger but to befriend it, and even to sit with the darkness that so often accompanies it. What if our inner light shines so brightly that it breaks through the cracks of the tomb, rolls away the stone, and pushes upward through the soil to grow and bloom? What if anger itself can become a guide—not to destruction, but to transformation? Our inner light might then glow so radiantly that it reveals anger transfigured into passion, and passion reshaped into compassion. In that light, our hearts expand, our faces shine, and our lives become a beacon—showing others a way forward. A way that turns us from violence, leads us into the tender places of our own darkness, and reveals that even there, God is present, inviting our hidden light to shine.

And maybe this way of living—so compelling, so wide in its welcome—creates space for even our anger to belong. Perhaps it will draw others to join us in shaping a heavenly reality here on earth, in this very moment. I am no longer ashamed of my anger. It is a messenger, reminding me of what truly matters. It stirs me to rise, to

act, and to help build a world where the fruits of the Spirit take root and flourish: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and self-control.

*What would healing from violence look and be like?
Would it look like a kingdom of heaven?*

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: I am here to be a follower and to foster followers, co-creating heaven here on earth.

Evening Prayer: *Divine One, I rest knowing your desire is for me. Create in me a vision for a world where anger is transformed into love. Where we move by the inner light that shines through illumined hearts. May whatever anger I gather in myself become fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and self-control. Love, unlimited. Amen.*

Saturday, March 14

UMC Resources



What We Do

On any given day, United Methodists respond to the tragedy of anger and violence with prayers and support. We live in a world where anger and violence interrupt our daily lives and we struggle to know how to respond. UMC.org says “We recognize that sometimes it can seem the world is full of evil and it can be a challenge to keep the faith.” Around the Conference, laity and clergy have shared that resources of prayers, liturgies and statements from our bishops help guide how we should respond within our congregations and communities.

UMC.org is an excellent resource for helping you respond to tragedies in our world and helping people cope with violence with peace. You can find prayers, services, and resources for advocacy and community actions. Here, you will also find statements from bishops, general agencies, and leaders of our denomination.

The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) website explains the mission of this important General Agency. GBCS is dedicated to the work of living faith, seeking justice, and pursuing peace. The board is called to seek the implementation of the Social Principles and other policy statements of the General Conference on Christian social concerns to fulfill the mandate of:

- relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Church, communities, and the world in which they live,
- bringing the whole of human life into conformity with the will of God,
- and showing that reconciliation involves personal, social and civic righteousness.

The General Board oversees the Social Principles that reflect the United Methodist Church's response to issues facing us in the world. GBCS offers United Methodists statements on violence around the world, resources to educate on social issues and ways to get involved and take action.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Dr. Sharon Austin, Director of Justice Ministries
JustMin@flumc.org

General Board of Church and Society Website
<https://www.umcjustice.org/>

Responding to Violence Resources
<https://www.umc.org/en/how-we-serve/social-issues/responding-to-violence>

DISAPPOINTMENT & IMPATIENCE

Week of March 15, 2026

Rev. Vidalis Lopez
South East District Superintendent



Sunday, March 15

During the Lent season, this week, we will explore how disappointments and impatience often act as obstacles to experience God's grace.

From the voice of a prophet to the poetic lament of a psalm; from the gospel to Revelation, Scripture reveals the journeys of real people and communities navigating through genuine disappointments and impatience. It also reveals a living God who walks with them, reorients their hearts, and continually invites them to a renewed mind and a new heart—empowering them to hope and overcome the obstacles to grace.

How might these stories and God's unwavering presence awaken us to face our struggles and sins with new hope, transformed by God's grace?

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...*

Disappointment & Impatience: Seed

Rev. Vidalis Lopez

Monday, March 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: *Thank you, Lord, for the gift and ability to breathe your faithfulness each new day. Through all the noises and difficulties, may I come to You with all my emotions- not blast it on social media or suppress it into secrecy, but to You, my Savior and haven. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42:9-11 (CEB)

“I will say to God, my solid rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I have to walk around, sad, oppressed by enemies? With my bones crushed, my foes make fun of me, constantly questioning me: “Where’s your God now? Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed? Why are you so upset inside? Hope in God! Because I will again give God thanks, my saving presence and my God.

Reflection: The psalmist relied on God as the unwavering cornerstone amid a crisis. According to various Jewish scholars, the psalmist is in exile north of Palestine. The psalmist expresses profound disappointment and longing, feeling stranded far from a safer, more hopeful haven. This text is also regarded as a pilgrimage passage inspired by someone whose journey was interrupted or imposed upon. Maybe the psalmist yearns to find a true home or longs to return. Along the yearning, the psalmist hears the noise of those who downplay or mock the hardship, echoing rejection and disdain. In the same way the psalmist writes throughout the entire chapter, recalling how God’s faithfulness was witnessed time and again, such as the ancient journey to the land of Jordan and Mount Hermon.

Within our families, neighborhoods, across the seas, and around the world, many are yearning for a fighting chance to find a sense of home. We each carry our own stories of longing- for days when life

feels less burdened by hardships or overwhelming pressures that may pull us away from God and from each other.

The conclusion ‘hope in God’ does not imply that the psalmist or any of us should dismiss the reality of disappointments. In the words of Desmond Tutu, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” Even far from God, even taunted by enemies, even in the darkness of a moment when the soul feels disquiet, the psalmist remembers and hopes for God.

It can be both/and: enduring disappointments while still holding onto the hope for better days. So, why wouldn't God want us to be authentic? What use is it to pretend with our prayers? Pray whatever is on your heart, sincerely. Reflect on how that can be an act of trusting that God's grace and love welcomes your true self in this moment of your life.

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: One foot in front of the other, your soul hopes for living water. This is not about easy faith, or quick fixes.

Evening Prayer: *Quiet your soul, praying Psalm 42:1-2: “Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God. My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God. I shall praise God, my salvation and my God.”*

Disappointment & Impatience: Roots

Rev. Vidalis Lopez

Tuesday, March 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 God, may I embrace this day trusting in you, finding strength in your promises, walking by faith, and remembering your faithfulness throughout the test of time.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 13:8-13a (ESV)

He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So, Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.” Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you.”

Reflection: In this chapter, Israel’s newly anointed king, Saul, prepares for battle against the Philistines. Earlier (1 Samuel 10), Samuel instructed Saul to wait for seven days, instructing that upon his return, they would offer the burn offerings and peace sacrifices together. But as people began to desert Saul, and Samuel was running late, Saul felt compelled and justified to act on his own initiative. His fear and impatience created a dangerous mix. Saul persuaded himself to change the plans, suggesting that his conscience—whether in that moment or as he later justified himself to Samuel—was warning him: wait!

Facing the power of a problem and the unknown, while losing the support of those on your side, is undeniably tough. You are going to face some difficult times in the future. You may be afraid, alone, and tempted to give in. Faith is deeply intertwined with our actions, shaping how we live and what we believe. But for most of us, patience—the virtue of waiting is a challenging test.

Asking yourself, ‘What will you do?’ is a test of faith. Our actions that follow will reveal the outcome. Answering the question, ‘What have you done?’ every day presents countless opportunities to learn and practice patience. How can you deepen your trust in God so that you feel compelled to pray, cry out to God, wait, and seek help?

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: Am I truly embodying patience thus far, or am I losing sight of inner peace amid life’s realities?

Evening Prayer: *May I experience rest in Your promises as life unfolds. You are patient and forgiving, and by Your amazing grace You work all things together for our good.*

Disappointment & Impatience: Breakthrough

Rev. Vidalis Lopez

Wednesday, March 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: *God, guide me to actions I can take that will build on a passion for justice and make me a vehicle for Your work in our time. Amen. — Beverly Harrison*

Scripture Reading: : Luke 8:1-3 (CEB)

Jesus traveled through the cities and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. The Twelve were with him, along with some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. Among them were Mary Magdalene (from whom seven demons had been thrown out), Joanna (the wife of Herod's servant Chuza), and Susanna who provided for them out of their resources.

Reflection: Although Mary Magdalene is more widely recognized, Joanna and Susanna are less often acknowledged, despite their commitment to follow Jesus and their financial support of Jesus' ministry. Susanna is mentioned only once in the Bible. The detail that Joanna's husband was an official in Herod's government raises intriguing questions, highlighting the social and political complexities of her allegiance to Jesus. Joanna is mentioned again going to the tomb of Jesus after his crucifixion and burial. Joanna was one of the first women to witness and testify to Jesus' resurrection.

Joanna, Susanna and Mary Magdalene likely faced societal stereotypes about their abilities and status, which may have hindered their capacity to serve and lead freely. The recurring need to proceed cautiously and confront misconceptions can be disheartening, emphasizing not only persistent patience and resilience, but also the presence and power of God's renewing grace to sustain and uplift them.

We face many choices—whether to align ourselves with those who offer comfort or ease, power and recognition, or to follow the way of Jesus, which can be more challenging and riskier. It's often simpler to guard our hearts, avoiding disappointments, rejection, and lack of respect. However, what is eternal and rooted in purpose is the joy of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Am I intentionally choosing actions today that align with building God's kingdom? How can I actively advocate for and support the women in my community, affirming their leadership and contribution within the church? What holds me back from stepping forward?

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: Genuine leadership cultivates environments that nurture growth and affirm the inherent worth of every individual.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, I am grateful for the purpose You place in my life, and I pray for Your continued guidance. Fill me with hope and anticipation for the opportunities tomorrow holds—a chance to do better, to grow, to serve more faithfully.*

Disappointment & Impatience: Becoming

Rev. Vidalis Lopez

Thursday, March 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: *Your grace is enough. Guide me to live purposefully, trusting that You are my Lord and Savior.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 10:1-4 (CEB)

Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to throw them out and to heal every disease and every sickness. Here are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, who is called Peter; and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee; and John his brother; Philip; and Bartholomew; Thomas; and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananaean; and Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

Reflection: From the list of Jesus' twelve disciples, one name is forever remembered for an unforgettable act of betrayal. Numerous viewpoints suggest different motives behind Judas' betrayal, each offering a unique perspective. Greed is frequently cited as a primary motive, but others point to disillusionment with Jesus' apparent lack of focus on political revolution against the Romans. Other theological views attribute Judas' betrayal to demonic influence. One thing is certain: Jesus chose Judas and became trusted. Judas was the treasurer of the disciples.

Matthew 26:14 Judas asks the chief priests, "What will you give me if I hand Jesus over to you?" Having been given authority over unclean spirits and countless opportunities to help people, alongside Jesus for nearly three years, why would Judas betray his friend Jesus?

What will it take to turn away from Jesus? Simon Peter was sure he wouldn't turn away, but he turned away three times. Instead of interceding, some disciples turned to sleep. Others abandoned Jesus

at the time of his arrest. A crowd turned away, choosing Barabbas. Pontius turned a blind eye. Many, like Peter, witnessed Jesus' resurrected hope and grace, experiencing transformation anew. Judas, consumed by guilt and disappointment, turned away, against himself. Perhaps, his greatest error was not waiting to understand what kind of Messiah Jesus truly was. One thing is true: Nothing is impossible for God. Imagine Judas meeting his Creator and reclaiming a surprising hope *after* disappointment.

What would lead you to betray or turn away from Jesus Christ? Could it be the relentless efforts that seem to yield no visible fruit? Jesus can save us from our sins and greatest disappointments—things we cannot undo. Through Christ, how can you find renewal amid darkness, hopelessness, and death—discovering light, hope, and life with new beginnings?

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: Understand what I need to give to Jesus will bring me closer to God's peace and guidance.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for turning toward me, forgiving me, & restoring me.*

Disappointment & Impatience: Fruitfulness

Rev. Vidalis Lopez

Friday, March 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, show us truth that heals. Help us grieve what must be grieved, and take the small, faithful steps that lead to repentance and restoration. Fill us with your Spirit to become the people you are calling us to be. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 23:13-15 (CEB)

How terrible it will be for your legal experts and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You shut people out of the kingdom of heaven. You don't enter yourselves, and you won't allow those who want to enter to do so. How terrible it will be for you, legal experts and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make one convert. But when they've been converted, they become twice the child of hell you are.

Reflection: From verses 13–29 Jesus issues seven sharp refrains—‘How terrible it will be...’ It's not mere rhetoric—it's a mirror, calling us to look honestly at the gap between our behaviors and our hearts. This deliberate repetition functions like the biblical ‘woe,’ intensifying the prophetic critique of hypocrisy. The NLT translates it, ‘What sorrows await you...,’ which reads like a grieving heart. The Message translation strips the language down until it's blunt and emotionally raw. I suggest you read that translation for it reads like a friend who will not let you hide from the hard truth.

The passage convicts not only by the law—which can indeed convict us—but also through sorrow rooted in love and a fierce, honest wake-up call.

Jesus models a difficult pastoral discipline. Notice Jesus' honest confrontation: he names failure, holds people accountable, and refuses

platitudes. His words carry accountability that grieves what sin has done to leaders and communities. Jesus, disappointed and with heartache, he extends a passionate invitation to repentance. Being called out can embarrass us or leave us feeling condemned. Grief opens the way to confession, reconciliation, and growth. As followers of Jesus, we grieve when our actions wound us, fracture communities, and draw us away from the kingdom's lasting values. If we sit with that grief for a moment—without hiding in shame—we do not stay broken; we are awakened.

Truth is not covered by religious performance. Where have I chosen appearance or convenience over compassion and truth?

Do I show up for appearances and not for truth?

Name a small way you can move toward integrity this week.

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: Pause and breathe, name one place where you are tempted to protect appearances rather than pursue truth. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one practical step to move toward repair.

