

HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

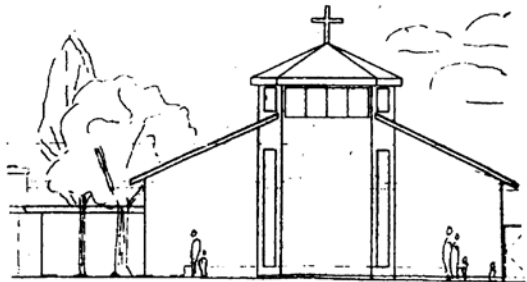
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

<http://www.parsippanyumc.com> E-Mail: jedwards14@juno.com

Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.

In a hostile, hurting world we reach out to share kindness and laughter. Our spirituality is based on Jesus and his love and compassion. We provide a community of support and healing where all are welcomed and valued regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or economic status. In a world where people feel they can love only those who are like themselves, we seek to celebrate the uniqueness of every human being.

"Making Room in the Circle"



FEBRUARY 2014



A sermon based on Matthew 3:13-17 preached on January 12th, 2014.

This is the first appearance of Jesus in the Gospels as an adult. He is around the age of thirty years old, and strangely, we know practically nothing of how he has been spending his life up until this moment.

We can assume that through the years a deepening understanding has been evolving inside Jesus' soul -- a growing sense of the

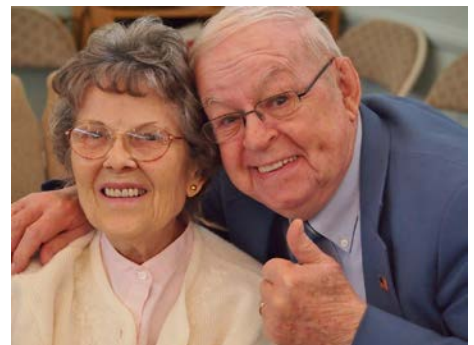
vocation that God is calling him to -- and it comes to a head when Jesus hears about the ministry of John the Baptist down at the River Jordan, where thousands of people have flocked to this strange prophet in order to be dunked by him in the water of the River as a sign of a new life.

If Jesus came from Nazareth to the place where John was baptizing, then Jesus was willing to make a very long trip -- a 70 mile pilgrimage by foot -- in order to undergo a dunking by John.

It was a troubling thing to many in the early Church why Jesus -- the sinless one -- would undergo John's baptism. It seemed to imply, on the one hand, that Jesus needed to repent, and on the other, that John was somehow **above** Jesus, so that Jesus felt obliged to submit himself to John. And so Matthew takes the story he inherited from Mark and adds John's objection: *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* It's as though Matthew wants to make sure people get it that Jesus is the bigger dude.

But before he set out on that pilgrimage, I think Jesus had become clear about two things:

First, that the path that God was calling him on would involve a whole new understanding of what "holiness" meant. Before this, holiness involved keeping one's distance from anything



that was tainted by sin; it meant staying away from sinners, staying away from disease and blemish. Holiness did not descend into the muck of life; it stayed aloof and above, lest it be contaminated.



But over time Jesus had come to realize that true holiness actually moves in the opposite direction -- that God is constantly reaching out to us human beings in the very muck and mess of our lives, and if we are to manifest something of the holiness of God in our human lives, then our lives must embody the compassion that seeks to be with those who are hurting.

The Samaritan who stops to embrace the man beaten up at the side of the road is expressing holiness; the priest and the Levite who keep their distance so they won't be contaminated by the half-dead man, well they're living out a fake kind of holiness.

And so Jesus had become absolutely clear that when he got to the banks of the Jordan, he would not stand there watching from above as others humbled themselves – he would enter the waters himself *with* all the thousands of ordinary, clueless Joes and Janes like you and me who had come there with broken lives hoping for a new beginning.

And the second thing that had become clear to Jesus was that in order to truly live, a person must first undergo a kind of spiritual death. It was the principle he would speak of later on in his ministry when he said that *“those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”*

And so when Jesus entered those waters to be dunked by John, he was giving himself over to a ritual that expressed a kind of death: the dunking was intended to symbolize death by drowning... death to that little ego-centered existence where everything revolves around me; and everything is about bolstering my image of myself through the accolades of others, a kind of life that is actually a kind of bondage, because it requires everything to go my way, and everybody to affirm my existence.



