



Utica United  
Methodist Church

# Weekly Messenger

February 3, 2023

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## Africa...How to Tell the Story...Vulnerable People

Since returning on Sunday from the mission trip to Africa, I've been processing the experience and considering how to tell the story best. I think it might be best to write more than one article, or this would end up being a very long reading exercise for you.

Before going to Guinea-Bissau, I'd led sixteen mission teams. I've come to know how important it is to have the team gather and get to know each other before going. Spending time with each other and coming to appreciate each other before being on foreign soil allows for a better understanding of the gifts and graces each person brings. Ultimately, it makes the mission experience much richer and settles out issues ahead of the trip.

Because of the geographic distance between team members, we had our team meetings on Zoom. We met monthly, and there was always one person who couldn't make the meetings. I was nervous that we had not had enough interaction with each other before traveling, but my nervousness was put to rest quickly.

Each team member was required to take turns leading evening devotions. On the third night of devotions, one of our younger team members shed any pretense and was honest and vulnerable about life, faith, and the struggles of his life. This same vulnerability was shared by many on the team as they led devotions, and all of the honest sharing was honored by the whole team.

Oftentimes, it takes a while for members of mission teams to understand that while they came to minister to others, God has even more to give to them as they serve. This team came to appreciate how the Holy Spirit was moving among us early on. We also came to understand our honest vulnerability as it was honored by each other as the vessel God was using to speak deeply to us. Before the trip was half done, I reached out to some friends back home and shared that the Holy Spirit was brooding over this team.

There is something that happens when we get away from our daily routines. We see things; differently; we come to appreciate God's creation more, and if we stay open to it, we can feel the Spirit speaking deeply to us. I pray that each of us finds the space to be vulnerable with fellow Christ followers and that we are blessed by the Holy Spirit brooding over us.

More of my experiences are to come.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Don

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Methodist Church  
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# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## Red Cross Blood Drive

We will be hosting the Red Cross Blood Drive on Tuesday, February 14th from 11am-5pm. As always registration will be done online at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org) or call 1-800-RED CROSS.

## UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH

All women are invited to attend the UWIF meeting in Fellowship Hall on Wednesday, February 8. We will begin with a potluck luncheon at noon. Each person should bring a dish to share and your own place setting. Drinks will be provided.

At 1:00 pm Peter Lucido, the Macomb County Prosecutor, will present a program on **S.C.A.M.S. (Stopping Crimes Against Macomb Seniors)**. He will be discussing ways in which seniors can prevent from being scammed.

All are welcome to attend!



## Happy 200th Birthday Utica UMC!

Utica United Methodist Church is 200 years old this year. We have many things planned to celebrate this wonderful milestone. Currently there are polo shirts on sale on Sunday mornings. Cost of the shirts are \$30.00. We do have order forms available in the church office, you can stop in and place an order or call the office. A historical display is going to be going up on the wall in the Parlor in the next couple of weeks.

Please mark your calendars as we look ahead....

March - We will have a Taco and Trivia night on March 11th. More details will be available as we get closer to this date.

April 23rd is our big kick-off celebration. Bishop Bard will be in to preach this morning. A meal is also in the planning process. Mark you calendars as you will not want to miss this Sunday of church.

May - Historic Driving Tours and Utica Cemetery Tours are being planned. Let's take a look at our roots and visit the graves of founding members of Utica church.

June - The Car Show will happen again this year on June 3rd. We are also looking at attending a Jimmy John's baseball game on June 23rd.

This year is going to be exciting and full of many different types of events. Start marking your calendars now.

# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## A Good Way to Start the Day

I awoke this morning and remembered that I had to go to the grocery store. I wanted to go to Vince and Joe's at 25 Mile Rd and I wanted to go early. I hurriedly dressed and jumped (ok more like crawled) into my car and left home about 8:05. The store opens at 8 a.m. and I was hoping to avoid the crowds that seem to gather at this popular store. I got to the store around 8:15 and the parking lot was actually reasonably empty. I parked in the handicapped spot across from the entrance and went into the store. I was greeted by some very happy workers, joked with the gentleman in produce and did my thing there with the produce I needed. When another woman and I nearly collided we both laughed as if this was really quite funny. I then bought fish where I was greeted by a smile and instant service. Another woman as I was passing by excitedly told me that bacon was on sale, I thanked her. I continued on to the meat where I bought way too much meat and the pound of bacon I had to have because "Hey, it was on sale!" and joked with the smiling and very helpful clerk that I probably had enough to last one person until Easter. As I left, I told her what a lovely smile she had, and she thanked me and blessed me some more with her smile. I then saw a woman who out of the blue told me she was buying food for a dinner celebrating the commissioning of Stephen Ministers at her church. I mentioned that we had that at our church also and told her about Celebrate Recovery and Stars and the Grief Ministry that we have also. I told her she should come and visit us, and she said that she was a member at a Catholic church in Romeo and I told her I had gone there for their blood drives many years ago and what a pleasant group they were then. We talked about the problems facing churches these days and how things had changed. I then went to the cashier having purchased enough food to last until Easter. The cashier was smiling and laughing, and we talked about being grandmothers and I told her the joy continues when you are a great grandmother. She mentioned one of her granddaughters is such a joy but has a disability. I told her of my granddaughter's trials with two children having food allergies and that she is such a great Mom and has tackled this problem with the zeal and fervor of a Momma Bear and that I am constantly amazed at her ability to take on every protection she can for her two babies. She talked about how special education for her sweet granddaughter seems more custodial then educational and that they have found more success through a young tutor that has increased the child's ability to read. I wished her a good day and left the store having spent enough money to buy a small city in some countries. I counted my blessings that I have the money and the ability to shop. It was 9:15 and the parking lot which I personally believe was designed by someone who hated people who drive cars, was starting to fill. I said a little prayer that the clerks would have a good day and their smiles would continue all day and that the people in the store who had consistently smiled at me would also have a blessed day. A chore I had been putting off for three days until I absolutely had to go the store had been a wonderful experience filled with happy, kind, people. We can find God and his blessings even in Vince and Joe's on a Saturday morning. Thanks be to God.