Evening Prayer: *Gracious God, as I reflect on this day, I thank you for your Spirit who gently leads me toward truth. I'm grateful for your unwavering love that grieves with me over my shortcomings and wounds caused by my actions. Help me see my failures not as final, but as opportunities for renewal. May you continue to shape my heart into greater love and integrity. Empower me to wake up anew each morning. Amen.*

Saturday, March 21

Social Principles



What They Are

“The Social Principles are a good faith response to what we believe God is already doing in our lives and in the public square.” The Principles embody the unique and significant justice legacy of The United Methodist Church and its predecessor organizations (through Social Creeds). They reflect our understanding of social and personal holiness in the gospel. The most recent edition of the Social Principles is printed in *The 2020/2024 Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church. Following the 2012 United Methodist Church General Conference mandate, they were rewritten in ways to make them structurally succinct, theologically grounded, and globally relevant. (Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, pp. 5, 11)

What We Do

The Social Principles inform and inspire us to live in community and in relationship with others, teaching us to love our neighbors as we celebrate the worth and value of all people whom God has created. The Principles inspire us to be our best and to serve at our best as people who proclaim, teach, lead, and serve the cause of Christ through justice. Our faith is expressed through the Principles on a range of issues that are relevant throughout the lives of each of us. They, along with other justice resources, i.e. Faith and Fact Cards and *The 2020/2024 Book of Resolutions* of The United Methodist Church. The Social Principles remind us that every day is the right day for the work of justice!

Ways to Engage in Social Principles

- Read scripture, read the scriptural references in the Social Principles. Pray about how the Spirit may lead you to respond.

- Preach, teach, and practice the Social Principles. Implement the Bible Studies and small groups—practice reflecting on how we care for and about neighbors, both locally and globally. Celebrate our United Methodist Connection and interconnectedness with our communities and people around the world.
- Participate in United Methodist partnerships (such as the Methodist Federation for Social Action), community, ecumenical, and interfaith alliances.
- Create opportunities to interact with people across lines of difference. Assume they have something that you can learn and not just teach others.

Make an offering to United Methodist Special Sundays that support the work of justice, such as Human Relations Day and Peace with Justice Sunday.

Ways to Connect

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JUSTICE & INEQUALITY

Week of March 22, 2026

Rev. David Williamson
Facilitator at Belonging, Inc.



Sunday, March 22

As you begin this fifth week of the Lenten journey you may be hearing this Sunday's Revised Common Lectionary Readings from Ezekiel 34:1–14 and John 11:1–45 that describe the devastation, despair and hopelessness of people in two images: A valley of dry bones and the death of Lazarus. Both of these give us pause to acknowledge the impact of death and loss upon us personally, and to recall that death, while coming to us all, is also the result of injustice and inequality in the world—stealing life, promise and flourishing from both oppressed and oppressor. This week focused on the theme of Justice and Inequality will be an opportunity to acknowledge both the trauma of injustice and the transformation power available to us through the gospel of Jesus 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...*

Power to Raise the Dead

Rev. David Williamson

Monday, March 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, evil, injustice and oppression are all around me, and at times I'm pained by the ways I see them in me. Grant me the grace and gift today of your power to resist injustice in whatever forms they present themselves. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24 (NRSV)

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

Reflection: Remember that this story of Elijah raising the son of a widow from Zarephath in Sidon from the dead is the one Jesus mentions in Luke 4:25-26. He shares this story in the context of his first sermon in his hometown synagogue in which he said, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor, release to

the captives, sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed.” This widow was an outsider to Israel, experiencing the devastating impact of unjust systems that denied her and her son access and opportunities for thriving. Jesus telling this story is also the trigger that prompts the crowd in the synagogue to attempt throwing Jesus off a cliff.

It is worth noting all the nuances and questions that come up for you as you read and reflect on this story in light of injustice and inequality. The bitterness of an oppressed widow’s dead son. That experience of feeling forsaken by God. The hope that comes when someone notices the devastation of injustice and employs the power of faith in action to effect change. The heartbreak when the church, called to this healing work, resists doing it and attacks those that do.

What if it’s true? That you are anointed, called and given power to raise the dead.

Our baptism liturgy reminds us that God has given us the freedom and power to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

With this gift, you are called to step into those places, spaces and with those people who will be healed and set free to live and flourish in the midst of the impossibility of oppression. While this will create tension for you and for others, hold on to the promise that this work is not competitive with winners and losers, it is a work of abundance with healing for us all.

Where do you sense God inviting you to “raise the dead” today—bringing hope, justice, or healing into situations of oppression or despair in your community or relationships? How does the promise of God’s abundance help you confront the fear, resistance, or tension that can arise when you act against injustice and inequality?

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 am anointed, called and given power to raise the dead.

Evening Prayer: *God as I reflect on this past day I recall the people and places experiencing injustice, send the people of God with faith in action to effect change – use them, use me to raise the dead. Amen.*

Justice and Hospitality

Rev. David Williamson

Tuesday, March 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: *God, grant me a hospitable spirit, that when greeted by stories of injustice, I would welcome them with compassion for myself and others. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:41-44 (MSG)

When the city came into view, he wept over it. “If you had only recognized this day, and everything that was good for you! But now it’s too late. In the days ahead your enemies are going to bring up their heavy artillery and surround you, pressing in from every side. They’ll smash you and your babies on the pavement. Not one stone will be left intact. All this because you didn’t recognize and welcome God’s personal visit.”

Reflection: Holding justice and hospitality together might seem odd. Justice is about addressing and changing the root causes of inequality. Hospitality is about welcoming guests.

The pairing of Justice and Hospitality came up for me as I was welcoming a group of Residents in Ministry to St. Augustine not as tourists, but as pilgrims. As pilgrims I was inviting them to attend to the stories of racial trauma and transformation in the city. By doing this, I believed that God would do healing work in their lives and illuminate their own calling to ministries of racial justice. During this experience, one of the participants (also a white man) said, “I hear you inviting me to practice Christian Hospitality by welcoming the stories of trauma and transformation experienced by people of color in St. Augustine and my own community.”

Wow. Yes! That’s right. The wedding of Justice and Hospitality.

I appreciate framing anti-racism work (and justice work in general) as an act of Christian hospitality. As a white man, anti-racism can sometimes feel like “anti-me.” I wonder if this is one of the reasons driving the “anti-woke” policy making the last few years?

The sad part of this for me is that anti-racism, like Christian hospitality, is not anti-me. The heart of the work is healing for everyone. Rejecting this good work because of both cognitive and emotional misinformation is cause for lament.

The lament of Jesus for Jerusalem comes to mind.

Here, Jesus laments Jerusalem’s inhospitality to his way of justice and liberation. They were under the oppressive rule of Rome. And they were trying to beat Rome’s oppression on Rome’s terms. Howard Thurman would say they were falling prey to the three hounds of hell that dog those with their backs against the wall—fear, deception and anger.

Trying to get free using the tools of the oppressor will only lead to more bondage and destruction. This is the sentiment expressed by Audre Lorde in her 1984 essay “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Lorde writes, “They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

Thus, Jesus weeps over the city because of their inhospitality to the way that leads to genuine change—to healing, liberation and justice.

How might welcoming the stories of racial trauma and transformation in your own community be an act of Christian hospitality, and what inner resistance do you notice as you consider this invitation?

Where are you tempted to “fight oppression on its own terms,” and how might Jesus’ way of healing, liberation, and justice call you to be hospitable to different practices or attitudes?

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: I can welcome the uncomfortable stories of racial trauma and transformation with grace for others and myself.

Evening Prayer: *God of justice and hospitality, you have shown me how to be present to the trauma of injustice without denial or discounting myself or others. When it gets overwhelming and I am tempted to be inhospitable, grant me your grace to be present, open and receptive to the healing, liberation and justice that you bring. Amen.*

Justice In and Through Us

Rev. David Williamson

Wednesday, March 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: *On this Annunciation Day when the church remembers the angel Gabriel's news that Mary would conceive and bear a son named Jesus, I pause in wonder that God continues to summon us to receive and bear the love that leads to justice.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38 (NRSV)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection: Sometimes justice seems impossibly hard. Systems of oppression are maintained by mountains of money, attitudes and

beliefs that do harm—often in the name of God, and by policies that seem as if written in stone. Today, at the threshold of Holy Week, where we will once again witness the betrayal, beating and lynching of Jesus by state power supported by religious leaders who absolutely believed they were acting faithfully, we pause with wonder that God’s justice persists in and through one of society’s least valued and most vulnerable—Mary.

Justice comes in and through Mary. Just let that sink in.

What does this say to you about your worth and value? What does this say to you about what is possible and impossible? What does this invite you to say and do when the Messenger comes with an invitation to step into God’s story of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly?

In what ways do I notice justice coming alive in me and through me as I have said “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word?”

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: I am blessed and highly favored—called to let God’s justice grow in and through me.

Evening Prayer: *I pause now to breathe, saying as if in a sigh, “Here I am.” I am here. Let it be with me according to your word. Amen.*

The Grace of Disruption

Rev. David Williamson

Thursday, March 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: *Lord, I join in the ancient prayer of the prophet Amos today praying for justice to roll down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. When I feel the discomfort which often comes in challenging the status quo of injustice, remind me that your grace is at work in the midst of it all. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 9:1-7 (NRSV)

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

Reflection: When people ask me what brought me to the work of anti-racism I tell them about my own uncomfortable “spit mud in the eyes experience” while appointed as a pastor in St Augustine during the summer of 2018.

My colleague, Rev. Ron Rawls from St. Paul AME Church, answered a call from God to be a holy interruption and divine disruption to racism as usual in our city when he began demanding the removal of racist symbols of the Confederacy in the town plaza.

He was standing in a long line of prophets before him like Jeremiah,

Amos, and Martin Luther King Jr. who along with many others in 1964 refused to accept oppression as usual in St. Augustine. Their work then led to historic and significant legislation that made segregation and voter suppression illegal. We glorify those people now that they are dead and not able to make life as uncomfortable as they did when they were alive. But God so loved the world (John 3:16) that he keeps on sending prophets to interrupt and disrupt racism as usual...to interrupt blindness as usual.

Adding nuance to my experience of “not seeing” the impact of Confederate symbols placed prominently on public land, Dr. Chanequa Walker Barnes names “Selective Sight” as a symptom of the pathology of white supremacy. She says, “Selective Sight teaches people to ignore (to not see) the obvious especially when it indicts them and their racial ethnic skin.” (TheoTalk on the Pathology of Whiteness)

Whether blind from birth or selective sight, it is the grace of Jesus present in disruption that has a way of giving new vision that leads to justice.

*Where might you recognize “selective sight” in your own life or community—places where uncomfortable truths about injustice are easy to ignore—and how is Jesus inviting you to see differently?
How have you experienced God’s grace working through moments of discomfort or disruption, and what next step might this grace be calling you to take toward justice?*

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: As I experience the disruption of injustice, I expect the grace of new vision and hope to emerge and sustain me.

Evening Prayer: *God, for the times when I have chosen to avoid uncomfortable conversations about injustice, forgive me. Grant me the grace to release regrets and begin again, moving toward your grace-filled disruption of injustice that I may be well in my own soul and part of the world's healing. Amen.*

Keep on Keeping On

Rev. David Williamson

Friday, March 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: *God, strengthen me today to keep on keeping on in the healing work of justice to which you have called me. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Micah 6:8 (NRSVUE)

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?

Galatians 6:9 (NRSVUE)

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

Reflection: There are two quotes that return to me again and again in the work of educating, supporting and developing leaders among clergy, congregations and communities who want to build communities of belonging. They both focus on the question, “How do I keep on keeping on in this healing work of justice when it gets hard?”

The first is from Martin Luther King, Jr. who was summarizing the words of Theodore Parker when he said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

During King’s struggle for racial desegregation and voting rights he faced mountains of opposition which seemed to be bending the arc in the wrong direction. I suspect you can point to examples today where this is also true.

The second is from Sam Wells during the time when he was Dean of Duke Chapel. He was summarizing the words of a Northern Irish

Priest who had grown weary that his work toward a just and peaceful resolution of the civil war there was failing. He said, "I'd rather fail at something that will one day succeed than to succeed at something that will one day fail."

Your work to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms it presents itself will be met with resistance within you and around you. Sometimes it will seem as if the arc is bending in the wrong direction. Sometimes it will seem that injustice is succeeding.

We know and trust as followers of Jesus, crucified and risen, that every effort to sow the fruit of God's spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control is an effort that will one day succeed.

We are part of God's story, started long before us, continuing long after us and compelling us to keep on keeping on here and now so that the realities of heaven might become the realities of earth.

What practices or attitudes help you stay focused on work that will "one day succeed," even when the results are slow or unseen, rather than chasing successes that may ultimately fail?

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: I am joining God's story of justice with every act of listening, love and advocacy for historically excluded groups.

Evening Prayer: *God, I take time to give thanks for the many acts of justice that I witness in others and myself. May these efforts be infused by your spirit to lead this world toward your vision for justice and peace. Help me to release the regrets and resentments that cause me to lose heart and receive strength from resting in you to keep on keeping on in the days to come. Amen.*

Saturday, March 28

Florida Advocacy Days



What We Do

As United Methodists, we believe in the importance of personal and social holiness. We are called not only to the work of mercy ministries but called to be a voice of advocacy and work together to solve issues of injustice and inequality in systems large and small.

The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church and the Eleventh Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church partner with Florida Impact to End Hunger (FITEH). The mission of FITEH is dedicated to advancing health equity by ending hunger for all Floridians. They mobilize communities to maximize access to federal, state, and local food and nutrition programs with a focus on Florida's most vulnerable populations. Their signature mission issue is the eradication of hunger and these programs include support for Federal Programs such as SNAP, SIC, and NSLP. The mission also encompasses Community Engagement and Outreach, as well as Youth Advocacy. The mission of two historic branches of Methodism, in collaboration with Florida Impact, aims to address food injustice and various intersectional issues related to food access, food deserts, food insecurity, and affordability.