Jesus enters the water to let that fraudulent form of life die, in order that a much more expansive life may begin living through him; one that isn't all about him, but rather about the love of God in which we live and move and have our very being.



And then, as he comes up out of the water, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the voice of God saying, “You are my beloved son, in whom I delight;” and Jesus arises with an understanding that moving forward he is to be the flesh and blood embodiment of the unconditional love of God in this world, reaching out to all the lost sheep.

So at the heart of baptism is death, a fact we often miss since we don't dunk here when we baptize, and because mostly our baptisms involve beautiful little babies, so full of life.

I was reminded of a quote I've kept over the years about what baptism is all about, written by a United Methodist Bishop, William Willimon:

"To be baptized is to be condemned to die. It is dress rehearsal for the last day of your life as well as for every day in which we must die to all that would make us less than God wants for us. Baptism is also resurrection practice. Between our death in baptism and our next death at the end of our earth life, we live in the hope that the same God who raised us from the waters of baptism will raise us again, pulling us forth from the tomb like newborn babes come from the womb. We live in confidence which comes from baptism, because we have already been through a trial run of our death and resurrection. We do not fear death, because we need not fear what we have already done."

I am fascinated by the story of Harold I told yesterday in his eulogy of his experience of jumping out of that burning plane 15000 feet up in the air above Germany. He was just a kid – 22 years old. He'd gone through this four month crash course to train him to become a flight navigator. There was a great deal of technical information for the Harold to absorb, and there hadn't been time for Harold to actually experience what jumping out of a plane should be like; all they could do is tell him what it would be like.

And suddenly there is that explosion, and the plane is on fire – it's going down. Harold helps the wounded bombardier, guiding him to the door so he could jump from the burning plane.

And so there Harold is -- the last man on the plane -- and he says a little prayer, putting his life in God's hands, and he jumps. They'd told him to expect a sudden jolt, but he's surprised that there is no jolt, he simply floats peacefully down to the ground, the only sound the swoosh of air rushing by. He hears the sound of the plane explode – the plane in which just a few seconds before he had been sitting on board -- but it doesn't disturb him. He finds himself enjoying the view – the sight of the German forest into which he is slowly descending.



In the days that follow, traveling alone at night in what surely would be considered an extremely dangerous situation – he is after all, in enemy territory in the midst of a bloody war-- the strange sense of calm continues for Harold as he finds himself feeling oddly free, enjoying the natural beauty of the earth.

As I suggested in my eulogy, I think this experience had something to do with the serene quality that Harold demonstrated in his life. He never seemed to be rattled by anything. It was, as if Harold had already passed through death when handed his life over to God and jumped out of that plane. And having accepted death, it allowed him to walk serenely through life.



I am reminded of another story I heard from World War II. A Lutheran pastor is being interrogated by an SS officer. The pastor is beat mercilessly, but the SS officer can't get the pastor to tell him what it is he wants to know. Frustrated and full of rage, the SS officer screams at the pastor, "don't you know I can kill you?!!!"

The pastor calmly answers, "Do what you must; but I have already died with Christ." The rage suddenly disappears. The SS officer realizes the power he thought he held over the pastor does not exist.

I also thought about Helen, the member of our congregation who along with Fred is over in Troy Hills Center. Helen is nearing the end of her life. Throughout her life, Helen's nature has

been that of a determined fighter, and that fierce, determined spirit has served her well. It is this spirit that has allowed Helen to valiantly battle cancer for so many years.

In recent months Helen has been going through a lot of anguish and agitation, brought on, I think, by the fact she losing the battle she's been fighting.

But recently I've seen a shift taking place inside Helen. The impression I have is that she is embracing the death that is awaiting her, and giving herself permission to stop fighting, and to simply accept what is. The other night when I saw her she seemed strangely radiant, at peace, unafraid. She seemed in possession of kind of freedom.

You and I, as far as we know, we're not reaching that point in our journeys. We have more life to live; more battles to fight.

But what if when we find ourselves stressing out to the max, and everything seems to be going wrong because it's not what we think should be happening – what if, in that moment we could try to let go -- surrender our lives to God's care, come what may, trusting what we tell each other each week, that God really is trustworthy with our lives, come what may?

