



Quarterly Newsletter of Epworth United Methodist
March/April/May 2022



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Huge Thank You

The Epworth Staff would like to give our wonderful congregation a huge THANK YOU for the very generous Christmas Gift of Love. Even through these tough times, your love for us shines through and warms our hearts. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Daylight Savings Time

Don't forget to set your clocks ahead 1 hour on March 12. Hopefully, this will be the last time.



VISION: Explore Faith,
Embrace Community

MISSION: Inviting, Belonging,
Connecting, Caring

All Means All

As a [Reconciling Ministries Network](#) congregation, we welcome all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, to share their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

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Epworth.faith

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Worship Schedule

10:00 a.m. Worship at Epworth and on-line
(masks optional and recommended)

Lenten Worship Schedule:

Easter Egg Hunt—4/1/23

10:00 a.m.—12:00 noon

Palm/Passion Sunday - 4/2/23

10:00 a.m. Worship at Epworth and on-line

Holy Thursday - 4/6/23

7:00 p.m. Worship at Epworth and on-line

Good Friday - 4/7/23

7:00 p.m. Worship at Epworth and on-line

Easter Sunday - 4/9/23

6:00 a.m. SonRise Service at the Bandstand

10:00 a.m. Worship at Epworth and on-line



Pastor Vicki's Views

As a teenager, my mother invited me to fast with her on Ash Wednesday. We talked about partaking of clear liquids only, no milk, no juice, and not telling anyone we were fasting. I do not remember being hungry. I do remember feeling a very special sense of connection with my mom and with God, and feeling like I had a secret mission. I must confess, however, that I did not completely understand the practice of “giving something up for Lent.” It seemed perfunctory somehow, and a bit like attempting to earn God’s love.

While at Duke Divinity School, a few of our colleagues used Lent as a means to demonstrate their piety. Giving something up for Lent seemed like a competition, rather than a means of grace. Of course, Jesus warned us about just such a temptation in Matthew 6, instructing us to practice our righteousness in secret. Pray in secret. Fast without drawing attention to yourself. Give without announcing your generosity. Jesus concludes by reminding us that the treasures of the earth are fleeting, and he invites us to store up treasure in heaven instead.

So, how do we store up treasures in heaven? We continue these practices with a focus on allowing whatever we do to draw us closer to Jesus and therefore closer to other people. We understand these “sacrifices” as developing the fruit of the Spirit (goodness, patience, kindness, faithfulness, self-control, love, joy, peace, and gentleness) and a means of creating more space for God. For instance, if we give up candy for Lent, we can understand it as working on our self-control. Or if we give up television, we can spend that time in prayer instead.

Spiritual practices for Lent took on new meaning for me when I journeyed through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in 1999. (You can find out more about the Spiritual Exercises at ignatianspirituality.com.) The Exercises took thirty weeks to complete, with daily exercises, journalling, and meeting with a spiritual director weekly. Ignatian spirituality encourages you to listen with discernment to your heart and to use imaginative prayer while reading scripture.

During the time when we journeyed through the final week of Jesus’ life, I felt so close to him. I used my imagination to put myself in each of the scenes, watching the participants and wondering what role I would play, but also paying particular attention to Jesus. Was he tired? Was he angry? Was he grieving? Was he lonely? What did he need?

Throughout those six weeks, I felt like I was “keeping



watch” with Jesus, trying to understand his actions and his suffering. I experienced such determination in his presence, such compassion and love. Even when his disciples let him down, I felt more of a heartache than a sense of disappointment. Every time I looked into Jesus’ eyes, I saw only deep understanding and a longing to do whatever he needed to do to demonstrate God’s love for me and for humanity and for the world.

By living the last days of his life with Jesus, I began to see God at work everywhere in the world. One of the tenets of Ignatian Spirituality involves seeing God in all things, with the ultimate goal of an eager and generous offer of your wholehearted self to God and to God’s work in the world. When we experience in the core of our being the depth of God’s love for us through Jesus and his willing embrace of death, fully and sacrificially, so that we might live, how else can we respond? We give up ourselves and all our petty desires to look good or to get ahead or to be right or to gain recognition and we instead want to love extravagantly and generously with the love poured out on us.