Ways to Become Involved

- Pray for individuals, especially children, seniors, and other vulnerable populations in Florida communities that lack access to nutritious food during school breaks.
- Join us at the Florida State Capitol in Tallahassee during the annual Children's Week celebration (typically in January or March each year), if an in-person event is scheduled. The UMC, AMEC, and FITEH witness is Florida Advocacy Days (FAD).

- Participate in in-person or virtual learning opportunities related to hunger and its associated issues.
- Study The UMC Social Principle on Food Justice in Bible studies, small groups, and from pulpits, and discuss its relevance to hunger in your community.
- Write your legislator about the reallocations of SNAP and other federally subsidized food programs and tell them why your advocacy and their support of these programs matter to families.
- Consider donating to Florida Impact.
- Check with local schools to support backpacks, food pantries, Fresh Expressions dinner churches, and community holiday dinners.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Dr. Sharon G. Austin, Director of Justice Ministries

JustMin@flumc.org

(863) 688-5563 x103

flumc.org/justice-ministries

SELFISHNESS & GREED

Week of March 29, 2026

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts
Senior Pastor, St. James UMC, Tampa



Sunday, March 29

It can be tempting to approach Holy Week as the “same old” story we hear every year. But when we add a lens to our reading of the Holy Week scriptures, we can discover a new appreciation for the events of Holy Week leading up to Jesus’s death and looking to the Resurrection on Easter. Read through the lens of Selfishness and Greed, the Holy Week narrative takes on a new, personal perspective that might hit home even more than ever before.

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...*

From Selfish to Selfless

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts

Monday, March 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: *Gracious Jesus, as we approach the story of Holy Week, help us to put ourselves into the story with new eyes. Remind us of our need for your love and grace, no matter where we find ourselves today. In your holy name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 12:1-11 (CEB)

¹Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. ³Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound,^[a] of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume. ⁴Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, ⁵"This perfume was worth a year's wages!^[b] Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (⁶He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.) ⁷Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me." ⁹Many Jews learned that he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰The chief priests decided that they would kill Lazarus too. ¹¹It was because of Lazarus that many of the Jews had deserted them and come to believe in Jesus.

Reflection: I probably don't have to convince you of the selfishness in the world today. Just take a look at the empty store shelves in a crisis.

Who really needs THAT much toilet paper? But are we willing to admit our selfishness? Maybe we are part of the problem...

Selfishness does not need to look like hoarding. Selfishness is any time we put our needs ahead of anything and everyone else. Selfishness is not the same as self-care. Yes, you need toilet paper. No, you do not need a stockpile in your garage.

Judas was selfish. The scripture tells us he was not worried about the extravagance of the perfume but wanted to sell it because he stole from communal money bag on a regular basis. Mary was generous. There was no need to wash Jesus's feet with perfume, but in her generosity, Mary offered her most valuable asset to Jesus.

All of us have a tendency towards selfishness. Some of us might identify with Judas, struggling with a clear sin in our lives that takes all the space in our hearts and minds. Some of us might be struggling in less obvious ways, simply putting our needs and desires above the needs of others. The "level" of selfishness does not matter. The sin is the same. As we journey with Jesus this Holy Week, we are invited to repent of our selfishness and ponder the most selfless act of all: Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross.

How have I been selfish in large or small ways 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: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Evening Prayer: *God of love, as I close this day, help me to see where I might be blind to my own selfishness and greed. Open my heart to your love, so I can be generous towards others. In the name of your Son Jesus I pray, Amen.*

Hearing the Call

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts

Tuesday, March 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 of all that is seen and unseen, as we seek your presence once again, open our ears to your call to love others in your name. Weed out the selfishness that has taken root in our lives so we can offer our whole selves to your service. In your holy name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 12:20-33 (CEB)

²⁰Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” ²²Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

²³Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One^[a] to be glorified. ²⁴I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

²⁷“Now I am deeply troubled.^[b] What should I say? ‘Father, save me from this time?’ No, for this is the reason I have come to this time.

²⁸Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

²⁹The crowd standing there heard and said, “It’s thunder.” Others said, “An angel spoke to him.”

³⁰Jesus replied, “This voice wasn’t for my benefit but for yours. ³¹Now is the time for judgment of this world. Now this world’s ruler will be thrown out. ³²When I am lifted up^[c] from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (³³He said this to show how he was going to die.)

Reflection: Sometimes we think selfishness is so much a part of our human nature that there is no way to overcome it. Or we try and fail time and time again. What is the point?

During Holy Week we get an unfiltered look at the heart of Jesus. Jesus asks and answers: what is the point? Jesus was troubled, knowing he would die in a few days. But he turns that feeling of “trouble” into God’s glory. Only by turning away from his own fears and uncertainties could he overcome selfishness to glorify God through his death. God audibly affirms Jesus’s call to die and rise again. And those around Jesus even hear it!

There is our answer. In dying to our selfishness, we are raised to life through Christ. By focusing on God’s calling and purpose for our lives, we can turn the page, shift our focus away from ourselves and our desires towards God’s glory and responding to God’s calling for every Christian: to share God’s love through love and service to others.

How is God calling me to serve others with the love 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: “Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever.” John 12:25

Evening Prayer: *God of love, no matter what the day has brought us, remind us that your love is the cure to our selfishness. As we receive your love once again, show us how we can share your love with others, as you have called us to do. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray, Amen.*

Breaking the Cycle

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts

Wednesday, April 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: *God of all our wants and needs, speak into our hearts and lives today and every day with your desires for us. As we seek your will, help us to tune our hearts to your voice as we listen with hope and longing. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 13:21-30 (CEB)

²¹After he said these things, Jesus was deeply disturbed and testified, “I assure you, one of you will betray me.”

²²His disciples looked at each other, confused about which of them he was talking about. ²³One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was at Jesus' side. ²⁴Simon Peter nodded at him to get him to ask Jesus who he was talking about. ²⁵Leaning back toward Jesus, this disciple asked, “Lord, who is it?”

²⁶Jesus answered, “It's the one to whom I will give this piece of bread once I have dipped into the bowl.” Then he dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son. ²⁷After Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” ²⁸No one sitting at the table understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus told him, “Go, buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰So when Judas took the bread, he left immediately. And it was night.

Reflection: This is the calm before the storm. This is the beginning of the Last Supper, Jesus's last meal with his closest followers before he would die. And one of them would be the one to betray him. Selfish Judas. Scripture tells us that Satan entered into him. In some ways, that would explain the terrible betrayal he would commit later that night, turning Jesus over to the Jewish authorities. But having

read about Judas the last few days, we also know that Judas was plain selfish.

Selfishness led to betrayal. Betrayal led to imprisonment. Imprisonment led to death. And usually that is where the story ends. But not this time. This time, death leads to new life. Even when we give into our selfishness and ignore God's call to love and serve, God offers us a chance to try again. Death is not the end of the story. No matter how many times we fall short, God keeps calling us and inviting us to receive God's love and forgiveness and try again.

Judas thinks he is trapped. He feels he has no choice but to follow the path that selfishness had laid out for him. But Jesus knows that we all have a choice. And God offers us more chances than we can count to make a different choice, to make a choice to be generous instead of greedy, to offer love instead of selfishness. And when we do, we will experience new life in Christ, now and forever.

How can I choose love instead of selfishness 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: Death is not the end of my story. I can have new life with Jesus today.

Evening Prayer: *God of second chances, as we seek your guidance in our lives today, remind us that our generosity and service start with your love. You love each one of us, no matter what we have done, and we commit or re-commit ourselves to share your love in service to others. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

A New Commandment

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts

Thursday, April 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 of compassion, as we start this new day, remembering your last meal with your friends, help us to also remember your invitation to love above all else. Open our eyes to see how you have called us to love one another as you have loved us. In your Son Jesus's name we pray, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17, 34-35 (CEB)

¹Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.

²Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God. ⁴So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. ⁶When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later."

⁸"No!" Peter said. "You will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't have a place with me."

⁹Simon Peter said, "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!"

¹⁰Jesus responded, "Those who have bathed need only to have their feet washed, because they are completely clean. You disciples are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹He knew who would betray him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you is clean."

¹²After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? ¹³You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. ¹⁴If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. ¹⁵I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. ¹⁶I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.

³⁴"I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

Reflection: Today is Maundy Thursday. The name in English comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, or commandment. Our scripture verses today reflect a commandment from Jesus: love each other. But the commandment goes on: "Just as I have loved you, so you also must love one another." After this dinner, Jesus will be arrested, beaten, and killed... for the love of all of us. For you. For me. For them. We are to love each other with the same self-sacrificing love that Jesus demonstrated for each one of us.

And while Jesus's death on the cross is the ultimate self-sacrifice, Jesus also lived a life of service and sacrificial love. He healed people in need. He touched those the community deemed untouchable. He listened to women and children and foreigners and those on the margins of society. Jesus's life, just like his death, demonstrated generosity and love at every turn. He rejected selfishness in favor of sharing the transformative love of God every chance he got.

I don't think Jesus is asking anyone to die on a cross again. He did that so we don't have to. But he is inviting us to love one another, choosing to act like Jesus every chance we get. We make small choices every day. Each of those small choices leads to a life of made of larger choices. Choosing love instead of hate. Choosing generosity instead of greed. Choosing to love like Jesus every day.

How can I love like Jesus in small ways today?

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: Jesus loves me, this I know—so I can love others like Jesus.

Evening Prayer: *God of love, you love us more deeply than we can ever know. As we lay our bodies to rest in your love, fill our hearts with your love for others. Move us to action on behalf of those you love—the least and the lost. In the name of your Son Jesus we pray, Amen.*

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Rev. Dr. Tiffania Icaza Willetts

Friday, April 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: *All-knowing God, you see our struggles and our successes. You see our hearts and our actions. Strengthen our hearts in your love so that we can love others selflessly, following the example of Christ our selfless Savior. In the holy name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 (CEB)

^{4:14}Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; ¹⁵because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

¹⁶Finally, let's draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.

^{5:7}During his days on earth, Christ offered prayers and requests with loud cries and tears as his sacrifices to the one who was able to save him from death. He was heard because of his godly devotion.

⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

⁹After he had been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.

Reflection: We have reached Good Friday, but not the end of the story. If you attend worship today, it will probably be grim and dark as you hear the story of Jesus's death on the cross. Jesus suffered, in body and in spirit. He was beaten and died in one of the most gruesome ways to die in history. He was betrayed by one of his closest friends and abandoned by many others.

But through all of his ordeal, Jesus never stopped loving those around

him. Jesus cried out to God, he lamented the pain he experienced. And he forgave the people who put him on that cross. He promised the thief next to him who repented that he would be in paradise with Jesus. He told one of his faithful friends to care for his grieving mother. Jesus's selfless love was demonstrated even before he died, as he suffered on the cross.

Hebrews reminds us that through the love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus, all of us can receive salvation. This salvation is a promise to be in paradise with God after death, and it's an opportunity to have a new start with God right now. It's an opportunity to love like Jesus, in good times and in bad. It's an opportunity to be part of something bigger than our selfish wants, to share God's love through our words and actions. It's an opportunity to consider how you can live into the "Good" of Good Friday, today and forever with God. You won't be perfect. That's OK. You always have an opportunity to try again, with God's help, as you follow Jesus's command to love others as he has loved each one of us.

How is God inviting me to share Jesus's love through my 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: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.” John 3:16 (CEB)

Evening Prayer: *Gracious God, as we close this Holy Week, we are waiting to see what you will do next. We know the end of the Easter story; we know Christ will rise again. We are waiting to hear your invitation to act. Help us to heed your call, to give our all, as Jesus did, to share your love with others. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

Saturday, April 4

Conference Commission on Religion and Race



What We Do

The work of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CCORR)—as an outgrowth of the General Commission of Religion and Race (GCRORR)—is to engage and embrace the cultural diversity that is present in our congregations and communities in Florida. Like GCRORR, we will challenge and equip the church to complete the unfinished business of dismantling racial discrimination by championing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Selfishness and greed are root causes of racial injustice, because greed leads to hoarding resources, denying opportunity, and maintaining structures of exclusion. Selfishness isn't just about individual sin but about institutional selfishness—when churches, conferences, or leaders protect their own comfort and privilege instead of opening doors for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The ministry of CCORR positively enhances the mission and vision of the Florida Conference in the following ways:

- Providing training and learning opportunities to understand the theological foundation for dismantling racism, the history of racism in Methodism and the broader society, and intercultural competency
- Setting and evaluating goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion during annual meetings with the Appointive Cabinet and the Board of Ordained Ministry
- Monitoring the demographics of Annual Conference speakers and participants and racial impact of proposed resolutions and legislation

- Reporting disparities in clergy compensation and equitable distribution of cabinet development funds

Ways to Become Involved

- Apply to become a member at flumc.org/applicationtoserve
- Watch for announcements about trainings and CCORR resources through Conference communications

Ways to Connect

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins, CCORR Chair

llhall-perkins@flumc.org

727-447-0064 ext. 301

flumc.org/commissiononreligionrace

RESURRECTION

Week of April 5, 2026

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins
Senior Pastor, Mt. Zion UMC, Clearwater
Chair, Florida Conference Committee on Religion & Race



Sunday, April 5

Resurrection is the heartbeat of our faith. It is more than a moment in history; it is the ongoing power of God to bring life out of death, hope out of despair, and new beginnings out of what seems finished. Each day this week, we will reflect on how resurrection is not only about what happened to Jesus but also about what God continues to do in us and through us. Whether in grief, in struggle, in endings, or in new opportunities, resurrection declares that death does not have the last word—God’s Spirit brings life again.