What would it feel like in those moments of conflict that so often afflict our relationships, when the people around us don't seem to be loving us in the way we think they should, we could remind ourselves that when we got baptized, whenever that was, the little fear-filled, ego-centered "me" got buried, and another me arose – the one who is God's beloved child, in whom God is well pleased?

It's the freedom I believe that Jesus experienced that day when he came up out of the water from death to life; the freedom I think that was glimpsed when Harold jumped out of the plane; the freedom that I hope Helen is entering as she accepts what is.

What would it feel like to live out that freedom that is God's gift to us?

In the kindness of Jesus,
Pastor Jeff

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Looking back...January was a no meeting month. This is also a no meeting month, keeping everyone safe should the winter weather be dangerous.

FEBRUARY - NO MEETING

**United Methodist
Women**

Feb 14 – St. Valentines' Day

Feb 17 – President's Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill; and
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Denise White and Grace Agre.

God Bless,
Doris Bradley

Prov. 17:17 "A friend loves at all times."



The UMYF will be holding their annual **Super Bowl Sub Sale** --- you can order your subs from any youth group member on January 19 and 26 at church. The subs will be available for you to pick up on Super Bowl Sunday – February 2nd – after church.

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An excerpt of Pastor's Jeff's sermon from Epiphany Sunday, January 5, 2013 entitled "There's Always Room in the Circle."

One of the mothers of our church told me that her six year old son recently switched schools, and that he was having a hard time fitting in among his new classmates -- in particular, that he was feeling as if they were excluding him from their pre-existing cliques.

She said this is how he put it: *"Mommy, you how Pastor Jeff says there's always room in the circle... for friends and stuff? Well, I think that's a lie. I don't think that it's true."*

I was genuinely moved by the fact that this little boy had so fully taken to heart the ideal expressed in the words we speak each week: that *"there's always room in the circle"* -- that he'd gotten it so completely regarding how people are **supposed** to treat one another, specifically, in regard to welcoming the newcomers among us.

It pained me, of course to hear of the distress that this little boy was experiencing when this ideal of how people are **supposed** to treat one another – the way Jesus instructed us to treat others – came face to face with the reality that too often in this world people **don't** treat one another this way, and that he had to have to experience first hand what it feels like to be excluded in this world.

It also struck me how deep seeded this propensity to exclude others is in human nature. These are six year old children we're talking about, which raises questions: where did this excluding behavior come from? Was it taught, which is to say, modeled somehow by the children's parents and families and others? Or is it in some sense instinctive, part of the inheritance of our DNA through the ages?

In all likelihood it is some combination of both, which would be the traditional Christian take on what is more generally called "sin" -- the darkness that opposes the light. We learn bad choices from others, but there is also something within us that compels us to make destructive choices...

There are two things required of us... First, to own the darkness that is within each of us: the ways we cling to our personal kingdoms. Our compulsive need to be right and have others be wrong. The subtle ways we exclude and diminish others in order to feel superior. There is something of King Herod in all of us, and we need to recognize his presence or the darkness will get the better of us.

But the other thing we need to do is to hold onto hope. A new possibility for how people can live in this world came into being when the Christ-child was born, and having once made its appearance, it can never disappear. The light can not be overcome.

If the little boy from our church can find in his experience of being excluded an empathy for every excluded person on earth, his life will be a sign of hope for others in this world. If he can hold onto the truth that there really is room in the circle for everybody even though people routinely fail to live in harmony with that truth, his life **will** be blessed, and he will be a blessing for others. He will bear witness to the Light.

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Anyone who is interested in serving from time to time as a **liturgist** in the Sunday worship service is invited to speak to Pastor Jeff.



We recently lost two long term, beloved members of our circle of love. Harold Gantert died on December 31st at the age of 91, and Trudy Hunt died on January 8th at the age of 83. We will miss them, but we rejoice that they have entered into the eternal love that is the communion of saints.



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Making Room for Jesus

A 6 Week Small Group Experience During the Season of Lent led by David Turner

THE Scriptures tell us that Jesus wants to enter our lives—and wants to share his life with us. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20). The season of Lent can be a time for those who want to slow down the pace of their lives...listen for the sound of Jesus’ knocking...and consider what it might mean to open up the door.