Hebrews 13:1-2 Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers for by so doing it some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Lord let us always remember that we are your children, and you delight in us. Let us be kind to all we meet. We ask Lord that you be with us in our days and be with us in our strengths and in our weaknesses. Be with those who are ill and those who grieve may we reach out and comfort them. Be with those in our midst who are worried and alone, may we be your instruments with them. Bless our staff and leaders, be with them in all they do. Be with our Pastor and the mission team as they return. Give them rest and reflection. May we express our gratitude for all they have done as they have been the face of Christ in another land. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Grace Epperson

# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## Psalms 23 and Celebrate Recovery

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalms has always been one of my “go to” passages. It got me through the most difficult times of my life. Each of us have, and again will face challenges, valleys that we need to traverse. Over the years I’ve discovered that it is better to have God walk along side of us as we make this journey we call life.

Each of us need to revisit Psalms 23 again. Psalm 23 provides encouragement for the valleys we face in life—and today we’re facing some valleys. It may be the valleys of hurts, habits and hang-ups, it may be the valley of loss or of serious illness. The truth is in this life there are valleys. Each and every one of us have faced and will face valleys. There is no getting around that fact.

As uncertainties stretch across our world, our faith is tested, social issues test our resolve, and we’re facing increasing health and financial concerns. These are not just difficult days for those of us who attend Celebrate Recovery, these things affect everyone.

Psalm 23 provides tremendous hope for what we’re experiencing today, and hope whenever we face a new valley down the road. Through the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalms, God reminds us of three powerful truths we can cling to when we’re apprehensive, uncertain of what lies ahead.

First of all God reminds us that we are not alone!

God is walking through the valley with us. Psalm 23:4 says, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”* (NASB).

You deal with life’s shadows by turning to the light. You can’t see the shadow and look at the light at the same time. Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12 NIV).

Stop focusing on what’s got you spooked, and focus on Jesus. He is with you right now. When you get your focus off of your fear, you can focus on God and what he wants to do through you. You may not be able to see him, but he is there.

Valleys are different for a believer than a non-believer. That difference isn’t the absence of the shadow. It’s the presence of *the Shepherd*.

Next God has a purpose for our problems.

Psalm 23 tells us over and over God works for our good. He gives us everything we need (v. 1), gives us rest (v. 2), gives us strength (v. 3), and leads us down the right path (v. 3). Psalm 23:6 says, *“Your (God’s) goodness and love will be with me all my life”* (GNT).

The consistent message of Scripture is that God cannot do evil. As we go through these valleys together, we need to remember that God will use these difficult days for our good, and ultimately for the good of others.

God loves to take the difficult times of our lives and use them to build our character. Paul tells us this in Romans 5:3-4: *“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation”* (NLT).

Hosea 2:15 says, *“I will transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope!”* (NLT). God will do this through the valley we face today as well. He will work it out for good.

As believers, we can be absolutely certain that there is a purpose in our pain.

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# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

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And lastly, our reward will last forever.

No matter what happens to our earthly bodies, this is not the end of the story. Heaven will be worth any valley we go through today. There we will be rewarded for our faithfulness during our time on earth.

The Bible says heaven is real—and we'll be there forever. No valley, no matter how long it seems now, will last nearly that long.

I don't know what valley you're experiencing today. I don't know what fear keeps you up at night. I don't know what hurt, habit or hang-up has reared its ugly, but I do know that you have a Shepherd walking through this valley with you. I know God will work good out of this situation. I know the valley won't last.