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 is the Giver of Life

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins

Monday, April 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: *Life-giving God, I don't take for grant this day. I give you thanks for life and your faithfulness. Empower by your Spirit to be all that you have created me to be and to do all that you intend for me to do. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 37:5–6 (NRSV)

⁵“Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live...⁶and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

Reflection: Death has a way of putting life into perspective. It can remind us not to take life for granted, to live without regrets, and to value the relationships we have. Death is not just the end of life but it can also describe the end of a career, a relationship, a dream or ministry. We can turn to God in these experiences of death. God is the only person with power over death.

Matter of fact, God, who is the giver of every good and perfect thing, is the giver of life. God's Spirit/Breath is what animates our lives. God is able to breathe new life where there has been death. The prophet Ezekiel experienced this when he was in a valley filled with dry bones. These bones showed no sign of life. Yet God's life-giving power overcame death and breathed new life into them.

In what ways have I experienced death recently? How can I turn to the Giver of life in this moment?

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: Death does not have the last word in my life. God is breathing new life.

Evening Prayer: *Oh God, let me not fear death or the end of things in my life. Let me release what is passing away and experience what new thing you want to bring forth. Amen.*

Grieving What Has Been Lost

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins

Tuesday, April 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: *God my comforter, I grieve people and things I've lost personally. I grieve injustices in the world which injure the humanity of marginalized groups. I pause while in your presence to remember these losses. Be my source of strength and consolation. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 11:32-36 (NRSVUE)

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

Reflection: It would be inhumane not to grieve the loss of a loved one, a marriage or friendship, a dream. Anything and anyone you've dedicated time or energy to becomes a part of you and your story. Once it is gone, you experience the stages of grief—often not in a linear or progressive fashion. You might vacillate between stages. Nevertheless, grief is a part of every experience of loss—whether we like or not. Whether embrace it or avoid it.

Jesus's weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus is a powerful witness that even Jesus, who was God in human flesh, grieved loss. What is most striking about this story is that Jesus has already told the other sister of Lazarus, Martha, that “I am the resurrection and the life,” and moments after weeping, he will tell Lazarus to come forth from his tomb. Despite Jesus knowing the Lazarus would be raised from the dead, he still grieves his loss—even though it

is temporary. Let this be a lesson: even though we know Christ is able to redeem the bleakest moments of life, it does not take away the pain of those moments. It is perfectly healthy to grieve and acknowledge our losses.

How have I avoided grief? At what points am I stuck in the grief process?

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 grief is fully human and holy. I must take time to grieve loss.

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, I surrender to the process of grief. Your Son gave an example of what it looks like to grieve. I won't rush through it because I know that you are with me leading me to new life, new possibilities, new beginnings. Amen.*

The Spirit of Life

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins

Wednesday, April 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: *Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me. Make me, mold me, use me. Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:11 (NIV)

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Reflection: Jesus's death and resurrection are central to Christian theology and practice. It's the reason why we worship on Sunday, the Lord's day, traditionally, because Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. We memorialize his death through celebrating the Holy Communion. Baptism is our identification with Christ's death and resurrection as our old lives are buried and we are raised to new life. Outside of the practices that form our life together as disciples of Christ, Christ's resurrection ought to also inform how we live daily, mundane lives.

We don't go through life by ourselves. Yes, we have a church family, but thankfully in the moments that they are not present we have the Spirit of God living in us. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, empowers us, strengthens us, encourages us, corrects us. We can face the harshest of times, because God's Spirit lives in us. Even the grave could not hold Jesus down because of the power of the Holy Spirit. So there's no impossibility, no injustice, no tragic ending that we can't overcome with the inwardly abiding presence of God's Spirit.

How have I felt powerless? In what ways will I reclaim my agency through God's power?

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: The Spirit of life lives in me. I won't be afraid to dream, innovate, to advocate for justice.

Evening Prayer: *I thank you that you have not given me the Spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control. I embrace the power that is within. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Experiencing the Power of the Resurrection

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins

Thursday, April 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: *Holy Spirit, empower me to face the ups and downs of life. Help me to stand in solidarity with those who seemingly experience more downs than ups—given the obstacles society places on certain people. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:10-14 (NRSVUE)

¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Reflection: Experience can be the best teacher. Sometimes there are lessons you just cannot learn from reading a book or hearing a lecture. The Christian desire to know Christ is often not fulfilled through traditional programs of Christian education like Sunday school or some other bible study-based small group. Part of John Wesley's legacy left to Methodism is the integration of head and heart. We take serious the pursuit of head knowledge and heart conviction that comes through lived experience.

To know Christ, one must experience Christ in a real and tangible way. One way Paul expresses how we can experience the Risen Savior is through our suffering. While writing to the Philippian church,

Paul himself was doing so while under house arrest. Instead of being focused on the gravity of his situation and likely prospect of the state executing him, Paul wrote encouraging words to the Philippian Christians. In his suffering, Paul was Christ-like. We, too, can experience Christ during our suffering by our choice to imitate and trust him. Christ is with us not just on the mountain top, but also when it seems like we are in the valley of death.

*In what area of my life do I need to learn how to suffer like Christ?
What are the next faithful steps I need to take to trust or imitate Christ?*

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: Even in my suffering, I have the choice to trust and imitate Christ.

Evening Prayer: *Jesus, I thank you that you are with me always. In the moments when I can't trace your presence, I still trust you. Amen.*

Good News to Spread

Rev. Lee Hall-Perkins

Friday, April 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: *Dear God, I thank you for the message of the resurrection. Not only did the resurrection change the story about Jesus's death, it continues to rewrite endings today. Continue to rewrite the story of my life, my church, my community, and the world. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 20:17-18 (NRSVUE)

¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflection: A witness testifies to what they have experienced, seen, or heard first hand. Mary Magdalene was the first witness, or evangelist, for the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. With her testimony, she inspired and invigorated other disciples who isolated themselves because of fear and grief. Her testimony also marks the example for every person who encounters resurrection power through Jesus: you have to share it with others.

We are an Easter people. Therefore, we do not accept hopelessness or despair. Rather, we proclaim the power of the resurrection. We proclaim new beginnings where evil tries to put endings. We proclaim life where evil claims death. This is Good News not just for us, but the poor, the marginalized, and anyone suffering.

*To whom do you feel called to proclaim the Good News?
How might you be a witness not solely with words but your actions?
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 Good News of the Resurrection is too powerful to keep to myself. I've got to share it.

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, let me be a witness for you and your resurrection power. Let the Good News of Jesus Christ be embodied by my words and deeds. Amen.*

Saturday, April 11

Wesleyan Heritage Pilgrimage



What We Do

The Wesleyan Heritage Pilgrimage (September 23–October 1, 2026) is a transformative journey through England designed specifically for the laity of The Florida Conference. Led by Bishop Tom Berlin and Derrick Scott III, with teaching by Rev. Dr. Brett Opalinski, participants will walk where John Wesley walked, pray where he prayed, and experience firsthand the rich heritage that continues to shape our United Methodist witness today.

This pilgrimage offers an unparalleled opportunity for spiritual formation and leadership development, deepening participants' understanding of their Wesleyan roots and equipping them to lead with renewed vision and commitment in their local congregations and districts.

Ways to Become Involved

You can find all the details about this trip on the Laity Space website and in the trip brochure from Educational Opportunities.

Trip Details:

- **Cost:** Starting at \$4,698 per person
- **Includes:** Round-trip airfare from Orlando or Tampa, lodging and ground transportation in England, entrance fees to historic sites, and most meals
- **Registration:** Now open with an initial deposit of \$300

Ways to Connect

Derrick Scott III

dscott@flumc.org

904-891-0961

laityspace.org/lay-pilgrimages-2026



Easter: The Fruit of the Spirit

Rev. Magrey deVega

Senior Pastor, Hyde Park UMC, Tampa



We remember that throughout the Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit is rarely, if ever, strictly individual in nature. The Spirit works in and through community for the benefit of those in and outside the church. One of the hallmarks of the corporate work of the Spirit is in Paul's classic image of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. These are not just aspects of individual holiness; they are designed to be shared for the benefit of the whole church, so that the church can be a witness to these qualities in the world. You will notice that this is an eight-week series, though there are nine fruit in Paul's list. That is because the first fruit, love, is understood to be an integral aspect of all the rest. Without love, none of the other qualities are possible. So, as you journey through each of these weeks, ask yourself, "How will my love for God and others compel me to bear this particular fruit, in and through my life?"

JOY

Week of April 12, 2026

Alice Williams

Lay Member, St. Luke's UMC, Orlando



Sunday, April 12

Most definitions of the word 'joy' describe an emotion of great delight or happiness. And for most of us, when we experience joy, it does evoke a feeling of gladness and well-being. But spiritual joy—God's joy—is far more than just a feeling. Spiritual joy's existence does not depend on external circumstances. It is both an internal state of mind and a way of living, that transcends our day-to-day emotional ups and downs. A recent AI search turned up a surprisingly good explanation of God's joy stating, "True joy is a gift from, and manifestation of, God's presence among us that enables an enduring attitude of the heart and spirit." That enduring attitude is the key between emotional and spiritual joy. Spiritual joy is independent of, and defiant of, our circumstances. Because of the nature of faith, we can experience God's joy in both the best and the worst of circumstances. Perhaps spiritual joy's greatest gift to us is that it can shape the 'how' (the attitude) we choose to live our lives.

Scripture Reading: John 15:9-11 (NIV)

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

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...*

Joy Is A Gift

Alice Williams

Monday, April 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: *Oh, Lord, the wonders and depths of your love! Your love, mercies, and blessings are mine regardless of life's circumstances. Your greatest desire for that I abide in your love, then reflect that love to those around me so that they may come to know you as I do. You are ever present in all my ways and all my days. What a joyous thing it is to know that I am claimed as your beloved. Help me to share that joy as I seek to be more like you this day! Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 15:11 (ESV)

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Reflection: Gifts are wonderful things! Typically they are not purchased by the receiver, and, in most cases, are a sign of love or gratitude by the giver with no reciprocal expectation. After trudging through the dark and difficult days of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, we finally can revel in what many believers consider to be the greatest gift of all—Resurrection Sunday! There's a bit of irony in the resurrection story for all of us—we mourn the death of Christ, yet we claim great joy in knowing by faith that earthly death is not the end—it is the transitional step to eternal life! And we claim this not just in our understanding of Christ's death and resurrection, but in God's gift of eternal life to all.

In the same way, our understanding of spiritual joy—God's joy—is God's gift to all of us, regardless of our physical circumstances and at no cost to us. Even more, unlike emotional joy that's dependent on the circumstances of the moment, God's spiritual joy is available 24/7, comes with a lifetime guarantee, and has a very strict “no

refund” policy. It can, however, be shared with whomever you choose—don’t you just love God’s terms and conditions!

Where am I experiencing the gift of God’s joy 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: How am I gifting others with the joy of the Lord?

Evening Prayer: *Lord as this day comes to an end, thank you for your presence in all things. Thank you for the gift of your undeserved love and grace. And thank you for the ability to experience your spiritual joy that transcends all emotions. In this moment I lift those things to you for which I am grateful and those things that weigh heavily on my heart. Now grant me rest so that I can rise tomorrow afresh, renewed, and joyful in spirit. Amen.*

Joy Is Defiant

Alice Williams

Tuesday, April 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: *Lord you know my heart, you know this day, and all that lies in it. Whatever I will face, you are already there. In all moments today help me to remember your unwavering presence and love. And because of your presence I can claim your joy, a joy that is greater than any challenge or emotion I may face. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV)

...For the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Reflection: It is so easy to tie joy with an emotion we feel based on a circumstance we are experiencing. We know life is a series of emotional ups and downs, there will times when we feel joyous, and other times when we will feel defeated and depleted. Thankfully God's joy isn't contingent on circumstance—it is an assurance and peace that can sustain through all circumstances and emotions. Because of its ability to transcend all emotions, this spiritual joy *cannot be diminished* by external circumstance, it defies all human emotions and circumstances. And like an unending power source, God's joy is available to each of us all the time. No one, and no circumstance, can take it away from us. The only way that this joy is ever diminished is if we fail to claim it.

Is my understanding of joy in this moment dependent solely on human emotion or in the assurance of God's unfailing love and grace?

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 are my spiritual joy batteries? How am I allowing myself and others to experience the joy of the Lord?

Evening Prayer: *Hey Jesus, thank you for another day of walking through life together. You know the challenges and the joys of this day, and I want to thank you for presence in both. Help me to continue to cultivate an attitude that reflects your joy and defies even the most negative of circumstances. Fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I may have eyes to see you in everyone I meet, and that I may share your love in all I do. May I rest well tonight in the knowledge that, "I am yours and you are mine." Amen.*

Finding Joy In The Present

Alice Williams

Wednesday, April 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: *Gracious and loving God, you have given me the gift of this day. As we go about the living of it, whatever this day may hold, I will rejoice in the knowledge that you are present with me in every moment. Grant me a joy-filled heart as I live out your calling today. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (CSB)

¹⁶Rejoice always! ¹⁷Pray constantly. ¹⁸Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Reflection: Our lives are filled with so many competing demands and expectations, and if we are honest, some days it can be difficult to be joyful—even in the joy of the Lord. So how do we create a joyful approach to life? Paul's letter to the Thessalonians provides a few tips:

Rejoice: Look for the good and claim when you see it. Find where the good is in the moment—even if they are tough moments. We may have to search for it but joy will be there.

Pray constantly: Practice good communication skills with Jesus. Develop a conversational approach in your praying. You can talk but also listen, and don't expect God's voice to come booming through. Remember the Holy Spirit often comes to us as a "still small voice," and pay attention to those "nudges"—they can be holy.

Give thanks: Develop the "attitude of gratitude." Look for the God gifts in life, both big and small, and *claim them!* Find the things you are thankful for in nature, in relationships, and in the simple things of life: a good book, a chat with a friend, a really good piece of chocolate cake (total editorial comment ☺).