Making Room for Jesus will offer a chance for interested persons to do just this. To engage our thinking and spur our discussion, we will be using a selection of short scripture passages and devotional readings. David Turner will lead six group meetings on **Tuesday evenings, from 7:00 to 8:30, beginning March 5th**. The group size will be limited to 15 members. Got questions or want to sign up? If so, please speak to David or contact him at: (973) 759-7850 or psalter103@aol.com.

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The Cogan’s are couponing! We are collecting coupons to help purchase food for the Parsippany Food Pantry. We also have a book of coupons that any church member is welcome to browse and take any coupons that they could use. We plan on getting to church at 10am on Sundays to cut and organize, helpers welcome. Please save your extra Sunday coupons for us!

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On the second Thursday of every other month our congregation provides dinner for the families at **Homeless Solutions**. Our next scheduled dinner is **February 13th**. If you would like to take a turn in helping with this outreach, or if you would like to donate money towards the expenses, please speak to Laurie Wilken or Connie Wallace.



The local schools collect both Box Tops and Labels for Education. Anyone interested in saving these off of your general purchases can bring them to church, and one of the families with kids will be GLAD to hand them in. The closest elementary school, Troy Hills, uses the money earned from Box Tops to purchase new books for the school library. Bring them in and give them to Alison Cogan if you have no other school to donate them to.

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A day time men's discussion group with Pastor Jeff meets **Fridays at 1 p.m.** at the church. We read together short readings and discuss them during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.

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"Living in the Light" meets on **Wednesdays** promptly at **11 a.m.** in Pastor Jeff's office. Pastor Jeff leads a Bible Study of the scripture lesson he will preach on the following Sunday, followed by a guided mediation and prayer. Anybody who is available at that time of day is warmly invited to attend.

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A **small gathering of men** from our church meet together **every Tuesday at 7:15 a.m. at the Empire Diner** with Pastor Jeff for breakfast, conversation, and a concluding prayer. All men are welcome.

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CHURCH CALENDAR and SCHEDULING EVENTS

The church calendar on our website www.parsippanyumc.com has been updated. The calendar in the church office is no longer being updated. If you want to schedule an event, you need to look at the website calendar to see if the date is available. All requests for use of the church facilities need to be approved by the trustees, Connie Keller or Amy Gripp.

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FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS – If you want to remember or honor a special occasion in your life by putting flowers on the altar, please get in touch with Connie Keller. You are certainly welcome at any time to place flowers on the altar. If you want an announcement in the bulletin, please call Connie Keller or send her an email with the dedication. Contact information: Connie's cell: 973-568-5404; home: 973-887-4384;

email: connie@mhmlender.com

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Anyone aware of a **Prayer Concern** is invited to contact Grace Agre at 539-3855 who will put the **Prayer Chain** into action. If Grace cannot be reached, please contact Pastor Jeff. If you would like to add your name to the people who receive the prayer chain, please speak to Betty Polen.



Parsippany Food Pantry - Wes Sitgreaves has called to our attention the ongoing need of the Emergency Food Pantry in Parsippany in these difficult economic times. There are more and more families turning to the food pantry for help. You can bring your donations of non-perishable food items to the church any Sunday. Wes takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. Supermarket gift cards are also welcome - buy them from Betty Polen and raise money for the church at the same time!!! This is a very easy way to give back to the less-fortunate

in our own township.

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Consider becoming a part of one or more of our Musical Groups here at church:

Bell Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in joining us, please speak to Barb Bradley or Aimee Letsch - or just show up on Thursday and see what happens!

Choir – rehearses Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. We always have an "open robe" for anyone who loves to sing. We sing in 4-part harmony, so if you've sung in your high school chorus or any other equivalent, you have a great start! Speak to any choir member or Barb Bradley if you're interested.

Kids Bell Choir – rehearses every Sunday after worship. All children and youth in 3rd grade and up (including junior and senior high school) are welcome. Directed by Aimee Letsch (973-585-7634)

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SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR FEBRUARY

Feb. 2
Micah 6:1-8
1 Corinth 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

Feb. 9
Isaiah 58:1-9a
1 Corinth 2:1-12
Matthew 5:13-20

Feb. 16
Deuteronomy 30:15-20
1 Corinth 3:1-9
Matthew 5:21-37

Feb. 23
Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18
1 Corinth 3:10-11,16-23
Matthew 5:38-48



God has poured out his love into our hearts....