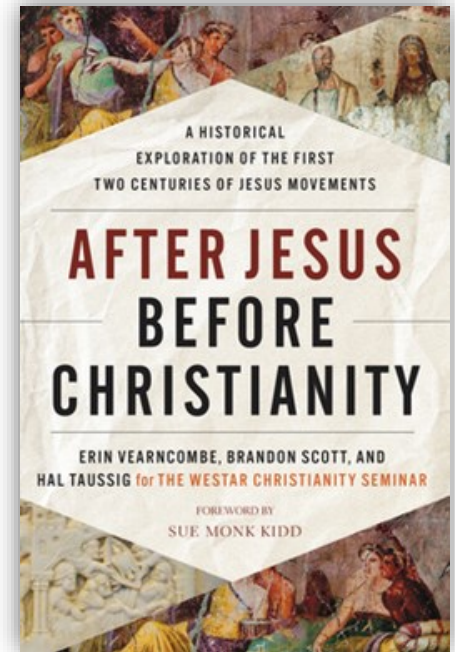
For me, Galatians 2:19-20 sums up the goal of Lenten practices of giving and praying and fasting (or “giving things up”): “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” When we fully accept the indescribable love of Jesus for us, we willingly give up all things in order to draw closer to the source of that love. We long for Jesus to live in us and through us because we know that his love for us grows stronger as we give it away.

So, in the words of our Ash Wednesday liturgy, “I invite you to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.” The journey will change your life.

Reflections on the Way to Easter and Pentecost

by the Rev. Dr. Bo Gordy-Stith, Pastor of Community & Communications

I've recently finished reading [After Jesus Before Christianity: A Historical Exploration of the First Two Centuries of Jesus Movements](#) by Erin Vearncombe, Brandon Scott, and Hal Taussig of the [Westar Institute](#) (famous for sponsoring the Jesus Seminar). This book gathers the consensus of scholars gathered for an early Christianity seminar sponsored by the Westar Institute. These scholars found a bewildering diversity among localized, often isolated movements gathered loosely (and most often around feasts and fellowship) as the party of the anointed Jesus. What we know of as the New Testament would not exist until several centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection, so the common thread in these communities was most often an identification with the empire the God of Israel ruled in the face of the crushing power of the Roman empire.



We see some of this diversity juxtaposed with (much) later Christian consolidation in our New Testament. For instance, Paul [commends female leaders of the movement](#) in the churches he helps found, and celebrates that in the unity that is Christ [there is no gender distinction](#), but also writes that [women should not even speak](#) in worship (sometimes in the same letter). And while Paul writes of [justification by grace alone, apart from works](#), the Book of James warns that [faith apart from works is dead](#). Not all of this diversity in teaching represents a progression of time, as [Paul attests in his letters](#).

While this kind of revelation can be unsettling, it can also put our own Christian diversity of understanding in perspective. We look for some golden age of homogeneity in the church in vain. Our scriptures do an interesting job of both creating an appearance of unity and testifying to the diversity of faith understanding and practice. The scholars who contributed to this study often conclude that these disparate communities gathered in remembrance of the anointed Jesus shared more in practice than in theory. Throwing out heretics would come later, of course. But even the heretics could not shake their encounter with the living Christ.

At Epworth we celebrate this kind of diversity in the ways we experience, understand, and practice our walk with Jesus by lifting up Faith Exploration as one of our primary values (celebrating community is the other one). And what is faith exploration, if not a kaleidoscope of the bewildering diversity of ways God finds us. I have experienced this kind of diversity in my own life – as I have gained in age and experience, my faith has changed dramatically in ways that might have frightened my younger self. Paul beautifully expressed this phenomenon of faith exploration in life in his [love chapter](#).

To acknowledge this progression is not to dismiss earlier faith experiences out of hand – [particularly foundational ones](#). Yet not all faith experiences and expressions are equal. We are watching “Under the Banner of Heaven” lately, an example of how some faith expressions cruelly distort faith. What may be most important in our common faith is to allow for “some space in our togetherness,” as Kahlil Gibran so beautifully puts it in “The Prophet.” We can be generous, hospitable, and respectful with ourselves and with each other on this faith pilgrimage on which we journey both together and alone. And Jesus can love us one and all every step of the Way.