And just for grins and giggles (after all this is about joy) here are a few other thoughts:

Trust: For believers, trusting in God's presence, love, and grace is the first step to receiving spiritual joy.

Show Kindness: Giving of yourself through simple acts of kindness can be a way to both give and receive joy. A kind word, smile, or simple kind gesture can often create a joy-filled moment. And don't be stingy with kindness. Allow yourself to be vulnerable enough to extend yourself even if it means you may get rejected. And rejection does not, and cannot, rob you of God's joy—unless you let it. Most folks will appreciate your simple act of kindness, and through that act you are acknowledging them as a beloved and valued child of God.

Humor: One of the most amazing and blessed gifts we have in our human makeup is the ability to experience humor. I'm not talking about humor that comes at someone else's expense, I'm talking about the kind of humor that brings joy and laughter to all—a good belly laugh is a moment to cherish. And better still, it is best shared as joy is contagious.

What will I rejoice in this day?

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: How am I enabling others to rejoice in the gift of this day?

Evening Prayer: *Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence in this moment and throughout this day. I pray that I made room for you so that others might come to know your presence and your joy. Thank you for the gifts of life, breath, love, and joy that have been mine today. Grant that I may rest and awake renewed, filled with your presence, so that I may live to the fullest the gift of another day. Amen.*

Finding Joy In The Past

Alice Williams

Thursday, April 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: *Lord how quickly our earthly moments pass and how grateful we are for the promise of eternal life. Thank you for those who have showered their love on us and shaped us into the beloved persons we are. And thank you for the gift of memory that enables us to hold on to joyous times not just for an instant but for a lifetime. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 126:5 (ESV)

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with **shouts of joy!**”

Reflection: If you’ve known love, it is very likely that you have felt, or will feel, the pain of loss. Whether through a broken relationship, separation, or death, you’ve probably known that gaping sense of loss that poses as a void that can never be filled. And the truth is, when we lose someone, or something we love dearly, it can never be replaced. God must have known the depth of our pain in these moments because, baring disease or disability, we have been endowed with memory, the ability to recall and hold close life’s moments we choose to. It has been said that these “precious memories” are gifts to our soul and are the fruit of the joy we reap after sowing our tears of sorrow.

These good and beautiful memories, as bittersweet as they may be, are our way of claiming the joy and blessing of having been in relation with someone, or something, we loved. God doesn’t intend for us to be slaves to these memories of the past, for we are called to live our best and full lives in the present. But we are given the gift of remembrance of the past to remind us what it is to love and be loved.

The joyful memories we choose to keep are gifts that can sustain us through difficult and lonely moments. What a wise God we serve who

understands that joy is not just something to savor in this moment, but also in remembering moments from our past!

What are some of my most precious memories?

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: Am I allowing myself to live this day filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that today's moments become joyful memories for tomorrow?

Evening Prayer: *God of past, present and future, thank you for the gift of eternity and the promise of everlasting life. Thank you for the ability to claim the joyful memories with friends and loved ones. In this moment I celebrate the great cloud of witnesses gathered with you and I pray your blessings on those whom I have the good fortune to still be making memories with. Thank you for how they all have touched my life through your gift of love. Amen.*

Living Joyfully

Alice Williams

Friday, April 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: *Joyful, joyful, I adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love! Thank you for the gift of this new day and all that comes with it. In whatever circumstances I encounter, may I be filled with your grace and love so that others may know your presence. Let me be bold in my caring of others. Let me stand up for those who are marginalized and overlooked. Let me lend a helping hand where I can. And at the end of this day, let me rejoice in the knowledge that I gave the world the best I could as we walked this day together. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 118:24 (ESV)

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Reflection: It is worth taking a moment to recap what we've learned about spiritual joy. First, it's a gift, something given freely and something that can be given to others. And it is both contagious and reciprocal for when we give it, we usually find ourselves even more joyous! It is truly a gift that just keeps giving.

God's joy is defiant. It is bold, resilient, and cannot be taken from us. No matter what our circumstances God's joy, just as God's presence, is ever-present. We choose whether to live with attitude of joy or not.

Spiritual joy can be found and cultivated in the present by forming good spiritual joy habits. And we can claim past moments of spiritual joy through the precious memories of the past.

Lastly, we are told to look at each day as a gift from our loving and triune God, and to REJOICE in it. We are not to be people who are defeated by life's circumstances. Instead, we are to claim God's

assurance that all of us, every single one of us, is beloved and cherished in whatever emotional state we find ourselves. And this loving God wants us to claim the gift of spiritual joy in all things—good or bad, sorrow or joy, health or illness, in times prosperity or want. What a wonderful and amazing thing to be able to seek God’s joy in all things!

*In what ways can I honor the gift of life to today?
What can I do to ensure I give my best to this day?*

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 what ways am I rejoicing in this day?

Evening Prayer: *“I am thine, oh Lord, I have heard thy voice, and it told thy love to me! But I long to rise in the arms of faith and be closer drawn to thee.” As this day draws to a close, I pray that you will draw me nearer precious Lord, so that I may abide in your love and be transformed by your grace. Allow me to stay near you always and let me live filled with your joy! Amen.*

Saturday, April 18

Bethune-Cookman University



What We Do

Vision. Resilience. Success. These words describe the focus and mission of Bethune-Cookman University, a United Methodist-related institution of higher education connected to both our conference and the broader United Methodist Church. There are deep roots of legacy and history behind those words. B-CU founder Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune established the university in 1904 with \$1.50 and faith in God, driven by a vision to provide an education that builds better lives. Against the odds, her resilience, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit were unwavering, and her impact unquestionable.

Dr. Bethune dedicated herself to a life of service, educating African Americans and advancing civil rights. Her spirit guides this historical university today and Dr. Bethune's powerful presence looms large on campus and beyond. The Bethune-Cookman experience is centered on student success. Students create a vision for their future. They work personally with great teachers and get hands-on intellectual and personal development in a small-university community. Students can feel Bethune-Cookman's culture as an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)—learning and growing in an environment where the African American experience is understood and where the richness of African American culture is affirmed, explored, celebrated and advanced.

Ways to Become Involved

You can continue to support Bethune-Cookman University as a volunteer or by donating to the university. Your apportionments also support the United Negro College fund which has supported Bethune-Cookman University. Consider hosting the Bethune-

Cookman Chorale or gospel choir in worship, or contact Rev. Dr. David Allen, Associate Professor of Religion to connect with students and ask how you can support this amazing university.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Dr. David Allen, Associate Professor of Religion
allend@cookman.edu
386-481-2497

To request a performance by the Bethune–Cookman University Concert Chorale, please email: bconcertchorale@cookman.edu.

PEACE

Week of April 19, 2026

Rev. Daphne Johnson
Senior Pastor, Lighthouse UMC, Boca Grande



Sunday, April 19

Last week, we began a new series of devotions on the Fruits of the Spirit with emphasis on Joy. This week we look at the fruit of peace. This peace produced within us by the Holy Spirit is more than the absence of conflict. Rather, it is a peace that we feel deep within us, it is a harmony, a contentment we feel in spite of the circumstances that may surround us. This peace is a gift from God such that when we open ourselves to the work of the Spirit this peace begins to grow within us, and as it does, our relationship with God grows even deeper. As this fruit grows, our very character is transformed and we move closer to becoming the person God created us to be.

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...*

Is Peace a Possibility?

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Monday, April 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 in the chaos of this day, I ask that your Spirit guide me in my thoughts that I might dwell in your peace throughout my day's activities. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 29:10-11 (NRSVUE)

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Reflection: Peace may seem like a rather difficult theme right now. There is so much conflict around us. Everyone seems to be angry about something. How are we supposed to find peace in the chaos that is this world? I understand. It is difficult to think you could possibly find any kind of peace, but peace is exactly what God wants for you and for all of God's creation. The peace that God is offering to you is not a peace that will stop the craziness around you. But just like in the Psalm above, God will grant you peace in the midst of the storm. You need only to trust in God, knowing that God is there and that ultimately God peace will win out. When we open ourselves to the work of the Spirit then that peace begins to stir deep within us. If we can only trust in God that peace will take over the fear and we will walk together with our God through whatever storm may come.

How can I turn over my fears and worries to God?

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 my refuge and my strength." Ps. 46:1

Evening Prayer: *Lord as I look back on my day may I see your movement in my life. May I recognize your work within me, may I see your presence with me. Let my body find rest and my soul find your peace. Amen.*

Anxious Minds

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Tuesday, April 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: *Lord, as I begin this day I ask that you calm the anxious thoughts that often creep into my activities. Help me to interact, to work and to move forward in the events of this day with a calm that only you can give. Work within me, O Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:6-7 (NRSVUE)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection: Do you think, God's peace sounds comforting? Does it sound like something you would like to experience? It is something I would love to experience. I would love to know that inner harmony and tranquility. Yet so often anxiety and fear seem to creep in. You know it is easy to let our thoughts get away from us. The world seems to encourage and fuel anxiety and fear. If we don't stay alert to these thoughts, they can enter into any part of our day and effectively drown out God's message for us. We must seek to look past the anxieties and worries of this world. By focusing on prayer, praise and thanksgiving, and trusting that God is in control, we can let go of the things that cause our anxiety. We do not have to be constantly on alert for the next danger. When thoughts intrude remember this scripture above, go to God in prayer and turn your concerns over to God. God's peace offers us inner harmony. As we make our communication with God an automatic reaction then our trust in God will grow and our ability to set aside anxiety will become stronger.

Where have I felt God's peace 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: "Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself." Matthew 6:34

Evening Prayer: *I thank you Lord, for the peace you have shared with me today. Help me to continue to stay open to your love and care that I might live in your peace throughout the storms of life. Continue Lord, to work within my spirit that I may place my trust in you. Amen.*

That My Imperfection May Find Perfect Peace

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Wednesday, April 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: *Loving God, awaken my mind that I may think only your thoughts today. Awaken my soul that I may look on each person with compassion and love. Awaken my imagination that I may discover your joy in every activity. May I spread your light in all that I do. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 26:3-4 (NRSVUE)

Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace, in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock.

Reflection: I tend to lean toward perfectionism. I feel like something can't be good unless it is perfect. This isn't true but it is a mindset I have. But Isaiah reminds us that perfect peace doesn't come from perfect circumstances but rather from a steadfast mind and a trusting heart. For me to feel the perfect peace of God, everything around me does not have to be perfect. In fact, there will still be chaos. There will still be illness and grief. Not everything will be perfect. To have perfect peace I only need to remain firmly rooted in my faith and to trust my God. There will still be times of pain and loss, but God's peace will get me through.

What do I do when something or someone is trying to disrupt my peace?

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: Peace is not a destination it is a way of being.

Evening Prayer: *Lord of all peace, give peace to me. May my soul be free from anxiety. And, may I bless all I meet with peace. Amen.*

Bringing About Peace

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Thursday, April 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: *God, as I watch the sun break through the clouds I am reminded of your creative power. Let your son break into my soul in the same way that in all I do this day I may be a reflection of your love, joy and mercy. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:9 (NRSVUE)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Reflection: It is easy to see that peace is not the way of the world right now. Countries are fighting countries, nations have conflict internally, communities have divisions between the haves and have-nots, families are torn apart because they cannot agree on everything. Often times the things that divide us aren't even that important. In the grand scheme of things relationships should be more important than privilege and power. But this isn't the way the world works. And, if we are not careful it can be very easy to be sucked into the way the world operates. We react in a way that is human nature with the need to protect ourselves. But this isn't what we are called to do. As children we learn to emulate our parents. They teach us right from wrong, they teach us empathy and compassion or at least they should and then we are to live out these teachings. As children of the great God of peace we are called to be peacemakers. We cannot live as the world teaches we are to be peacemakers. This isn't easy. But we are not called to a life of ease we are called to a life of service. We are called to be peacemakers. When we have given our lives to Christ then this should be a driving principle in our lives.

How can I live peaceably with all people promoting peace wherever I am?

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: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:18

Evening Prayer: *God of peace, it is easy to ask you to give my soul peace. When I am in the midst of chaos, or anxiety it is easy for me to fall upon my knees and ask that you make my life calm and peaceful. But I know God that you call me to bring this peace to others to step out of my comfort zone and to work to create space where all may be heard, may be cared for and may live in peace. Help me to follow through with this call on my life. In your most holy name I pray. Amen.*

The Path to Peace

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Friday, April 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: *Lord, I ask that this day unfold with grace to guide my thoughts and actions toward peace and love. May I feel your presence every moment and may that feeling remind me to speak and act in ways that are pleasing to you. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 14:27 (NRSVUE)

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Reflection: As we come to the end of our week the text reminds us of the redemptive work Christ's has done for each one of us. Knowledge of Christ's love of us, of the assurance of our salvation should bring us an inner peace that we could never find in this world. Knowing this peace and knowing that we too are expected to be peacemakers then the question comes to us, what must we do? How do I start to live out my life empowered by Christ's peace? First, I believe we are called to pursue peace in all aspects of our lives; with friends, with strangers, with enemies. Next, I believe I must always watch my own spirit so that I do not fall back into the ways of the world. I must recognize the want for vengeance in my life and stop myself from any actions toward revenge. And, I must always keep my spirit open to the workings of the Holy Spirit for it is only through the work of the Spirit that I will be able to share the peace of Christ which passes all understanding.

Is my heart troubled? Can I feel and accept the peace Christ offers me?

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: To be a peacemaker is to choose to listen when it is easier to speak.

Evening Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for the gifts and trials of this day. May I learn from my mistakes that tomorrow I may be an even better follower of your will. Amen.*

Saturday, April 25

Peace With Justice – Church and Society



What We Do

The Peace With Justice team supports clergy, churches, and members in advocating for and working toward a peaceful world. The General Board of Church and Society website reminds us that as we seek “to live into our mission of transforming the world, we must prioritize collaboration among nations, work to reduce the use and need for weapons, and foster just, equitable, and durable solutions to the root causes of conflict.”