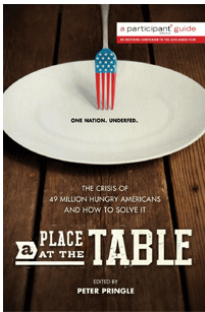
Romans 5:5


FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

| | | | |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 2 nd | Mia Savarin | 11 th | Valia Hawkins |
| 3 rd | Denise White | 11 th | Julianne Karr |
| 3 rd | Justin Cogan | 11 th | Ryan Wink |
| 3 rd | Diane Morgan | 19 th | Charlotte Romeo |
| 4 th | Susan Valcoff | 22 nd | Elizabeth Vance |
| 5 th | Barbara Munnely | 22 nd | Kylie Collins |
| 7 th | Charlotte Vance | 23 rd | Krista Kempski |
| 8 th | Andrew Schnetzer | 24 th | Tracy Krisa Kempski |
| 10 th | Mark Dierbach | 25 th | Sarah Edwards |
| 10 th | TJ Cogan | 25 th | Keith Hawkins, Jr. |
| | | 28 th | Grace Agre |

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| 16 th | Mariahna Suzan & Joshua Vedam |
| 19 th | June & Russ Schnetzer |



St. Gregory's Episcopal Church at 480 S. Beverwyck Road in Parsippany will host a showing of the film, **"Place at the Table"** on **Saturday February 1 at 7:30 p.m.** Childcare will be provided. The film synopsis states the following: Fifty million Americans, including 1 in 4 children don't know live with uncertainty regarding where their next meal is coming from. A Place at the Table tells the powerful stories of three such Americans, who maintain their dignity even as they struggle just to eat. In a riveting journey that will change forever how you think about the hungry, A Place at the Table shows how the issue could be solved forever, once the American public decides that ending hunger is in the best interests of us all.

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Skylands District Day of Learning

Resourcing the Church for Vital Ministry , **Saturday, February 22, 2014**

Butler United Methodist Church, 5 Bartholdi Avenue, Butler, New Jersey

Schedule for the Day: *Registration 8:30 am—9:00 am; Devotions and Plenary 9:00 am—9:45 am; 1st Workshop Session 10:00 am—11:30 am; 2nd Workshop Session 11: 45 to 1:15*

Workshops will be offered on: *staff/parish Relations Committee; Conflict; Christian Witness in a Prison State; Community Outreach; Creative Children's ministry; Vital Youth Ministry; Safe Sanctuaries; Reconciling Ministries; Spirituality of Fund Raising; Celebrate Recovery; Lay Leaders; Beyond Friendly- becoming an inviting and welcoming church; Trustees; Taxes and financial issues affecting churches; vital small groups; creative worship.*

Speak to Pastor Jeff if you would like to attend one or two of the workshops.

Outstanding Evangelist Award

January 2014

Maggie Letsch is hereby honored for being an outstanding evangelist of the Parsippany United Methodist Church, sharing the good news of



God's love revealed in Jesus, and embodied in our congregation, where *there is always room in the circle*. In the past year Maggie has been personally responsible for bringing *eleven people* into the circle of God's love. Way to go



Maggie!!!

"Our message is that God was making all human beings his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends. Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends!"

2Corinthians 5:19-20



February 2014

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | 30 | 31 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 10:30 AM Worship | 3 | 4 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast | 5 11:00 AM Living in the Light | 6 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir | 7 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group | 8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 10:30 AM Worship | 10 | 11 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast | 12 11:00 AM Living in the Light | 13 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir Homeless Solutions | 14 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group | 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 10:30 AM Worship | 17 | 18 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast | 19 11:00 AM Living in the Light | 20 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir | 21 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group | 22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 10:30 AM Worship | 24 | 25 7:15 AM Men's Breakfast | 26 11:00 AM Living in the Light | 27 7:00 PM Bell Choir 7:45 PM Adult Choir | 28 1:00 PM Men's Discussion Group | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |