



Dear Members and Friends of Union Presbyterian Church,

In his book, “Messy Spirituality: God’s Annoying Love for Imperfect People,” Mike Yaconelli shares a story about a British bomber in WWII. As Yaconelli tells it, this British bomber found itself in a major predicament during one bombing raid over Germany. All the British fighter planes protecting the bomber got involved in dogfights with other German fighter planes at the same time. The bomber was left unprotected as a German fighter approaching. The crew of the British bomber watched helplessly as the tracer bullets kept hitting their plane until suddenly five bullets slammed into the bomber’s fuselage near the gas tank. The crew braced for an explosion, but none came. Although fuel poured out the holes, there was no explosion. Several hours after the plane landed safely back at their base, one of the mechanics gave the crew the 5 bullets that had been found in the plane’s fuel tanks. Opening up the shells the crew discovered that none of these bullets had gunpowder in them. In one was a tiny wad of paper that read, “We are Polish POWs- forced to make bullets in factory. When guards do not look, we do not fill with powder. Is not much, but is best we can do. Please tell family we are alive.” Five small bullets out of millions, made a huge difference for that crew of that bomber.

Yakonelli argues that the same is true for our lives. He writes that the Christian life is mostly”... a tiny life, filled with little decisions, tiny steps toward God, tiny glimpses of his presence, little changes and small movings, tiny successes, and imperceptible stirrings.” Christian discipleship is like that? It’s not usually about big choices, as much as it is about small choices that we make over and over again. This last year, the elders on Session at Union have been challenging one another in their own walks with God. Each elder picked a specific way they wanted to grow closer to Christ. Maybe they wanted to study the Bible more, try praying a new way and hear God better, or attempt to follow God’s nudging in a specific area of their life. None of these practices would likely suddenly lead to monstrous growth, but a lifetime of practicing them, can transform our relationship with God.

In “Messy Spirituality,” Yakonelli writes about 2 other little things that are pivotal if we truly want to grow closer to Christ. The 2 things are **STUCK-NESS** and **MESSINESS**. Probably most of us think of these things as barriers to faith. Doesn’t being stuck or having life get messy show that something is wrong is our relationship with God? But Yaconelli believes that these 2 things are actually essential!

STUCK-NESS

Yakonelli argues that stuck-ness is one of the most important parts of Christian discipleship. Unless we realize that we are stuck, unless we are unsatisfied where we are at in our relationship with God, unless we want to change and grow closer to God, we won’t do anything to get unstuck. Yaconelli writes that “getting stuck is the prerequisite to getting unstuck.” Recognizing that we are stuck forces us to stop, to notice what is going on around us, to pay attention to our hunger for God, to give up trying to do things are own way, and to search for Jesus instead.

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February Elders

Tammy Biddix
Jason Morrison
Faye Harrell

Communion

February 4

Stated Session

February 18

Continued from previous page

Without realizing that we are stuck, we will just keep on doing what we always do in our busy lives and avoid seeking God anew. For Christian discipleship to “work,” we have to be willing to stop and look to see how our walk with God is being hindered. We need to be willing to pause and check out how we are stuck.

MESSINESS

The second small ingredient that Yakonelli argues that we need to add into our discipleship is messy lives. He writes that true spiritual growth seems to “thrive in the midst of our problems, not in their absence. Spiritual growth occurs in the trenches of life, not in the classroom.” This is what I heard time and time again by members of our Session this last year. We all made these clear plans about how we were going to try and grow in faith last year but then life happened. No one I talked ended up following their “plan” perfectly. Two elders told me nearly the same thing, “here’s what I planned to do... but [fill in the blank] happened... and this is what I ended up doing instead.” Yakanelli writes that we grow in Christ “when we try to be consistent in an inconsistent world.” Isn’t that what those Polish POW’s were doing.... they were trying to “do the right thing” (the very small things they could do) in a messy world and a terrible situation. Finding more time to pray when we have all the time in the world IS a good thing. But finding more time to pray when we hardly can find time to stop to breathe can transform our lives.

My prayer for each of this year, is that we all make time to try and grow in Christ. That we each pick a small way or two to draw closer to God in 2024. But as we do so, maybe we also need to remember that being stuck in our faith and having a busy/messy life, isn’t necessarily a hinderance to that walk with God... but is actually an important ingredient!

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor James

WORSHIP IN FEBRUARY AND BEYOND

After finishing up a sermon series on life altering encounters Jesus had with 3 individuals in the Gospels, on February 18 we will begin a 6 Week sermon series looking at some of Jesus’ parables.

As Christians we are all called to share “good news,” but how do we know whether we are sharing “good news” or “God’s Kingdom-Sized Good News” with others? This Lent we will be exploring some of Jesus’ parables about the Kingdom of God, to get a better understanding about what Kingdom-Sized Good News looks like! Be thinking about the “good news” God has given you over the years and the opportunities you’ve had to proclaim that news to others!

Sermon Series: Encounters to Remember

February 4- Luke 7: 36-50, “The Adulterous Woman”
-Celebration of the Lord’s Supper
February 11- Luke 8: 42-49, “The Woman who touched Jesus”

Lent Sermon Series: “Proclaiming Kingdom-Sized News”

February 18- Mark 4: 26-29; Matthew 13: 24-34,
“Parable of the Growing Seed, Wheat and
Tares, the Mustard Seed & the Leaven”
February 25- Matthew 13: 44-53, “Parable of the
hidden treasure, Fine Pearl, Net, &
Storeroom”
-President’s Day Weekend
March 3- Matthew 22: 1-14, “Parable of the Great
Banquet”
-Celebration of the Lord’s Supper



ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

This year, Ash Wednesday shares its date with Valentine's Day on **February 14**. We will still have an **Ash Wednesday Service** that you can attend here at church at **7 PM**. However, your evening might be busy! As a result, you can also stop by the front of the church between **7-8 AM**, for **"Ashes on the Go!"** An opportunity to receive a prayer and ashes from the comfort of your car that morning.



Whether you receive ashes from your car or at our evening service, we hope that you will take time this Ash Wednesday to ready yourself for the season of Lent. The simplest explanation for Lent is that it is an extended time each year for us to contemplate what the cross means for us. Isaac Watt's song, "When I survey the Wondrous Cross," reminds us that contemplation of the cross should lead us to boast in nothing, to count our richest gains as lost, make us willing to sacrifice the things of this world that charm us most, and help us to become dead to all the things of this world. Jay Y. Kim in his Christianity Today Article, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," writes that the world tells us that, "ultimately, there is only life and death... and that our lone option is to revel in the former before eventually and inevitably succumbing to the latter." And that, "our culture at large is at the ready, to offer us endless temporary pleasures designed to keep our eyes fixed on shallow versions of the present." Lent, is an opportunity to remember how staring death in the face thru Christ's sacrifice on the cross, allows us to look past this short-sided understanding of death to the hopeful eternal story found in Jesus.

GOOD NEWS RISING

This year, on **Easter Sunday** we will once again have our **Good News Rising Special Offering**. Witness and Service Committee is currently exploring how to use it to help 3 Christian National and/or Global Mission Programs. As we get closer to Easter, Witness and Service will give specific details on those 3 Mission Programs. But this month, we want you to be aware of a couple important things about the offering!

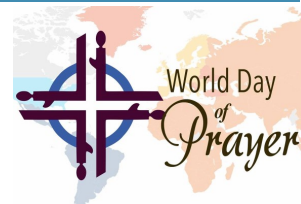
- (1) First, this offering is **DIFFERENT** from the PCUSA special offering, "One Great Hour of Sharing." None of the money received will go towards the Presbytery Mission Agency or even get channeled through the PCUSA denomination.
- (2) At each of our sanctuary entrances, we have plastic fish banks available, so that our children and youth can collect money for this offering as well. We want all ages of the church to be able to be involved!
- (3) The offering is called "Good News Rising" because on Easter Jesus rose and in him, we can find new life. This offering is a way we can bring the Good News of Christ and new life to people throughout the world!! Unlike our 5 Cent a Meal offerings, Good News Rising is not focused on local programs, but national and global Mission.

We hope that you will consider supporting Good News Rising this year!!



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER SERVICE

The Women of the Church invites you to attend a special service on **Friday, March 1** to celebrate World Day of Prayer. The service will begin at **7 PM**. We hope you will make plans to join us.



HAPPY YEARS

Happy Years will be on **February 21st at 12 PM**. We will be having chicken pot pie, chicken and rice, slaw, bread, desserts, and drinks. All ages welcomed and invite a friend.

NEWS FROM THE SESSION



The Session of Union wants to make sure that the entire congregation is aware of where Union is at in the process with the Presbytery of Western North Carolina considering our denomination affiliation. During the month of January, the council of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, approved an 8-member Administrative Council who will work on behalf the Presbytery through the process of discernment with our church. This Administrative Council has already met once and will meet one more time before they set up a hearing with our congregation. This hearing is similar to a congregational meeting. No voting will occur at the hearing, but church members will be able to share their feelings about whether or not they believe that Union should seek dismissal from the denomination. This hearing is the official beginning of the discernment process and the details of what happens next will be shared at that hearing and beyond. Please keep an ear out for when the Administrative Commission notice for when this hearing is scheduled to take place. Your attendance at the hearing and thoughts about denomination affiliation are both desired and encouraged!

WHAT'S NEXT WITH FRONTIER FELLOWSHIP?

For those of you who missed it, on **January 21, Dr. James Truesdell, Associate Director of Frontier Fellowship**, visited our church. We once again thank Dr. Truesdell for his words about the need of Global Mission to unreached people groups during worship and his explanation of what Frontier Fellowship is all about during lunch afterwards!