As United Methodists respond to injustice, violence, and war, PWJ underpins those efforts through shared resources, communicating event information, and funding. The FLUMC Peace With Justice Coordinator serves as a liaison with the General Board of Church and Society, which offers many seminars and trainings, print and digital resources, and advocacy opportunities. Congregations hold an annual offering on Peace With Justice Sunday that helps fund these efforts across the Conference and world.

Ways to Become Involved

There are several ways to join the work of peace and justice in our Conference and around the world. For training, seminars, and resources, check out umcjustice.org. If you'd like to be part of allocating PWJ funds to projects in The Florida Conference, you could join the grant review team. For opportunities to connect and activate in your community, you can join others in your District holding prayer vigils, advocating with elected officials, and taking a stand for compassion and peace.

One personal way you can become involved in Peace With Justice is through prayer and attention. In your prayer times, incorporate prayers for peace, naming specific conflicts around the world, areas

of injustice, and leaders who can affect change. Pay attention in both your devotional time and your daily life to the instances of peace/conflict and justice/injustice. Hold silence and listen for God's wisdom, mercy, and call. Look for little ways to be agents of peace in each interaction, each conversation, and offer encouragement to others you see doing the same. In these little bits, as well as larger actions, we join in God's transformation of the world.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." – Romans 12:21

Ways to Connect

Rev. Beth Bostrom, Peace with Justice Coordinator

bethbostrom@gmail.com

flumc.org/peacewithjustice

PATIENCE

Week of April 26, 2026

Rev. Daphne Johnson
Senior Pastor, Lighthouse UMC, Boca Grande



Sunday, April 26

This week we continue meditating on the Fruits of the Spirit. We have already looked at the gifts of Joy and Peace and how when these are produced within us by the Holy Spirit we begin a transformation, and we are more open to the work of the Holy Spirit and God's direction in our lives. Today we begin our week's focus on Patience. This is something that is often in short supply these days. We all need more patience. The truth is God has given us this gift we only need to accept it, learn to use it and share it with others. This gift can truly help us to transform our character into what God has called us to be.

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...*

Fruit Basket

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Monday, April 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: *Lord, as I rise to face this day, I ask that you be with me in my day-to-day interactions. Give me patience when I try to respond with indignation, give me patience when my anger begins to rise. Help me remember your patience with me as I seek to treat others with understanding and love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Reflection: Our theme is patience but as we see in this scripture we cannot practice patience apart from the other fruits. To be able to be patient with someone we must be able to value that person apart from the action that is frustrating us. In our text from Ephesians, Paul reminds us that we must hold all our relationships in humility and gentleness and that we must be patient and bear with one another in love. To bear with someone is to be understanding and patient. This isn't easy to do, and Paul knows this. But if we approach everyone with understanding and love then we make the space that is needed to be patient. Through love we can listen more carefully, we are able to forgive more easily, and we are able to choose unity over division. Of course this means we must hold everyone in love; not just our family, not just our friends but also those who frustrate us, those who vote differently from us, those who look different from us, we must hold all of God's creation in love. This goes against our human nature but as followers of Jesus Christ we must seek to love as God loves, and this means we must work to be patient with everyone.

When have I needed God's patience?

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 patient and calls me to be patient with others. When have I been able to follow through with this? When have I failed?

Evening Prayer: *I thank you Lord for the blessings of this day. Thank you for helping me to hold others in love and to share your patience. Keep me focused on the other that I might always approach others with patience and an openness to understand. Amen.*

Mirroring God's Character

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Tuesday, April 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: *Loving God, as the morning breaks on a new day may I begin it with a fresh slate. Help me to walk through this day pausing before I react, thinking before I speak, and listening before I discount. Give me patience as I face the ups and downs of the day. This I ask in your most holy name. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Exodus 43:6-7a (NRSVUE)

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation...

Reflection: We thought yesterday about holding everyone in love and being patient. Some people seem to be better at this than others. But it isn't easy to do. What keeps us from being patient? We aren't patient when we feel someone is doing something wrong or when they aren't doing something the way we think it should be done. We get impatient when we want something right away and it isn't happening. We are often impatient with others when we are overwhelmed or stressed or just tired. Frustration from these things I have mentioned, and others cause us to be impatient, to become angry. And there are times when we show impatience because of our own uncertainty and fear.

Impatience is an emotion that can take over easily and in different situations. When impatience seems to be a human default how can we learn to be patient in all things? We are created in the image of God, and we are to cultivate God's character in our lives. In our text above it states that God is slow to anger. This is another way of saying God is patient. This is a part of God's character and a trait that we are to

strive for. So how can we grow in patience? How can we become slow to anger? Well, it takes practice. But when we practice patience, we will strengthen our own self-regulation. The more we practice, the better we become at it. We will deepen our compassion. We will begin to see others in a gentler way. As we continue to practice, we will begin to cultivate an inner peace. And as these things become a part of our daily character, then we become more aligned with God's character. So, to become more patient, we must practice patience.

Do I make a conscious effort to practice patience? When have I done this?

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: Patience is not a single step, but it is a journey we are on throughout our lives.

Evening Prayer: *O God who is slow to anger. I bring praise to you for your patience with me. Thank you for walking through this day with me, for guiding me in my actions and interactions. Holy Spirit, work within me that I may better reflect your image. Amen.*

Accepting Our Own Imperfections

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Wednesday, April 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: *Good morning, Lord, I awakened with an open and willing heart. Guide my day. Help me to encounter your creation with kindness. May my words be supportive, may I walk with humility and may I remember to be patient in all things and to all people. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: I Thessalonians 5:14 (NRSVUE)

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.

Reflection: Have you ever tried hard to do something, and it just didn't work? Have you ever hoped for something to come to fruition, but you just couldn't bring it to the finish line? Do you ever feel like your best isn't good enough? It is hard to be patient. It is hard to be patient with others, but you know what? It may be even harder to be patient with ourselves. Often our frustration comes when we don't meet the goals or standards, we have set for ourselves. Our text for today reminds us to be patient with all people and that includes ourselves. We all make mistakes. We all fall short of our goals from time to time. And we become impatient with ourselves. When we seek to bear the fruit of patience this isn't just for others, we must be patient with ourselves as well. When we can learn to be patient with ourselves, we can find the hope and joy that God wants for us. We can develop that inner peace that only God can give. And when we can learn to be patient with ourselves then we will learn to allow ourselves to be imperfect. When we can do this then we are more able to allow for this imperfection in others. We will become more compassionate and we can be patient "with all of them."

Does my imperfection ever cause me to be impatient with myself?

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 is patient with me so I should be patient with myself.

Evening Prayer: *God of mercy, as this day comes to a close, I release all the worries and frustrations of the day to you. I know you will hold what I cannot. For this I am truly grateful. Wrap your love around me as I drift off to sleep. Amen.*

Turning Chaos Into Calm

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Thursday, April 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: *Thank you, Lord, for the gift of this new day. Help me to see this day as a new opportunity. Let me leave any negativity behind. Fill me with your joy that it may overflow into the lives of all I meet. As I journey through this day may I be a reflection of your love and grace. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: I Colossians 3:12 (NRSVUE)

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Reflection: Most days it seems I can do three things at once. If there is commotion around me, it doesn't interfere with what I need to do. But then there are other times when it seems like everything is a distraction. This happened when I was writing the reflections for this week. It seemed like every time I would get a thought someone needed me for another issue.

Outside my office window was a very happy bird singing his bird song at the top of his little lungs. And on top of that someone outside was playing a radio very loudly. No matter what I did it seemed I could not concentrate. I would try to work then hear something that would totally distract me. I would get up and pace around for a moment and then try again. When music came on I thought I could ignore, I would get to work only for the music to end, and the radio host would start talking. My patience was gone.

I popped out the door looking for someone to tell to turn the radio down. That is when I saw him. It was our neighbor, a business owner working around his business, painting the outside, still working to

recover from the hurricanes from last year. The music was motivating him. When I saw him working and happy, I stopped. I caught my breath. I had lost my patience. But it wasn't anyone else's fault.

We can't change others, and we cannot always change what is taking place around us. What we can change is our reaction to what is taking place. I could have gone out and blamed my neighbor for the problems I was having. And yes, he could have played the radio a bit lower. But truly my distraction was not his fault.

If I am to have the mind of Christ I need to work to choose patience in my thoughts, words, decisions and actions. As I breathed in patience, I smiled at the picture of our neighbor enjoying his work. I went back into my office, did a few things that didn't need concentration and then packed up and headed home. By the time I was headed home my thoughts were light and my mood was good. We must choose patience. We can choose to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and above all, patience.

*When have I blamed others for my distractions?
How could I have responded better?*

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 is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1 (NRSVUE)

Evening Prayer: *Gracious God, the day is done, my mind is tired, my body is weary. Bring me the rest that only you can give. Renew me throughout the night and prepare me for the work of tomorrow. Amen.*

Submitting to the Work of the Spirit

Rev. Daphne Johnson

Friday, May 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: *Loving God, in the quiet of this morning I begin my day with you. Fill me with your peace and calm so that the chaos of the day cannot invade. Open my eyes and my mind so that I see you in every moment of the day. Then guide me to shine your light to all I meet. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSVUE)

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Reflection: Today I refer us back to our theme scripture. We have discussed all week how we can be more patient and how by being patient in different circumstances we learn to accept ourselves and others and our relationships and interactions are better. But for this fruit to fully grow in our lives and make a difference in the world, for it to fuel the purposes for which God has placed us here we must allow it to become not just a momentary action but a constant characteristic of our very being. It must become an automatic response to the daily trials that come up. And for this to happen we cannot do it alone.

Patience, true patience, cannot be developed on our own. We must cultivate a strong relationship with God and allow the Holy Spirit to work within us. Patience is a characteristic developed within us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only through the help of the Spirit are we able to continually choose patience over discord. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit are we able to see each person we encounter with eyes of love and kindness. It is only when we can look at the other in this way that we can share the patience with

them that God shares with us. It is through working with the Holy Spirit that we can develop patience as a Fruit of the Spirit and when we have done this we then reflect God's patience with the world.

Our world needs to see and feel the presence of God. When we seek to yield the Fruits of the Spirit in all that we do, God's good work is known and the world begins to be transformed.

*What am I doing on a daily basis to strengthen my relationship with God?
Am I open to the nudging of the Holy Spirit in my life?*

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: As you walk through your day remember that some you meet are struggling. Let your patience be a safe place for them to breathe.

Evening Prayer: *Ever-present God, I have felt your presence throughout the day. As I drift off to sleep, I ask that you stay with me, bring me peace, and help me to be renewed for the day ahead. Amen.*

Saturday, May 2

Missional Engagement of The Florida Conference



What We Do

At the heart of the gospel is Christ's call to be peacemakers, and Missional Engagement lives out this call by helping the Church embody peace through global mission. Rooted in peace, we connect congregations in Florida to mission partners across the world, joining efforts to build wells that provide safe, clean water, empower vulnerable children, strengthen health clinics, support sustainable agriculture, and nurture communities of faith. We walk alongside international partners not as donors but as friends, learning from their wisdom while offering encouragement and support. By engaging in these relationships, we help to bridge cultures, foster reconciliation, and embody God's vision of peace across borders.

Along the way, we create opportunities for hands-on participation—through projects that provide relief supplies, highlight the work of missionaries, and share stories of transformation happening far from home. These shared efforts remind us that peace is not confined to one place but is God's dream for the whole world.

Ways to Become Involved

There are many ways to participate in this work of peace. You can join a mission trip or covenant partnership with churches and communities around the globe, deepening mutual relationships that transform both giver and receiver. You can support international relief projects by contributing supplies, raising funds, or volunteering in collective efforts that respond to pressing needs.

Local congregations can form partnerships with global ministries through prayer, advocacy, and shared mission projects, while individuals can learn about and engage in ministries that confront issues such as hunger, poverty, and violence. Each act of connection

strengthens our witness to Christ's reconciling love and reminds us that when we work for peace together, the world grows a little closer to God's kingdom.

Ways to Connect

Molly McEntire, Director of Connectional and Mission Ministries

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KINDNESS

Week of May 3, 2026

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson
Retired Clergy, Florida Annual Conference



Sunday, May 3

The theme this week is a timely one: Kindness. If you're like me, you sometimes wonder if the world has become completely devoid of kindness. And, truth be told, there are days when we wonder if Christians have forgotten that kindness is both a fruit of the Spirit and at the very heart and character of God. Let's explore it together.

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...*

Kindness, Wear it Well

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson

Monday, May 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: *Dear God, I'm probably going to meet some people today who could use a kind expression from me. It probably won't be my first inclination, maybe not my second, but I know You want me to be kind, and I believe you will help me, as I offer myself to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12 (NRSVUE)

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Reflection: You likely won't know our wonderful daughter, Shevon. At age 23 and in her 13th month of marriage, on her way home from teaching school, she was T-boned by a driver who ran a newly installed red light, resulting in a traumatic brain injury, 17-day coma, months of physical therapy, and a loving, faithful husband. She eventually recovered, everything but balance, which means she is mostly in a wheelchair, and she and her husband have two delightful children, one in college and the other finishing high school. And, through it all, Shevon seems to have developed a deepening kindness trait. When Jan and I visit her in Blacksburg, Virginia, I often go with her to the grocery store. With me by her side, she can hold onto the cart and make her way slowly around the store. Here's what happened on our last visit: As we approach the person working at the Deli, Shevon cries out: "Hi, Susie, how are you doing?" And a conversation ensues. Then to the bakery, where Joe cries out, "Hi, beautiful!" And another personal conversation; on to the produce person in the pickles: "Hey Lucy, how was your vacation last week?" All the way around the store to her friend, the check out clerk. She knew everyone and they knew her! And they were thrilled to see her

—because she showed them the kindness of knowing them. And I sensed I was on holy ground.

Do you know the produce guy at your store? I didn't either. I sure do now, and I know how proud he is of his Granddaughter, whose photos and achievements he now freely shares with me.

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: Is there someone else I might extend kindness to that I have been overlooking as I go about my day—someone I know casually, or maybe someone very close in my family?

Evening Prayer: *God, as I look back on this day, I'm reminded of the many ways you have extended kindness and grace to me, and with your help, I will do the same to people I meet along the way, and maybe by so doing, the world will grow just a little kinder.*

Receive Kindness-Give Kindness

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson

Tuesday, May 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, sometimes I forget that I have been the recipient of the most amazing gift ever: Your grace and love and kindness, given to me in so many ways. Please keep that reality ever before me.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:32 (NRSVUE)

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Reflection: You've heard the phrase that: "Hurting people hurt people," meaning that people who have received hurt, tend to pass that along to others. Likewise, people who have received kindness and forgiveness and love and grace, tend to pass that along to others. I remember the morning a Grandmother told me of the experience her Grandchild had at another Church. The pastor mentioned a roadside sign that stated: "I'm not angry at you," signed God. And the Pastor said, "That's not true!" I responded, "I'm sure glad we United Methodists don't see God as angry and vengeful, but rather loving and kind. I fear that too many of today's Christians who are unkind toward others, believe in an unkind God.

How might I apply God's loving kindness to every nook and cranny of my life? And then, how might I pass that along to others?

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: When I imagine your face, dear God, I see the kind and loving face of Jesus, and in so doing, I see your face, and am grateful.

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, it's been a day of reflection—on all the ways you have loved me, forgiven me, been kind to me, and continue to do so. At times I am overwhelmed with gratitude. Thank you. Amen.*

No “Shoulds” About It

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson

Wednesday, May 6

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

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSVUE)

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

Reflection: When I first started preaching—many years ago—I realized that my sermons used the word “should” an awful lot—and not much was happening in the lives of my parishioners. I guess that’s how I was raised, with a lot of “shoulds,” and it’s sadly how I understood a lot of Christianity. It wasn’t working well. No one was responding to my well articulated “shoulds.” Then, one day I visited my wife’s kindergarten class, where she was effusively affirming, encouraging and “kinding” them into their fuller, developing selves. I was amazed—and transformed, and slowly was my preaching style. Not long after, I read E. Stanley Jones’s response when someone asked him the secret to his preaching success: “I just envision a halo over the heads of everyone in the congregation and watch God helping them grow up into it. Somehow, I had made Christianity more about “shoulds” and “oughts” (which were never transformative) than about gifts and fruits of the indwelling Holy Spirit! Indeed, everything I needed to know I learned in kindergarten (my wife’s kindergarten class!).

Do I believe that others’ lives are improved by my telling them what I think they should do, or by my affirming, with kindness and understanding, what the Spirit is already doing in their lives?

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: As the Holy Spirit is gifting me more and more each day the fruit of Kindness, how is that gift impacting my life and the lives around me?

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, I can sense you stretching me in ways that aren't always comfortable, but I'm grateful, for I sense Your Kindness becoming more and more my own kindness—to myself and to others. Amen.*

Come to Jesus, He's Kinder Than You Might Think

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson

Thursday, May 7

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

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11: 28-30 (NRSVUE)

Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Reflection: At the heart of everything in our lives as followers of Christ is this intimate, restful, gentle, humble relationship with Jesus. In a word, nothing else matters; not doctrine, not “shoulds,” not what the culture or society or a preacher or a small group might say or require; it’s not about external motivation. It’s about intimacy with Jesus.

Now, stay with me because I’m going to mention the Greek word for kindness: *Krestotes*, as found in Galatians 5:22, one of the fruit of the Spirit. Now, here’s the exciting and fascinating thing: the same Greek word stem is used to describe Jesus’s yoke: *Krestos*: For my yoke is “kind” - my yoke is kindness. When we let Jesus place His yoke upon us, we are united/bound together in His gentleness and humility and kindness. Wow! It’s not us manufacturing it; it’s not us striving to be more kind. As my Pilates instructor often reminds me: “It’s not about making it happen, it’s about letting it happen.”

*Am I a person who has spent most of my life trying to make things happen?
How might I transition to becoming a person who lets things happen?*

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: How's that yoke fitting right now? Easy? Does it wear well? Am I trying to force the direction, or am I letting the One beside me take the lead, as I learn from Him?

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, I think I am starting to get it. In my best moments, I'm learning to let You lead, learning to trust you more, learning to come to Your Son and learn of him: gentleness, humility and kindness. Thank you. Amen.*

The Kindness of God

Rev. Dr. Dan Johnson

Friday, May 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: *O God, as this new day unfolds, open our eyes, ears, hearts to your kindness that flows over us in all the ordinary things of life. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 136:1, 2, 26 (NRSV)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever... O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Reflection: Please bear with me one more time, because today I'll mention the awesome Hebrew word that is repeated in all 26 verses of Psalm 136. It's *Hesed*, and it means: steadfast love, a deep and loyal kindness that will not let us go! It's repeated in every verse of this Psalm to make the resounding point that *Hesed/Covenant Kindness* is at the very heart of who God is! I believe deep in my bones that the crux of the problem in the world today, and in much of popular Christianity today is that their religion is NOT a reflection of this kind of gracious, loving, kind God, but rather is a reflection of a harsh, judgmental, angry, punishing god, resulting in mean-spirited religions, and judgmental and harsh "Christians." And the beauty for we United Methodists is that John Wesley and his brother, Charles, also knew this God of loving Kindness and proclaimed that reality in almost every hymn they wrote: "Love Divine, all Loves Excelling..."

What kind of God do I worship? Will I let myself be embraced in the Kind and Loving Arms of God, the God whose very heart and nature is Love and Kindness?

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: Find some time today to google: Charles Wesley Hymns, and see if you can see the theme of God's steadfast Love.

Evening Prayer: *Dear God, there are times when I am simply overwhelmed with the thought that you Love me, and that your Kindness washes over me. Help me never to take it for granted, and help me to pass it along with grace to both to those who are in my family, and out into the world wherever injustice and meanness exist. In your name, Amen.*

Saturday, May 9

New Church Development



What We Do

The fruit of kindness and goodness spreads throughout our state through the hearts of United Methodists committed to the work of evangelism—laity and clergy willing to share their lives, resources and witness to connect with those who may not have a community of faith or have never experienced the love and grace of Christ.

The Florida Annual Conference is committed to creating new churches through our New Church Development ministries. This team works to create the strategic framework, values, and next steps for planting new United Methodist churches in Florida—churches that love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously. We aim to do this in ways that are sustainable, Spirit-led, and responsive to local contexts. These new faith communities will be intentionally planted in diverse contexts and will embody the unique makeup of their neighborhoods in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and more. We want to plant churches that cast a wide net. We define a “new church” as a vibrant, self-sustaining congregation.

Ways to Become Involved

Contact your pastor, your District Superintendent or the New Church Specialist about your passion, idea, or plan to start a new church and pray for our new church starts.

Ways to Connect

Scott Smith, New Church Development Specialist
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863-557-5163

FAITHFULNESS

Week of May 10, 2026

Rev. Allee Wood
Senior Pastor, First UMC, Clearwater



Sunday, May 10

What does it mean to experience “faithfulness” as a fruit of the Spirit? First, we ground ourselves in the reality that our ability to be faithful relies on God’s first action of love and fidelity to us. It is God’s unwavering faithfulness to us throughout the ages that even gives us the opportunity to experience our own faithfulness to God’s work in the world. What would it mean to commit ourselves to the faithful action of the Holy Spirit in us, in our community, and the world?

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's Steadfast Love

Rev. Allee Wood

Monday, May 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 Love, I thank you that your faithfulness is the reality in which I live, move, and breathe in. Help me to see your steadfast love in unexpected ways, all day long. In Christ's Name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 36:5-7 (NRSV)

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains;
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Reflection: Psalm 36 begins with a lament over the wickedness of the world, but quickly turns to the reality of the Psalmist, and us: all of Creation is an expression of God's love. All throughout our lives, despite the brokenness of the world, the faithfulness of God truly stretches to the skies, and God's righteousness is an unmovable mountain. Even when we can't see it, this is as true for us as the ground beneath our feet. When we consider faithfulness as a fruit of the Spirit, we first have to see it as the true character of God. God has never left or forsaken us. We truly can take refuge in God's love, in the shadow of God's wings. Our United Methodist communion liturgy says, "When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast." That precious, steadfast, faithful love of God is what draws us near to God even before we realize it. Where can you notice the steadfast, faithful character of God today?

When has God been faithful to me, even when I turned away?

*Where do I see evidence of God's love in Creation,
or in the ordinary blessings of life?*

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: Whether I know it or not, God's faithful love is the reality of our world.

Evening Prayer: *God of grace as the day ends, help me to see the many ways that your faithful love has been a part of this day, and my life. May I count my own gratitude and return it to you in thanks, that your grace continues to show up in my life. Amen.*

New Every Morning

Rev. Allee Wood

Tuesday, May 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: *Lord, whether we come to you in lament or in joy, You are present. Show us that your mercy is new for us each morning, and that your faithfulness to us is indeed great. In Christ's name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Lamentations 3:22-24 (NRSV)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

Reflection: I used to live on the East Coast of Florida, where I could count on a beautiful sunrise most mornings. Often, when I walked out to the beach, felt the sand under my feet, and stared at the stunning oranges and pinks that danced across the sky, reflected in the ocean, the words of Lamentations and the hymn, “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” would spring to my mind: “Morning by morning, new mercies I see.” I was grateful for the image of a new portion of mercy, as though my cup was refilled each morning by God’s faithfulness. The writer of Lamentations knows this truth well. God’s mercy has been faithful to them even in their deepest sorrow. In this center verse in Lamentations, they pause to acknowledge that new mercy and faithfulness every day, which helps them keep their hope even when all seems lost. For us, whether the day is filled with blessing or lament, God’s mercy is truly new every morning: expressing the truth of God’s faithful character. Even as we cry out to God, we can see when God is working, deepening our own faith and hope in God.

What practice can help you attune yourself to God's new mercy every morning? How can this practice, even in cries of sorrow, help you to hope in God's faithful love?

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 life is painful or difficult, God is faithful.

Evening Prayer: *Steadfast God, in Jesus you showed us the lengths you would go to know our sorrow. You know the contents of my day. As I give my day to you, I pray that your mercy will renew me for a new day tomorrow. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

Trust God

Rev. Allee Wood

Wednesday, May 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: *Faith in you, Great God of Joy, begins with realizing that I do not understand. Help me to trust you beyond what I can see this day, and every day. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:3-5

Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
Then you will find favor and good repute
in the sight of God and of people.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.

Reflection: This familiar Scripture is contained in a long address to the student of Wisdom. As the Teacher reminds the student, the core of Wisdom is to trust God, even beyond their own understanding. But just a few verses earlier, Proverbs asks us to not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake or leave us. We are to bind our own faith in God around our neck, and write it on the tablet of our heart. In this, we will find our faith in God is cultivated, and we can experience the trust in God that extends beyond our own insight into the great mystery of the world. I don't know about you, but that last part is what I struggle with: being faithful to God beyond my own insight. And yet, when I release my own grip on what I think is right, and allow God's love to be written in my heart, I find that we experience God's love in new ways. In that trust, we can find that our own faith grows.

*How can you write your faith in God in your heart?
Where can you release your own insight and trust 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: When I write the story of God's love on my heart and in my life, I can experience trust in God in new ways.

Evening Prayer: *I want to trust you, Loving Lord. Help me to see the joy of mystery, and the beauty of trusting You beyond my own insight. Inspire me to live with a faithfulness that is a sign around my neck and in my heart. Amen.*

Faith and Not Sight

Rev. Allee Wood

Thursday, May 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: *God, help me to remember that your purposes, your Kingdom, and your love are much larger than me. May my heart be faithful to what I cannot see, in Your name. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:5-7

The one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Reflection: As Paul addresses the Corinthian community, he encourages them to focus not on what is right in front of them but on the hope they have for God's future. Paul reminds them that they are not hoping just in what the earthly tent of their body or their circumstances offers- but in the heavenly, redeemed future God offers. When Paul talks about their faith in this future, he says, in the Message translation, **"It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going."** (2 Cor. 5:7, MSG). Our faith in Christ gives us a perspective that is larger than the perspective of the world. It is a faithfulness to something bigger that allows us to turn the other cheek to our enemies, show up in our relationships when they are challenging, and keep our integrity in the face of the world's corruption. This faith keeps us going because God, in the Holy Spirit, is the one that cultivates it. Our heavenly mindset can help us keep the faith in what we do not see, reminding ourselves of the power of God's Kingdom at work.

*What keeps you going? Is it a Kingdom mindset, or one of this world?
How can you trust in God beyond your own sight?*

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: This world is not my ultimate reality, God's Kingdom is, and I will be faithful to God's love.

Evening Prayer: *God of love, when I am tired by the trappings of this world, help me to see your work that is larger than my own perspective. In this, help me walk with faithfulness to your love, not by my own sight. Amen.*

Sharing Our Gifts

Rev. Allee Wood

Friday, May 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: *O Lord, open my heart and mind, that I might see opportunities to share Your abundant love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:24-30

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Reflection: This parable of the talents, and the one of the “dishonest manager,” in Luke often makes us uncomfortable. Is God really angry and vengeful? Is God dishonest? And yet, at closer examination, these parables teach us about faithfulness. After going away and trusting his servants with varied resources, the master returns to find that two have doubled their resources and one has hidden his in the ground, doing nothing. When asked, the servant says that it is fear of the master that prevents him from taking the risk. His talent is taken away and given to the one who risks it to grow. Instead of hearing this as a word about why some are poor and some are rich, I have

learned to see this more in light of the wisdom of Spiderman: “With great power comes great responsibility.” When we learn to trust God completely, we risk our talents and our resources to further grow the Kingdom. The fruit of faithfulness grows in our lives and overflows in God’s love. I do not think that God throws us into the outer darkness for our lack of faith, but I do wonder what we miss when we are not faithful to use all of our blessings to share God’s love.

