



Dear Friends and Members of Union Presbyterian Church,

Happy New Year!! I don't know about you but I have a bunch of new year resolutions that I am planning to make a reality this year!

- I have a plan to get to the gym several times a week.
- I want to pick up learning to play the harmonica again and get back into making stained glass.
- Vicky and I are going to try to go out for lunch once every 2 weeks and we want to get back into the habit of getting the family out of the house once a month to take day trips and see more of the great stuff in North and South Carolina.
- I also have 2 brand new commentaries that I want to start using in my daily Bible study.

I'm excited to give these resolutions a try. But none of them are my main one. The most important thing I want to start doing in 2023 is to pray more regularly for a growing hope in Christ. As a pastor, I spend a lot of time coming alongside individuals "low" in hope.... When people are in pain, experiencing loss, are hurting, or dealing with stressful life circumstances, it is understandable why their "hope-tank" might be nearing empty. But this last year, I was struck by just how many people I chatted with both around Gastonia and even all over the place during my Sabbatical last summer who seemed to be low in hope.

In his book, "Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter," Timothy Keller writes that many researchers argue that humanity has more reason for hope today than ever. Steve Pinker of Harvard University has found that data seems to indicate worldwide decreases in violence, warfare, and poverty as well as the lengthening of life spans and improved health care. And yet Keller argues that most polls and surveys of the last 15 to 20 years don't show any increased happiness with these societal improvements. Polls actually show increasing pessimism of the future, and increasing anxiety and hopelessness. What is most shocking is the high levels of profound discontent, depression, despair, addiction, and loneliness in the most advanced liberal societies. The places "doing the best" often appear to be filled with the most hopeless.

Keller writes that some secular experts are beginning to seriously look at how religion might be connected to hope. Humans seem to hunger for meaning and purpose. And as societies focus on progress... they often abandon faith, and lose "the thing that undergirds all of [life]: meaning, cohesion, and a deeper kind of happiness than the satiation of all our earthly needs." Often the things we believe will make us the most happy... like long lives and decreasing violence... alone don't bring us the satisfaction we think they should.

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JANUARY ELDERS

Claire Cabral
Jennifer Nelson
Junior Thompson

COMMUNION

January 8

STATED SESSION

January 15

HAPPY YEARS

January 18

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So what brings hope? For those of us who believe in Christ... isn't it the resurrection of Jesus that brings the most hope? The word "hope" in Christianity is not a word that means "wish." For Christians, the definition of the word "hope" has always been defined as a certainty. Keller writes that it is this sort of understanding of the hope (or certainty) found in the resurrection of Christ that has allowed Christianity to thrive and grow in even the bleakest of times.

I love how Keller structures his book, "Hope in Times of Fear." In every chapter he focuses on another aspect of how hope through the resurrection of Christ should impact every facet of our lives.

-We should have certain hope in the reality of the event of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is pointed to and predicted throughout Scripture. The resurrection does not come out of nowhere. It fits in perfectly with the overarching story of the Bible. But the resurrection is also a reasonable and historically grounded event. It isn't as if decades after Christ's death, people began to "say" that Jesus rose again. It is an event that was proclaimed as Good News right away! The resurrection is truly an event we can place our hope in.

-And through the resurrection we can have hope FOR the future. One day we will be completely free of sin and united with God in heaven. But through the resurrection you and I can also have hope FROM the future. The resurrection of Christ has brought the future kingdom of God into our present. The Kingdom of God may not be fully realized yet but it has already begun to be realized in our lives. Through the resurrection we can be freed from sin and the guilt that weighs us down in life. Through the resurrection we can be freed from the fear of death.

-But not only that, but because of the resurrection we can also have hope that by uniting with our risen Lord, our lives CAN change. Our messed up priorities, our selfish attitudes, and our striving to be on top, all can be transformed.

-Because of the resurrection there is hope for all our relationships (with God and with others), there is hope that one day everything that is wrong in this world will be made right, and that those who are suffering the worst of things (those who are weak, hungry, weeping, and hated) can experience all the best of things. Isn't that what Jesus is talking about in the beatitudes!?!

No matter what we are going through, the resurrection of Christ brings light to the darkest places! There is absolutely no hope like the hope found in Christ!!

