

Friday, January 8, 2021

Greetings Paragould FUMC!

So good to be writing to you as we celebrate this new year! I am praying for you and your family as we begin 2021 facing old challenges and new opportunities. I am so happy to be in ministry with you!

THIS SUNDAY: We celebrate Jesus' Baptism and remember our own! In each of the gospels Matthew, Luke, and Mark it is recorded that Jesus joined John the Baptist at the River Jordan to be baptized. The text says, "...as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" This is one of the significant moments in the life and story of Jesus as his identity is further revealed and confirmed. On this occasion we typically remember and celebrate our own baptisms. We will do the same this year - from home! In preparation for worship Sunday, prepare a saucer or bowl of water to be near you during worship. While streaming the service, you will be invited to dip your hands into the water and mark your own hand with a cross, remembering your own baptism. Along with remembering our baptism, we recommit ourselves to God by recalling our baptismal vows. Again, we will do so this year by sharing in covenant prayers from home via streaming. We will share in the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer while remembering our baptism this Sunday. In this covenant liturgy we commit ourselves again to God as we begin another year. Join us at 9am/11am this Sunday as we share in this service including John Wesley's prayer:

Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal. I do here covenant with you, O Christ, to take my lot with you as it may fall. Through your grace I promise that neither life nor death shall part me from you. And let the covenant I have made on earth be ratified in heaven. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 12noon FACEBOOK LIVE PRAYER: Beginning Wednesday January 13, Rev. Dane or Rev. Chase will meet you via the FUMC Facebook page for a time of check-in and prayer each Wednesday at 12noon. Join us for this time of weekly prayer! See you on Facebook!

WEDNESDAY SANCTUARY OPEN 4-6pm: As we did during the Advent Season, the Sanctuary will be open to you for personal prayer and reflection Wednesdays 4-6pm. Facesmasks and social distance required.

WEDNESDAY MINISTRY MOMENT 6pm FACEBOOK: Join us online via the church's Facebook page for occasional ministry opportunities including music, study, and prayer.

FUMC LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS MEETINGS: [Linked here is our 2021 FUMC Leadership roster.](#) These committees and teams were approved at our Charge Conference last year. I welcome and celebrate these new chairpersons and committee members. I believe we have an excellent roster of leaders and servants. Please hold these individuals in prayer and reach out to them if you have any questions regarding their area of responsibility and ministry. Our business meetings for this month are scheduled as listed below. I expect these meetings to be via streaming online (ZOOM) only. Please note the Church Council meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 27 at 6pm. Council members are expected and all FUMC members are welcome.

* Sun. Jan. 17: 5pm SPRC; 6pm Finance

* Sun. Jan. 24: 5pm Trustees

* Wed. Jan. 27: 6pm Church Council Meeting

STEWARDSHIP SERIES: Please plan ahead for this month's annual Stewardship Sermon Series "First Things First" on Sundays January 17, 24, 31. We will spend these three weeks considering what it means to place God first in all aspects of our lives. What idols, big or small, do we need to put away? How is this related to our financial discipline and giving? On Sunday, January 31 we'll complete our 2021 Commitment Cards. Begin to pray about your giving now!

FUMC & COVID-19: FUMC Leadership continues to monitor COVID-19 case numbers closely. The Trustees are the group whose responsibilities include decisions regarding ministry and safety relative to the pandemic. As of now, our campus is open. Small groups can meet, but we need to avoid group gatherings where possible. We will continue Sunday morning worship via streaming until further notice. The Witt House is operating under strict safety measures. The Arkansas UMC Conference is providing an online COVID dashboard (<https://arumc.org/covid19/dashboard/>) for each county. As of this writing, the Greene County recommendation reads as follows. **Congregations should strongly consider not having in-person gatherings and worship based on the following statistics- cases per 100k: 76.3 & positive test rate: 21.5%. In-person gatherings and worship are not recommended if the "cases per 100k" > 75 OR if the "cases per 100k" > 25 & the "positive test rate" > 10%.**

OUR COUNTRY: I write the USPS version of our newsletter on Monday. I then sometimes tweak the email version before it goes out later that week. Right now, I am editing the email newsletter late Wednesday night. What a strange Wednesday this has been. I was not in the office today because my daughter Edith needed X-rays and a cast on her wrist this morning. 2021 is not off to any better start than 2020! This afternoon I was shocked to see the violent riots at our United States capitol. As I write this, the grounds have been secured and the houses of congress have returned to their work. News outlets report at least 4 people have died - 1 by shooting and 3 in medical emergencies. More will be made known regarding the details of his troubling day. What we can say at this point is that today was a historic and disappointing occasion for our nation. My heart is grieved and disturbed. I am praying constantly as I know many of you are as well. We will continue in prayer in worship this Sunday. I will be reflecting on these events in preparing my sermon. In the meantime, I am reminded that today, January 6, is the Feast of Epiphany. We celebrated this holy day this past Sunday including reading from Psalm 72, "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper." Jesus is the fulfillment of God's justice and righteousness. Jesus alone. All earthly kings and governments will fall short of this high calling. We have been reminded of this fact this week. As we prepare for this coming Sunday and recalling Jesus' baptism, we remember that we have made an oath to serve Christ and Christ alone. We have been baptized into his life, death, and resurrection. He is our King and savior, our only hope.

Lastly, I draw your attention to one small matter regarding our staff. Our Communications Director has legally, formally changed her name from "Karole" to "Karoline" Risker. Please join me in addressing her as Karoline including using her new email address karoline.riskier@fumcparagould.org. She's shared a little on social media her reasons for this change and she's promised to be patient with us as we grow accustomed to her new first name.

1. [Order Worship 9am Service Jan 10](#)
2. [Order Worship 11am Service Jan 10](#)

Grace & Peace,
Rev. Dane