*Where could you be faithful in taking a risk to share God’s love
with our world, instead of hiding it?*

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: Being faithful is sharing God's love, not hiding or hoarding it.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, cultivate in me faithfulness to your love. When I am afraid, invite me to see Your grace. When I am caught by scarcity, help me to see Your abundance, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Saturday, May 16

Committee on the Status & Role of Women (CSROW)



What We Do

Faithfulness is a fruit of the spirit we associate with all disciples, but as we celebrated Mother's Day this week, we cannot help but remember the faithful women of our faith, our heritage and of our church—women who have shown us the way of justice like the midwives Shiphrah and Puah who saved Moses, leaders like Lydia who led her family and neighbors to faith, and John and Charles Wesley would not have been who they were without the faithfulness of their mother Susanna. Honoring the great women of faith is in our DNA as Methodists.

The Committee on the Status and Role of Women is a conference and general board and agency of our denomination holding up the importance of women around the world. Their mission: *Challenging The Florida Conference of the UMC to support, resource, and celebrate the full and equal participation of women, both clergy and laity, regardless of age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and ability, in the total life and mission of the Church.*

We serve clergy, laity, and congregations by:

- offering education and training on gender equity and inclusion,
- providing accountability when issues of discrimination or harassment arise,
- celebrating and resourcing women in leadership, ministry, and mission, and
- partnering with other ministries to make sure women's voices and stories are centered.

Our work is rooted in justice and discipleship, helping the church reflect the image of God more fully.

Ways to Become Involved

- **Team meetings:** Generally held every two months on Zoom on the third Thursday of the month at 9:30 AM and last at the maximum 1.25 hrs.
- **Participate:** Attend CSROW-led workshops, clergywomen's gatherings, or gender equity trainings, advocate for the appointed female pastors, learn and utilize tools for engaging respectfully with female clergy and members of the church, and learn how to address sexual harassment directly while creating safeguards that prevent it.
- **Volunteer:** Share your gifts in planning, communication, advocacy, or resourcing local churches. Share information to celebrate women in local churches
- **Advocate:** Bring awareness in your congregation by lifting up women's voices in worship, study, and leadership.

Ways to Connect

Rev. Dr. Andrea Byer-Thomas, Chairperson of CCSROW

basics2@hotmail.com

954-793-1591

GENTLENESS & SELF-CONTROL

Week of May 17, 2026

Rev. Magrey deVega
Senior Pastor, Hyde Park UMC, Tampa



Sunday, May 17

As we wind down our series on the fruit of the spirit, we will be considering the qualities of gentleness and self-control in tandem. Both require a kind of self-awareness and self-regulation that guards against more impulsive instincts that may cause undue harm to ourselves and others. To exhibit both externally in our relationships with others, we must start within. We must be gentle with ourselves before we can be gentle with others. And we must constantly remind ourselves of what we can control, while releasing that which we cannot control. Our journey this week will begin inwardly to explore the deeply seeded starting points for gentleness and self-control, and extend outwardly to shape the way we relate to others with beauty and harmony, rather than with chaos and harm.

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...*

A Mirror of Grace

Rev. Magrey deVega

Monday, May 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: *Lord, thank you for your unconditional love, which sees my imperfections and weaknesses and extends to me the warmth of your grace. May your salvation allow me to be gentle with myself, so that I may be free from self-condemnation. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:1-8 (NRSVUE)

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

Reflection: Mirrors have become an indispensable part of everyday life. We use them in the mornings as we prepare for the day, to drive safely around town, and in common equipment like flashlights and headlights. Most often, we use them to look at ourselves, which often elicits a kind of sigh, as we focus on our flaws.

The text from Romans serves as a kind of mirror for the state of

our soul, except this time, it doesn't focus on our flaws, sinful urges, shame, guilt, and the countless reasons we feel like we don't measure up to God's intentions. Instead, Paul invites us to see the grace of God reflecting back at us.

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," he said, essentially asking us to look in the mirror again, to see instead the unvarnished truth of who we really are: children of God, made in God's image.

May that inescapable reality be the starting point for you, to be gentle with yourself, and to begin the work of taking control of your sinful urges, that your "mind, governed by the spirit," will bring you "life and peace."

In what ways have I been too hard on myself? How will I open my eyes to God's unconditional love, and begin to be gentle with myself?

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 has forgiven me of all my sins; now I am able to live as one who is free from sinful urges.

Evening Prayer: *God, as I reflect on this past day, bring to mind evidence of when I did not rely fully enough on your grace to see through the hard times. Help me do better tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

A Soft Answer

Rev. Magrey deVega

Tuesday, May 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, grant me awareness of my speech, that my content and tone might match your best intent, and bring more beauty and harmony into the world. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 15:1-8 (NRSVUE)

¹A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

²The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge,
but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

³The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good.

⁴A gentle tongue is a tree of life,
but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

⁵A fool despises a parent's instruction,
but the one who heeds admonition is prudent.

⁶In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked.

⁷The lips of the wise spread knowledge;
not so the minds of fools.

⁸The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,
but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Reflection: Few actions convey our ability (or inability) to express outward gentleness toward others than through our speech. There are many passages in the Bible that summon us to control our tongue, from James (the tongue is a bridle, a rudder, and a spark of fire), to Ephesians (“Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth”) to the Psalms (“Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.”)

But it's this passage from Proverbs that captures the idea most succinctly: "A soft answer turns away wrath." It is a reminder that tone is often as important as content when it comes to communicating a hard truth to someone. This is why text messages and emails are sometimes misinterpreted by the recipient. We read into the words a kind of motive that doesn't exist, which requires phone calls or personal visits for clarification.

When we need to share a message that may evoke anger from someone, mastering our own gentleness is a key first step. It can sometimes mean taking a deep breath to collect our thoughts and emotions before saying what we need to say. Sometimes it means drafting a message in full so that we can externalize it, then sleep on it to reassess it in the morning. "Soft answers" can take many forms and arise from many means. Regardless, they can be very effective in turning away wrath, and making difficult matters even worse.

*When has someone communicated a hard truth to me with
such gentleness that I was able to receive it?
How might I do the same in my interactions with others?*

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 words matter, both the ones that I speak and the ones that I embody. May my words be useful in building others up, not tearing them down.

Evening Prayer: *Almighty God, as I reflect on this day, I remember many conversations I had with people along the way. For the times I have caused harm, empower me to seek reconciliation. For the times others have shared words of love with me, remind me to express gratitude. And in all times when you speak to me, grant me greater receptivity to the work of your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Three Alternatives to Fear

Rev. Magrey deVega

Wednesday, May 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: *God, it is not your desire for me to feel afraid. Amid all the stressors and frustrations around me, help me to find my center in you, that I might face my uncertainties with power, love, and self-control. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:1-7 (NRSVUE)

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Reflection: For centuries, ancient philosophers believed that a person was governed by three dominant centers: The gut, which is the source of our physical power and our actions; the heart, which is the source of our emotions and our capacity to relate to others; and the mind, which is the source of our intellect and will. Paul reminded Timothy that in Christ, we can address our fears through holy behavior (Power), divine motivation (Love), and self-control (Mind).

Power: We need not be paralyzed into inaction, sitting passively in surrender to conditions that seem beyond our control. God calls us to

use our talents and passions to address the world's deepest needs, both to take a stand and to take a step, by the power of God.

Love: But action alone can be potentially harmful if it is not done in love. Not merely human sentimental love, but a love that is both for God and from God in the way that it loves others. That alone must be our chief motivation, beyond all other allegiances and devotions, either internal or institutional. God's love calls for nothing less than the full reconciliation of all broken relationships and systems, which can only be achieved through powerful actions that are shaped by love.

Sound mind: The King James translation calls it a sound mind, self-discipline in the New Revised Standard version, and self-control in the Common English Bible. Both power and love must also be governed by a will that is shaped by selflessness and self-giving. We must rise above primary loyalties to partisan pressures and cultural definitions. A sound mind seeks the common good, far beyond old, tired, binary categories of winning and losing.

*How will I live with a balance among my body,
my heart, and my mind throughout this day?
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: No matter what happens to me, I will remember what I can control, and release what I cannot.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, this day has brought me regular reminders of life's challenges and opportunities. For times when I have fallen short of your ideal intentions, please forgive me, as I seek forgiveness from others. For times when I have endured difficulties beyond my control, thank you. You are my constant strength and wisdom. May I now find rest in you throughout this night. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

The Power of Contentment

Rev. Magrey deVega

Thursday, May 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: *Loving God, the day ahead will be full of the unexpected. Help me to focus on you, that I might discover an unassailable center in your steady presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-13 (NRSVUE)

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Reflection: Paul reminds the Philippians, and us, that there is a connection between our feelings and our thoughts. Emotions are natural, whether they be joy, anxiety, and peace—all of which are named in verses 4-7. The same can be said of our thoughts, which

are fully within the realm of our control. We choose to fill our minds with ideas that can bring order and sensibility to our world, or make things more complicated and chaotic. Paul would prefer us to choose the former, rather than the latter. Each of the qualities of the mind in verse 8 result in steadiness and resilience, of heart and mind.

But he adds one more key ingredient, to help us find balance between our thoughts and feelings: contentment. Despite everything that happens to us that are not in our control, we always have a choice in whether to focus on being content, or focusing on what we lack. And when we discover contentment in even the harshest of circumstances, we become stronger, and more able to handle hardships beyond what we thought capable. Indeed, we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”

*How will I fill my mind with thoughts that are holy,
and my heart with feelings that reflect my best self?
And how will I focus on being content today?*

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 have more than I deserve, thanks to the faithful generosity of God.

Evening Prayer: *Almighty God, as I reflect on this day, help me to notice the little blessings that I would have otherwise overlooked. You have filled my life with so many good things. May my recognition of your generosity fill me with contentment for the day ahead. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

With Gentleness and Reverence

Rev. Magrey deVega

Friday, May 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, the day ahead is sure to contain moments of disagreement with others. Help me to stay true to my convictions, while remaining true to your command to love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-17 (NRSVUE)

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰Instead, “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.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection: It is important to remember that many New Testament scriptures were first written during a time of intense persecution of the early Christians. So, imagine the surprise of those who first read this letter of 1 Peter which calls them to a unique response to this intense persecution. “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in

you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” There are two ideas in this text that form a “both/and” approach to relating to others with gentleness and self-control.

The first part we can understand. Don’t be afraid to stand up for your convictions. Be clear about who you are, and stand by your principles. It is permissible, even advisable, to be confident about our principles, and to stake claims about what we claim as our beliefs.

But the second part is just as important: do it with gentleness and reverence. Wow. The first century Christians were expected to stare down their persecutors, and instead of reacting with anger, or spite, or scorn, they were to treat their enemies, their oppressors, with gentleness and reverence. What a remarkable thing to ask, and a nearly impossible thing to expect! We are called to relate to others who disagree with us with a tone that is neither condescending nor acrimonious. We are called to be simultaneously convicted and compassionate, secure and sympathetic, in the way we relate to others.

*How will I balance both a commitment to my convictions
with a generous, gentle spirit?*

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: I can't control what others think or do; I can only control the way I treat others. May that way be governed by the love of God.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for the blessing of being connected to others. Every interaction reminds me that I am not alone, and that I need that interrelatedness to be my best self. In ways I could have treated others better, help me to do better. And in ways I could have been more grateful, help me to give thanks in all things. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Saturday, May 23

Branches Ministries



What We Do

Branches, formerly known as South Florida Urban Ministries, is a faith-based nonprofit serving the Miami area and provides life-changing opportunities to hardworking families and their children to help them break the cycle of generational poverty. Our mission is to serve, educate and inspire people through student, family and financial wellness services in partnership with our communities. We fulfill our mission by engaging children, youth and adults with opportunities for them to become better educated, more financially stable, able to make long-term, positive life choices and to know God. Our focus is on student achievement, family services, and financial wellness and our programs serve children, youth, adults and families through our three respective program areas: Grow, Climb & Achieve. To learn more, please visit: branchesfl.org/programs-2/

Ways to Become Involved

You can support this ministry by volunteering and bringing mission teams to Branches. You can come personally and support Branches' programs serving children, youth or adults, please visit: branchesfl.org/volunteer/ or consider bringing a team of youth or adults for a spring or summer mission trip, May–August, and during Spring break in late March. You can also make a special donation to the work of Branches through the Conference Advance Special #510004.

Ways to Connect

Brent McLaughlin, President & CEO

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11500 NW 12th Avenue, Miami, FL 33168 | (305) 442-8306 x2008

For mission teams looking for specific projects, please contact Kim Torres at ktorres@branchesfl.org or 786-650-2007.



**Abide in the love of God.
Bear fruit through grace-filled lives.**

From the quiet weight of ashes to the song of alleluia, this second volume of *Awakened to Grace* invites readers into the heart of Lent and the joy of Eastertide.

Through daily prayer and reflection, Lent names the Obstacles to Grace—fear, anger, injustice, and greed—making space for repentance, truth-telling, and transformation. As the season turns, Easter bursts forth with resurrection hope, exploring the Fruits of the Spirit and calling renewed hearts to bear love, joy, patience, kindness, and faithfulness in everyday life.

Rooted in honest prayer and shaped by the promise of new life, this devotional leads readers toward lasting freedom in Christ—where grace not only forgives, but restores, renews, and sends us forth to live as resurrection people.

