

THE FIRST WORD



212 S. PARK STREET, KALAMAZOO, MI 49007 // (269) 381-6340 // WWW.UMC-KZO.ORG

JOIN US FOR WORSHIP IN PERSON OR ONLINE ON SUNDAYS AT 10AM.



Photo by Keith Mumma

Seeking: Honest Questions for a Deeper Faith ***Lent 2023***

The Lenten scriptures this year reveal many stories of Jesus encountering people who are seeking: Nicodemus comes to him in the veil of night, he approaches a Samaritan woman at a well, he heals a man born without sight. In these stories, each person is seeking a new beginning, a different life, a deeper faith. What unfolds is an exchange filled with questions and exploration. Often, an unveiling occurs—assumptions are disrupted, a new perspective is revealed, mystery grows.

Our Lenten series is founded on questions. Many of our weekly questions feel restorative (“Can these bones live?”). Some feel like a charge or challenge (“Who will you listen to?”). Some questions are hopeful and curious (“How do we begin again?”). Our questions won’t necessarily lead to answers, but they can help us find clarity and a new perspective. Ultimately, we pray they lead to a new beginning, a restoration, a wider grace. Like the characters in our Lenten scriptures, we are also seeking many things: clarity, connection, wonder, justice, balance. We are seeking our calling, the sacred, and how to live as a disciple. Throughout the turbulence of the past few years, many of us are asking big questions about our lives and our faith. Our hope is that this series will help us unpack some of those big questions in ways that are honest and faithful. Throughout this season, we hope you will continually ask yourself: What am I seeking? What is God seeking?

Together, let us engage in the spiritual practice of seeking. In this engagement, let us stay curious, open, and nimble. Prayerfully, may we soften our assumptions and expand our perspectives. As we draw more deeply into the heart of God, may these questions create a safe space to explore and lead us more deeply into the fullness of life

-Pastor Julie

Lenten Labyrinth: A Prayer Practice

There is a long history of the use of labyrinths in Christian worship. The purpose of the labyrinth is to slow us down and, in this season, we contemplate the themes of Lent. Our worship series is entitled “Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith.” The questions we will consider are restorative, challenging, hopeful and curious with the desire that they will lead us to greater clarity and perspective. The labyrinth is a wonderful tool for seeking, questioning, and coming to places of peace and restoration.

The labyrinth will be set up in Wesley Hall throughout the season of Lent. You are invited to walk the labyrinth after worship on Sunday or Monday through Thursday between the hours of 9am-4pm. It is safe for several people to walk the labyrinth at one time but please allow space for each walker. This labyrinth requires the removal of your shoes to preserve the cloth of the labyrinth. The labyrinth can take 10-20 minutes to walk depending on your pace and the time you spend in the middle. There will also be prayer stations set up outside the four corners of the labyrinth. Please make use of them to enhance your time of prayer and contemplation. If you have never walked a labyrinth, I encourage you to try this ancient prayer practice to quiet your mind, center yourself and allow your spirit to be in prayer, curiosity, and expectation. Peace be with you.

-Pastor Julie



Children and Families Ministries News

The Children and Families Ministries Team invite all to save the date for the March All Church Family Fun!

6-8pm, Friday, March 10, 2023, Bowling Party at Airway Lanes, please RSVP to jlibrizz@umc-kzo.org by Sunday, March 5th with how many bowlers will attend so we have enough lanes for all who attend! Cost is \$10 per person, to be collected at the event, which includes shoes. We'll have the alleys from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Airway Lanes (5626 Portage Road), but plan to arrive by 5:45 to rent shoes and find that perfect ball so we're ready to roll at 6 p.m.!

Moms Retreat



Moms' Retreat from April 28-30, 2023 at the Ludington beach house! We encourage all moms to save the date and plan to join us for this special event. We will be sending out more information in the coming weeks for those who would like to sign up so keep an eye out for further details. We can't wait to see you there!

Nursery

We have Nursery available on the 2nd floor with trained and fully vaccinated caring adults for infants through 4 year olds from 9:45am - 12:15pm each Sunday. During worship after, "A Time for the Child Within Us All" children 4 years old to 6th grade are invited to join us for their own kind of worship on the 2nd floor called, "Godly Play." We hear and see one of God's stories and wonder about what it might mean together. Children will be returned to their family during the closing hymn of worship. If it is a Communion Sunday children will rejoin their families for communion. Then children will be returned a bit earlier for communion. After church there is Sunday School for children 4 year olds through 5th grade in room 203.

Thank you to Ms. Anne Sherfield, Ms. Lisa Coe, Ms. Jane Barnes and Ms. Joyce Moore for taking turns to lead Sunday School this year! Sunday school begins with snacks in the Arches area. There is also Fellowship Time for Parents in the room next to the Arches for parents during this time with coffee!



Faith Milestones

Faith Milestones are those firsts as we grow in our faith experiences because we know it doesn't happen just on Sunday mornings. It's part of all we are and all we do as God's be-loved people. Faith Milestones is a new opportunity for our 3rd -5th graders! Sunday, February 26 we will share dinner and learn about prayer and communion with hopes of helping to lead communion on Sunday, March 5, 2023.

Please email Ms. Julia at: jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org for more info.

Small Groups

We would like to express our gratitude for taking the time to share your thoughts and interests through the recent small group surveys. Your input is invaluable in helping us create a successful small group program. We believe that small groups are an excellent way to connect with others, form meaningful relationships, and grow in your personal and spiritual journey. Stay tuned to "Around the Corner" for regular updates and sign-up sheets for the various small groups that we will be offering. We are confident that there will be something for everyone and we look forward to the opportunity to serve you in this way.

Family fun!

Thank you to everyone who attended our January and February Family Fun events! Your support and participation made them truly special. We are grateful for our community and the memories created together. Thank you again!



Swimming fun



Ice Skating Feb 05 2023

Can You Lend an Ear to Helping Our Neighbors?

Ears wanted! Our Helping Our Neighbors ministry (HON) is in need of volunteers to help those who need assistance with utilities or avoiding eviction. Since the pandemic, this ministry has been operating by phone, answering calls daily. If you have a compassionate heart and are comfortable talking on the phone and using email, you can be a HON volunteer!

HON is hoping to staff this rewarding and much needed ministry with enough volunteers for each day of the week to be shared by two volunteers. Will you lend your ear? For information, contact Ann at rasweany@charter.net, or Ruth at rlamachia@umc-kzo.org.

RECONCILING MINISTRY TEAM (RMT)

RMT Book Review for Black History Month

One of the new things the Reconciling Missions Team is doing this year is a monthly book club as a continuation of the ABAR work we started last spring with the Big Deal Weekend. February is Black History Month and we would love for you to join us in reading *This Here Flesh* by black author Cole Arthur Riley. Here is a synopsis of her book as well as a review provided by one of our RMT co-leaders Mandakini Brophy.

Here is a synopsis provided by the website [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) who also have a list of books to help celebrate Black History month.

"From the womb, we must repeat with regularity that to love ourselves is to survive. I believe that is what my father wanted for me and knew I would so desperately need: a tool for survival, the truth of my dignity named like a mercy new each morning."

So writes Cole Arthur Riley in her unforgettable book of stories and reflections on discovering the sacred in her skin. In these deeply transporting pages, Arthur Riley reflects on the stories of her grandmother and father, and how they revealed to her an embodied, dignity-affirming spirituality, not only in what they believed but in the act of living itself. Writing memorably of her own childhood and coming to self, Arthur Riley boldly explores some of the most urgent questions of life and faith: How can spirituality not silence the body, but instead allow it to come alive? How do we honor, lament, and heal from the stories we inherit? How can we find peace in a world overtaken with dislocation, noise, and unrest? In this indelible work of contemplative storytelling, Arthur Riley invites us to descend into our own stories, examine our capacity to rest, wonder, joy, rage, and repair, and find that our humanity is not an enemy to faith but evidence of it.

At once a compelling spiritual meditation, a powerful intergenerational account, and a tender coming-of-age narrative, *This Here Flesh* speaks potently to anyone who suspects that our stories might have something to say to us.

"*This Here Flesh* written by Cole Arthur Riley is a theological narrative of race, identity, experience, and faith. She does an incredible job making meaning of her life experience and generations before her. Each of her stories adds more perspective on how we all bear the image of God. Specifically, she emphasizes how black lives add to the root and goodness of Resilience and God's story." - Mandakini Brophy



Children's Books for Black History Month

Children's Defense Fund recommends books for children of all ages. Scan QR Code for list of books.

Coming in March

Please join us in March as we celebrate Disability Awareness Month and read "The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability" by Nancy Eiesland

Our Sympathy and Prayers to the Family and Friends of:

Keene P. Wolfe who passed away
January 20th

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

Lana Allen & family
Don and Harriet Chalker
Christine
Destiney & Jasmine
Ashton Fredenburg
Lenora Holliday
John & Carol Holmes
Nancy Hyde
Nancy Johnson
Dan Kitchen
Bill and Ruth LaMachia
Elaine Martin & John St. Laurent
Judy McClelland
Durrell & Marsha McKenzie
Susan Noble
The Rawsky Family
Anna Rassmussen
Charles, Micah, Garret, & Emily Rose
Rudy
Mary Lou Sanderson
Shannon
Barb Skuza
Nelson & Mary Stapleton
Jim Treece
The Uggen family
Lori Valkema
Liza and the Wolfe Family
Miriam Downey
Janet Wyndendorf

Prayer requests

If you would like to share a prayer request with our clergy and prayer ministry team, please visit www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/, or, please call the church at (269) 381-6340 and leave a message. Prayer requests need to be received each **THURSDAY by noon** for inclusion in our weekly list for the prayer ministry team.

After Worship Coffee Service Volunteers

Sunday coffee service has resumed at Kalamazoo FUMC. Join us after worship in the Perks area on the first level of the church. We look forward to once again sharing coffee and fellowship with you! If you have questions or would like to assist, please contact Ruth LaMachia at rlamachia@umc-kzo.org.

Lent small group opportunities

A WAY OTHER THAN OUR OWN: DEVOTIONS FOR LENT.

Leader: Carol Hodges on Wednesday Evenings. 7-8pm on Zoom, and Thursday mornings in-person at the Church 10:30 -11:30am.

"A Way Other Than Our Own" written by theologian Walter Breuggemann is a series of daily Lenten reflections. Participants read these brief reflections each day on their own time, and then discuss in greater depth each week during small group times. Books can be ordered from Amazon or from your favorite local book sellers. A bi-monthly group will meet on Sunday evenings, 2/19, 3/5, 3/19, and 4/2 from 6-7:30 at church. Leader TBD. Weekly Small Groups begin March 1st and 2nd and continue each Wednesday and Thursday through Lent.



Interested participants may sign up at the Welcome desk or scan the QR code attached below using your phone camera to access our online form. Simply open your camera, point it at the code, and click on the link that appears.

SEEKING: HONEST QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER FAITH: A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

Leader: Pastor Julie Kline, Sunday mornings 11:15-12:30 in-person after worship

"Seeking" is a series of scripture and art reflections that correspond directly with the worship and preaching themes each Sunday during the Season of Lent. Participants may read the reflections on their own time and then dig deeper into the themes with Pastor Julie following worship. A bi-monthly group will meet on Sunday evenings, 2/19, 3/5, 3/19, and 4/2 from 6-7:30 at church. Booklets may be obtained at the church. Electronic version of booklet available please email jcelorio@umc-kzo.org if interested.

Academy Class opportunities

MANNA AND MERCY

Pastor Matt will continue teaching the class "Manna and Mercy" through April 16th following worship from 11:15-12:30 (taking off Sundays March 3, and April 2 for confirmation class). "Manna and Mercy" covers the narrative arc of scripture while teaching a series of 25 theological principals that emerge from the narrative. Participants may join the class at any time, no need to participate in prior classes.

"A HISTORY OF RACISM: AN EXPERIENTIAL JOURNEY VIA THE POWER OF FILM"

You're invited to an immersive experience of what Black brothers and sisters have endured for centuries through images, sounds, and music from Hollywood movies and other video sources. Mark Stucky will lead three sessions pondering the periods of slavery, the Ku Klux Klan and Jim Crow, and then current issues (such as police shootings and reparations). The Academy class will meet in the Parlor from 11:15 to 12:15, Sundays, Feb. 12-26, Those not able to attend can still view abundant class resources and links at cinemaspirit.info/race/, and those that will attend can use the links to preview, review, and delve deeper into the session experiences. (This is a "reboot" of the class from last March, but for those who attended all the sessions last year, about 20% of the material this time will be new.)

JAZZ CONCERT: featuring The Baylor Project from Baylor University

You're invited to join us at First United Methodist Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan on Sunday, March 19, 2023 at 3:00 p.m. in the sanctuary for a special event. Come and be a part of this special gathering and make new memories with us. See you there!



The First Word for March

Articles for the next issue are due no later than **March 6, 2023**. The next newsletter will be mailed the week of **March 12**. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be sent to jcelorio@umc-kzo.org. Articles may be edited for space and content.



Pastor Julie Kline on Sunday February 5th.



Rev. Matt Weiler Sunday February 5th.