Tim Keller, has recently written "Hope in Times of Fear," amidst his own ongoing battle with pancreatic cancer. And yet, even in his own struggles, he is able to end the book writing this, "Jesus has secured [infallible Godly hope] for us [instead of relative human hope] by his death and resurrection. When [God's infallible hope] abides in us, our immediate fate - how the current situation turns out- can no longer trouble us. Defiance comes from looking at ourselves. Hope comes from looking at Him."

I will be praying for this sort of hope to grow in me during 2023. I will be praying that it might find its way deeper into the lives of those I love and care about. I will be praying this year that the hope found in the resurrection of Christ might spread through and around me both deep and wide. I invite you to make this one of your New Year Resolutions as well! Also... if you need an exercising partner... fingers crossed... you might find me at the YMCA several times a week at the crack of dawn!

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor James

SING A NEW SONG TO THE LORD IN THE NEW YEAR

Psalm 96: 1-6

96:1 Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. 5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. 6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

2023

A new year is upon us. During Advent and at Christmas, we are challenged to understand the incredible gift that we have been given in Christ, to reflect on what Christ has done for each of us and for the world, and to look forward with anticipation to when Christ will return and the Kingdom of God will be fully realized.

As Psalm 96 proclaims, the time for each us to sing a new song is right now!

What new song will you sing to the Lord in word and deed this year?

Below you can read about and listen to 10 songs on Pastor James' and Nancy Newman' playlists right now. Maybe one of them will challenge you to sing and follow God's call in a new way this year! One of the songs below might even be completely new to you.

(1) "Hymn of the Holy Spirit," Pat Barrett, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgguVaGqHE8> What a wonderful song that reminds us all the ways the Holy Spirit guides and directs us. I love the line, "Holy Spirit, guide my speaking words of grace and truth abound. Let my lips be filled with stories of the mercy that I've found." -Pastor James

(2) "Wood and Nails," The Porters Gate, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odisftO1uLE> This song compares God to a carpenter at work in us so that we in turn can do God's work. I love the verse, "The kingdom's come and built upon wood and nails gripped with joyfulness. So send me out, within Your ways, knowing that the task is finished. The dead will rise and give You praise wood and nails will not hold them down."- Pastor James

(3) "Immortal Invisible," Laura Story, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vvAeMFLUiQ&t=66s> Some say that contemporary worship songs lack the depth of old hymns. This song from Laura Story is a contemporary song that expounds on the hymn, "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise." It has quite alot to say! - Pastor James

(4)"It is Well," Todd Fields, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtETJU5FV40> My favorite version of this classic hymn with a new take for the chorus. -Pastor James

(5) "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go," Indelible Grace, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVOG15Zj5KM> I love this modern take using the words of a classic hymn. The idea that God's love gets a hold of us and will not let us go no matter what really speaks to me. -Pastor James

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- (6) “Graves Into Gardens,” Brandon Lake, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwX1f2gYKZ4>
My favorite phrase: “ You turn mourning to dancing; You give beauty for ashes; You turn shame into glory; You’re the only one who can! You turn graves into gardens; You turn bones into armies; You turn seas into highways; You’re the only one who can!” How can I fear anything when I serve such a great God!- Nancy
- (7) “Jireh,” Naomi Raine, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfV20k9TXKw> “Jireh, You are more than enough” is so very true in my life. “I will be content in every circumstance. You are Jireh, You are enough.” When I start feeling any anxiety or uncertainty about life, I remember how temporal this life is and how my God is more than enough in my life!-Nancy
- (8) “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” The Tabernacle Choir, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2auMlipoLg>
This was sung at our wedding and little did Bill and I know how this would be the very theme of our life together. God spared Bill’s life for 17 year after a diagnosis of only 5 years with a blood disorder. Bill has now gone to be with Jesus and God’s great faithfulness to me is still unchanged! “Morning by morning, new mercies I see. All I have needed, Thy hand has provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!”
-Nancy
- (9) “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” Carrie Underwood, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaYH5ablhA> “Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife. Joyful music leads us sunward in the triumph song of life” I have a habit of “singing” and praising God through the good and bad circumstances of my life and I plan on continuing to sing through 2023! Often, I even wake up with a song in my heart! - Nancy
- (10) “Abba, I Belong to You,” Jonathan & Melissa Helsler, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sroPrjCoGY> This song keeps me grounded in this crazy, chaotic world by reminding me, “You’re (God) more real than the ground I’m standing on. You’re more real than the wind in my lungs. Abba, I belong to You!” How wonderful it is to belong to such a mighty God! - Nancy

We also invite you to share with the church office a song you’ve been listening to. The song should be faith based and new to you (newly heard or recently heard by you in a new way). We will post all the songs on our website, highlight one a week on Facebook this Winter, and listen to the songs as part of our prelude in worship each Sunday. Maybe the hope expressed in these songs will even keep us filled with Christ’s joy during some of the darkest and coldest nights this winter!

WORSHIP FOR JANUARY

After a special Epiphany service on **January 8th**, we will be spending the rest of the month of January exploring chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians... a chapter that focuses on a whole bunch of other ones! We read that with our ONE faith through the ONE way of Christ we are invited to be part of ONE body under our One Lord, Jesus Christ! Join us as we unpack this one-of-a-kind Good News!

Epiphany Sermon

January 8: Ephesians 3:1-12, “Epiphany.... Stuck on You”
-Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

Lectionary Sermon Series: ONE

January 15: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, “ONE Lord, Jesus Christ”
-Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend
January 22: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18, “ONE Body in Jesus Christ”
January 29: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31, “One Way thru Jesus Christ”

Sermon Series: Growing in Grace

February 5: Luke 8: 1-8, “The Joy of Burying God’s Word in Our Heart”
-Celebration of the Lord’s Supper



CEMETERY NEWS

Notice from the Cemetery Committee – all flowers and arrangements will be removed from the cemetery the last week of January. Please contact Kathy Kytle. if there are any questions or concerns.

COMMUNION

We will be celebrating the Lord's Supper on **January 8** instead of the first Sunday of the month.

HAPPY YEARS

The Happy Years Fellowship will be meeting on **Wednesday, January 18** for lunch at **12 PM**. The meal will be provided with drinks. Donations will be accepted. Please join us for good food and fun fellowship no matter what age you are.

PLEDGE CARDS FOR 2023

If you have not had time or forgot, there is a Stewardship table with 2023 pledge cards set up near the Rotunda.

UNION'S MISSION GIVING

Historically Union Presbyterian Church has give \$400 per month to Presbytery of Western North Carolina to be used for missions. Session is still committed to giving to Christians ministries that do mission work in the community. Because we are not currently giving money to the denomination, in December we gave the money that would have been given this fall to PWNC to the following agencies:

Gaston Street Ministry

Gastonia Street Ministry serves souls broken by addiction and unable to help themselves. They serve single parents, the mentally ill, the very young, immigrants and refugees, and all struggling to survive. They offer comfort to the suffering with food, clothing, conversation, and prayers..

The Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center

The Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center is located in Gastonia and is a domestic violence shelter that assists the victims of domestic violence by providing emergency shelter, advocacy and support on the journey to an abuse free life.

Crisis Assistance Ministry

CAM is located in Gastonia and provides help with electric, water or natural gas bills that are past due, help with payments on rent and mortgages and with food & medication assistance.

Black Mountain Home for Boys

The Black Mountain Home for Boys (located in Black Mountain, NC) cares for those who have been abused, abandoned, neglected, or orphaned. The children are placed at the Home by the North Carolina Department of Social Services. Some children stay only a few weeks, while others may spend a considerable part of their growing years with the home.



FINANCIAL NEWS November 2022

	<u>October</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
Revenue	\$14,077	\$170,734
Expenses	<u>16,693</u>	<u>176,510</u>
	-2,616	- 5,776

Following are unexpected expenditures that impact our financial picture.