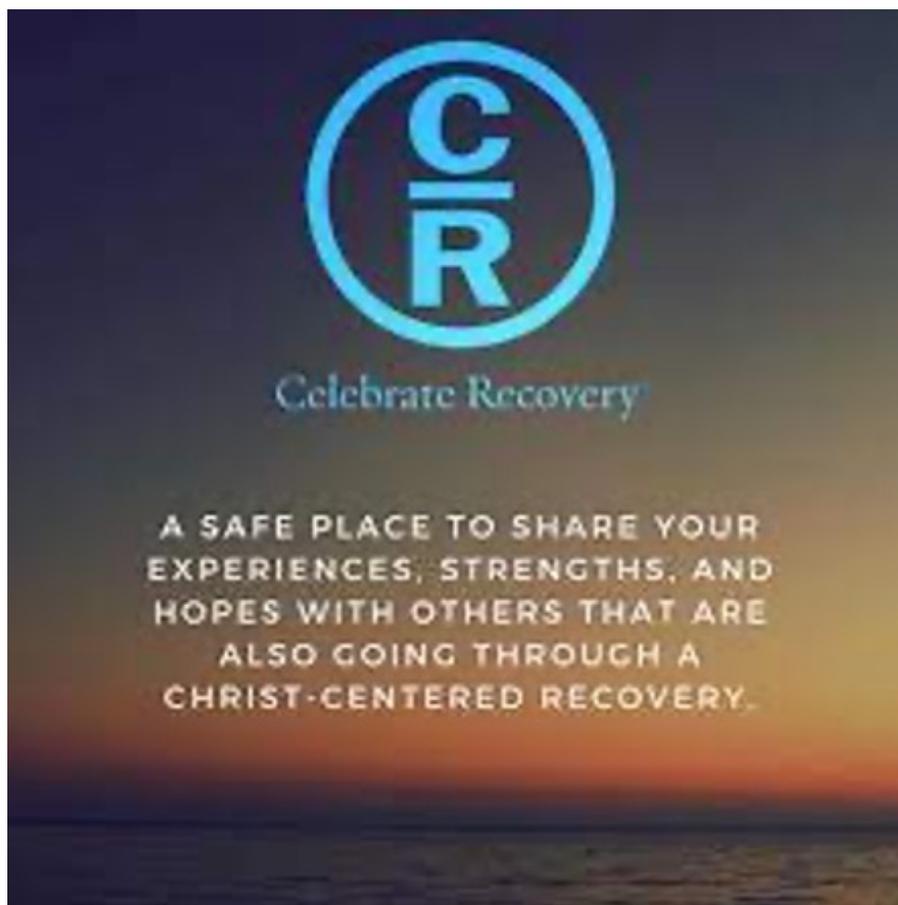
Take some time to soak in Psalm 23 today—not just for the people you'll walk through this valley with but for yourself and your family as well.

We'll walk through this valley together as we look at it in light of eternity. Revelation 21:4 tells us: *[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever*" (NLT).

This is not the end of the story.

Join us each Thursday at Celebrate Recovery, a place where you will find peace as you travel through those valleys.

Bob & Patsy



# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES:

**9:30AM**

with Organ, Choir and Handbells  
in the Sanctuary

**10:30AM**

with our Worship Band  
in Fellowship Hall

### Online Worship

A recorded service will be  
available online on  
Facebook, our church website and  
on YouTube beginning at  
9:00am each Sunday.

### OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Thursday

8:00am-4:00pm

Friday 8:00am- 2:00pm

### Food Pantry

Our food pantry is  
available to those in need  
by calling the church office  
and making an  
appointment.

This institution is an equal  
opportunity provider.

### Keep Connected

If you are not signed up for our  
Weekly Messenger email, you  
can do so on our website by  
clicking on the "More" tab, then  
"Weekly Messenger"; on that  
page you will find a place to  
register for our weekly email!



*"Like" us  
on  
Facebook!*

### Our Mission

Inviting people to rely  
on Jesus to find  
unexpected purpose,  
peace and joy.

### Ministry Team

**Rev. Don Gotham**

srpastor@uticaumc.org

### Music Ministry

**David Fox**, Organist, Bell, & Chancel Choirs  
Director

FoxDavidL@sbcglobal.net

**Mer Renne**, Contemporary  
Worship Leader

mer@uticaumc.org

### Communications Director

**Rachelle Heldt**

rachelle@uticaumc.org

### Secretary/Bookkeeper

**Charlotte Ramsey**

charlotte@uticaumc.org

### Deadline Information

Articles for advertising/  
announcements must be submitted to  
the office by 3:00pm on  
Wednesday of each week.

Messenger: Email to Rachelle Heldt  
Prayer List: Email to Charlotte Ramsey  
or call the church office.



Going on vacation; can't make it to church?

How about using E-giving so you can still give your offering for  
those times when you can't be here **The E-giving tab is on our  
church website: www.uticaumc.org**

If you need assistance, call the church office.

## Celebrate Recovery, Thursday, 6:30pm