EPWORTH REHOBOTH BEACH

Youth—Moments Matter

Written by Vicki Gordy-Stith

Epworth Youth and Polar Bear Plunge

Our Epworth Youth once again led the way, this time into the frigid Atlantic to raise funds for Special Olympics Delaware! On Sunday, February 4, we met after worship for a meal, provided by Penny McClelland and the Food and Love Team, then headed to the beach. Over 3600 people gathered there to plunge into the cold water from the cold air, with air temperature at 48 degrees and water temperature at 42 degrees. Our group included plungers and towel holders and we raised about \$2780, which contributed to the over \$1 million raised for Special Olympics, serving 4200 athletes. Well done, Epworth! Thank you!



Christmas Joy—Moments Matter

Written by Mickie McManamon

Breakfast with Santa Returns

After a three year break due to the pandemic, Epworth's Breakfast with Santa returned on December 3, 2022. The Christmas Joy elves of Epworth United Methodist Church decorated our Fellowship Hall, prepared all the breakfast foods, and were busy making plans for the Christmas holiday season. A member of the Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santa's, Santa Jerry, visited with children, both young and old! Santa was fluent in American Sign Language. It was such a joy to have a deaf family come to the breakfast. Their children got to interact with Santa for the very first



time. It was a great event and we look forward to it again next year! Mark your calendar for Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023!



Blue Christmas Moments Matter

Written by Mickie McManamon

Blue Christmas Service at Epworth December 21, 2022

What is a Blue Christmas Service? No, it is not connected to the song Elvis made popular....so please know this song is not the center piece of this service!

For those who have suffered loss, the holidays can accentuate feelings of sadness. Being surrounded by happy Christmas carols and holiday parties may cause people to mask their feelings or even create some shame around having them. However, when a loved one is no longer present to celebrate the holiday, there is often guilt, sadness, and loneliness.

A Blue Christmas service can offer some healing and hope. The idea behind the Blue Christmas service is to create space for the acknowledgment of the heaviness often carried during this season, as well as offering the hope that Jesus gives. The Bible clearly acknowledges, celebrates, and makes space for pain, struggle, hardship, and tears — and so should we.

A Blue Christmas service is a quiet, contemplative service that usually happens on the evening of December 21, the winter solstice. This day, which has the longest night and the shortest day, is symbolic of our darker nights when we find ourselves grieving, lonely, or longing for something better. The Blue Christmas service is all about making space during a season that is noisy with celebration, to acknowledge the “both/and” of our emotions. It’s an avenue of making space for beautiful pastoral care and compassionate community for those who are struggling. This is the caring setting that Epworth designed for those struggling during the holiday season. We make space for anyone grieving, lonely or longing for that which is missing this Christmas.

Come and join us, December 21, 2023 at 7 pm.



Here's a picture of the children and youth doing the pageant on Christmas Eve. Under the direction of Adam Emel-Firestone, the young people offered a wonderful pageant at the early worship service.

Children's Play Participants:

Mary: Quinn Emel-Firestone; Joseph: Levi Evans; Narrators: Chase Reynolds (Angel) & Jiji Holt (Angel); King Herod: Kayden Holt; Wise-men: Jaiden Redick, Gage Redick, Brydon Emel-Firestone; Camel: Xander Emel-Firestone, Xavier Pioli; Angels: Kayden Riley-Spillane, Lilah Evans, Leilani Evans, Emily Karpuk, Stella Elmore; Shepherd: Nicholas Karpuk; Sheep: Rowan Emel-Firestone, Lucy Evans, Oliver Riolo

Christmas Joy Moments Matter

Written by Mickie McManamon



Epworth's Cookie Walk

On Saturday, December 10th Epworth's Cookie Walk returned after being away for the last 3 Christmas seasons. The congregation was asked to donate 4 dozen cookies per family. Once again they responded to the call. Saturday morning there were tables



lining the Narthex with all kinds of homemade cookies. Thanks to all who donated cookies! The funds raised were used for our Christmas Joy ministry.



Environment—Moments Matter

Written by Bob Paulen

LOVE YOUR MOTHER...EARTH!

Hopefully spring will be close behind this newsletter. Both spiritually and physically, it will be a time of awakening and new life. Spring will be heralded by trees budding, flowers blooming and renewal of our beach life. We often take these things for granted, but I want to illustrate our dependence on nature by highlighting the tremendous gifts trees share with us to make our lives better and healthier. What gifts do trees provide and how does our planet benefit?