- January: repair exterior leak in the Sanctuary
Cost: \$6285
- April: digital music machine for Sanctuary
Cost: \$2854
fire & safety inspection
Cost: \$857
- July: Church computer for Martha
Cost: \$642

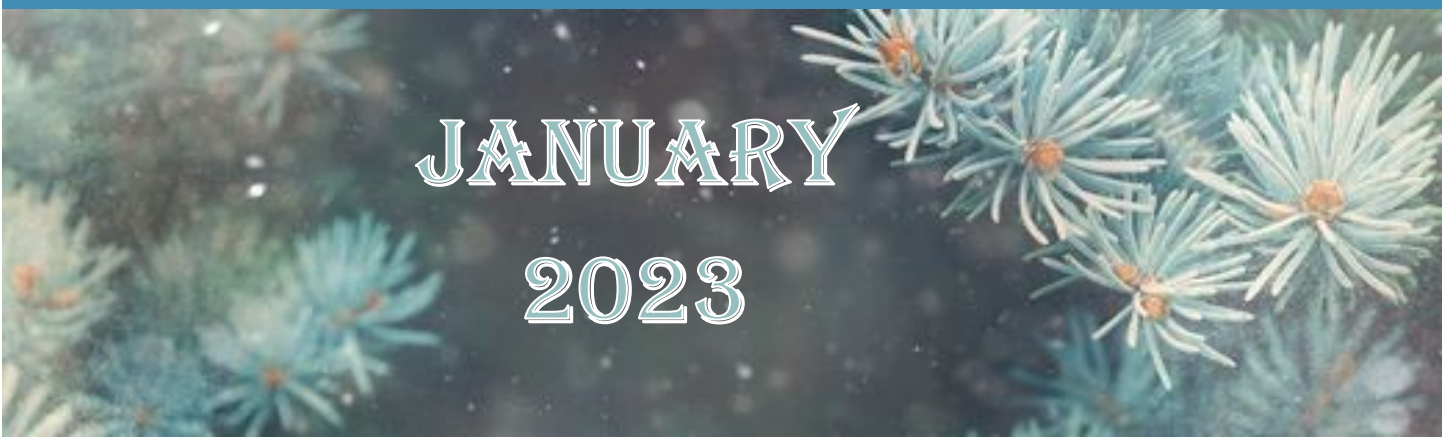
Please pray for our Church, Pastor James and our leaders as we work through the day to day operations of maintaining God's House.

Jason Morrison - Receiving Treasurer
Martha Simmons - Disbursing Treasurer



THANK YOU SO MUCH!

- Dear friends and Church Family! Vicky, Jack, Fiona, and all of us Holemans are reminded so often how loved we all are at Union Church. This December was no different! We thank you all for the warm cards, wishes, gifts, and prayers this Christmas season. Thank you for continuing to share so much love with us!
Sincerely, Pastor James
- Dear Church Family,! You always bless me so much! Thank you for the Christmas greetings and gifts you. The fruit basket was delightful and certainly enjoyed by a whole bunch of my crew. You always make me feel loved and appreciated. I'm looking forward to a new year with you to see what God has planned for us! Love, Nancy Newman
- Dear Men of the Church, thank you so much for the beautiful fruit basket that you brought me! The basket was lovely and filled with so many good things, and both Kelly and I appreciate it very much.
Susan & Kelly Digh
- Thank you, Men of the Church for the fruit basket and Women of the Church for the goodies. I enjoyed both so much. Jean Gaston
- Thank you to all who played and those who supported the volleyball team this year. We placed 2nd in the season and made it to the semi finals!



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<p><u>Sunday</u> 9AM Sunday School 10 AM Worship</p>	<p><u>Sunday</u> 4 PM Kids of the Kingdom & Youth</p>					
<p>1 HAPPY NEW YEAR</p>	2	<p>3 6 PM B & G</p>	4	5	6	<p>7 Surprise Birthday Party</p>
<p>8 Communion 11 AM WOC & MOC 2:30 PM SOC & W & S</p>	<p>9 11 AM Golden Girls 7 PM Soul Sisters</p>	<p>10 10 AM Bible Study</p>	11	12	13	14
<p>15 11 AM W & C 12:30 PM Stated Session</p>	16	<p>17 10 AM Bible Study</p>	<p>18 12 PM Happy Years</p>	19	20	21
22	23	<p>24 10 AM Bible Study</p>	25	26	27	28
29	30	<p>31 10 AM Bible Study</p>				

Union Presbyterian Church

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Non-Profit Organization
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Return Service Requested

Reverend James Holeman
Pastor

Nancy Newman
Administrative Assistant

Jieun Ha
Accompanist

Church Hours
9:00 AM—1:00 PM
Tuesday—Friday
Office Closed Monday and Saturday

SAVE THE DATES

January 8

Communion