1. Climate resilience—Trees food-making involves absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and storing it. This helps remove greenhouse gases that cause climate change.
2. Clean Air—Trees are good for our health. They produce oxygen for us to breathe and remove harmful pollution/pollutants from the air.
3. A Boost to your health—Time in nature—like a walk in a park correlates with a drop in anxiety and depression. Trees help both our mental and physical well-being.
4. Clean water—Trees filter water making your drinking supply cleaner and more reliable. Trees store and filter more than half of the U.S. water supply.
5. A home for the wildlife we love—Forests create habitat at ground level, the top of their canopies, and everywhere in between. All these habitats in a single area allow many diverse species to thrive.
6. Cooler temperatures—Temps are rising and heat waves are getting longer. A neighborhood tree's shade acts like a natural AC and can even help keep down our energy costs.

So this spring, why not plant a tree to two to honor Mother Earth? If that's not possible, then join a group that has tree planting as their mission. Here are a couple of suggestions: Arbor Day Foundation, One Tree Planted and Trees, Water and People. We'll all benefit by greening our world.

"The earth is the Lord's and they that dwell within"
Psalm 24:1 & 1
Cor. 10:26.



Demonstrating Care Moments Matter

Written by Mickie McManamon

Smart 911 for Deaf and HH Community And...YOU! November 12, 2022

Epworth hosted a community service to our Deaf and HH community. The event was Saturday, November 12, 2022. Smart 911 is a new concept in how we receive emergency services and notify first responders of special issues they may need to be aware of when they respond. Epworth reached out to our Deaf/HH population and interpreters because one of our deaf members experienced a problem when they called 911 during a Covid emergency. The information was shared in their primary language and availability of assistive technology was available to sign up. There were several agencies, Beebe Outreach, DEMA, Deaf Outreach, DDHS, and assistive technology, that came to provide additional services. Smart 911 is a wonderful service available to all. Here are some things to think about why you might like to sign up!

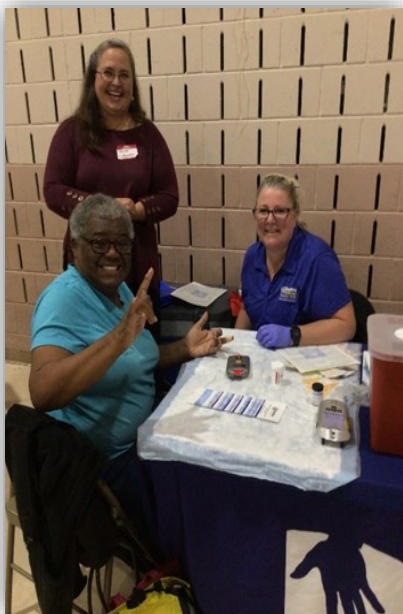
Today, 9-1-1 Can't Find You

Over 80% of calls made to 9-1-1 come from mobile phones. When you dial 9-1-1 from a mobile phone, the 9-1-1 call takers have very little information to help you – only your phone number and a very general sense of your location.

This is a serious problem in an emergency when seconds count, particularly if you or your loved ones have medical conditions or are unable to safely speak. With Smart911, you can provide 9-1-1 call takers and first responders critical information you want them to know in any kind of emergency.

When you call 9-1-1, your Smart911 Safety Profile displays on the 9-1-1 screen and the 9-1-1 call takers can view your addresses, medical information, home information, description of pets and vehicles, and emergency contacts. You can provide as much or as little information as you like.

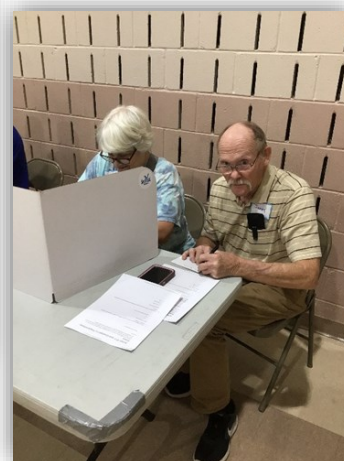
Smart911 is a national service meaning your Smart911 Safety Profile travels with you and is visible to any participating 9-1-1 center nationwide. Anyone can sign up, even you! It is a free service....check it out at www.smart911.com!



Annette Predeaux and one of our interpreters, Lynn Kohler, getting her sugar checked by a Beebe representative.



DEMA, Deaf Outreach and some of our facilitators and recipients receiving updates on evacuation, if needed. Routes were highlighted and discussed. In addition all received a To Go Bag with a list of essentials if you need to evacuate!



Mary and James using available computers to sign up for Smart 911.