So how can we at Union connect to Frontier Fellowship in the months to come? Dr. Truesdell mentioned a couple things...

(1) Pray! Dr. Truesdell left us several booklets, **“Pray for the Thirty- One Largest Frontier People Groups,”** to

help us be more aware of the areas in the world where the Good News of Christ is least heard and specific ways that we can be praying for these regions and the people groups in them.

- If you would like one of these **prayer guides**, please contact Tammy Biddix from Witness and Service or Pastor James and they will get one to you! You can also download a PDF copy from **Go31.org**.
- In connection with Global Day of Prayer and Lent, we will be using some of the materials from these books in a devotion that you can use! We hope that you might broaden your daily prayers with these materials.

(2) Get informed! Each month, Dr. Truesdell sends out an update about the south Asian frontier. You could get on this email list. Let Tammy Biddix or Pastor James know if you are interested!

As we get more informed as a congregation and spend some time in prayer, we believe that ways our church can get more regularly involved in Frontier Fellowship will quickly come to light!





SOUPER BOWL LOVE OFFERING

The youth of the church will be collecting a special love offering on Super Bowl Sunday which is **Sunday, February 11th**.



YOUTH VALENTINES LUNCHEON FUNDRAISER

Mark your calendars for **Sunday, February 18th**. The Older Youth will have their annual Valentines Day Lunch right after church to help raise money for upcoming activities and outreach events. Please make plans to attend and support this important ministry.

180 WEEKEND

Please join us in prayer for our youth and the hundreds of youth around Gaston County that will be participating in 180 Weekend **February 9th & 10th**. Please pray that God moves in the hearts of those who are participating and that each and every youth can grow closer in their walk with Jesus.

MEN OF THE CHURCH FEBRUARY MEETING

Men, make sure that you remember to set your alarm a little earlier on **February 11th**. The men of the church will be having their monthly **planning meeting** at **8 AM** in the Fellowship Hall.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR SOME CHILI!

The Men of the Church will be hosting a church-wide event **February 23**, from **5-7 PM**. Come enjoy some Fellowship and Chili with friends! There will also be a **Chili Cook-Off competition** that you can help judge! If you would like to submit a Chili for the competition, please contact Junior Thompson. Donations received for the Chili dinner and to vote for your favorite Chili will be used to support the Men's Ministry!



5 CENTS A MEAL

Our next 5 Cents a meal offering will be on **Sunday, February 4th during worship**. The money collected will go to support the Salvation Army..



BOOK CHICKS

Do you enjoy reading a good book? How about snacks and socializing? Join us monthly during our Book Chicks book club meetings for some food, fun, and fellowship! For more information or to find out what book we are reading, please reach out to Kim Morrison. Our next meeting is **Monday, February 19th at 6:30 PM**.

UNION VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Congratulations to our very own volleyball team on their victorious season! They were both regular season and tournament champions!

UNION ENSEMBLE

Practices for the Union Ensemble in February will meet right after church on **February 11 and 25!** We will be checking out some new music for Holy Week and Easter, so if you are interested in singing with the Union Ensemble we hope that we will see you there!



PRESBYTERY PRAYER CALENDAR & PRAYER CONCERNS

Unity
8210 Unity Church Road
Denver, NC 28037
unity@unitypres.org

Vians Valley
P.O. Box 202
Bakersville, NC 28705

Waldensian
109 Main Street East
Valdese, NC 28690

Walnut
254 Barnard Road,
Marshall, NC 28753
genelinton@klive.com

- We continue prayers for the Rev. Beth Newman, pastor of Byson City Presbyterian. Beth was back in the hospital dealing with a number of complications. A Caring Bridge website is available for communication and updates. You can reach it by clicking [here](#).
- We ask for your prayers for safety of our latest Mission Team in Guatemala as they return to North Carolina on Thursday.
- Prayers for Presbytery Associate Rev. George Thompson who broke his foot and awaiting treatment decisions.
- Hold Ronnie Puckett, husband of former PWNC staff member Marcia Puckett, in prayer as he continues immunotherapy every six weeks for his cancer.



February Events

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Sunday 9AM Sunday School 10 AM Worship	11 AM Golden Girls 7 PM Soul Sisters			1 8 AM HOME Co-Op	2	3
4 Communion 5 Cents a Meal 2:30 PM SOC	5 11 AM Golden Girls 7 PM Soul Sisters	6 10 AM Bible Study 7 PM B & G	7	8 8 AM HOME Co-Op 6 PM Women's Council	9 10 180 Weekend Older Youth	
11 11 AM Ensemble Practice	12	13 10 AM Bible Study	14 Ash Wednesday	15 8 AM HOME Co-Op 3 PM Bingo 6:30 PM Prayer Walk	16	17
18 11 AM Youth Valentine Luncheon 2:30 PM Session	19 6:30 PM Book Chicks	20 10 AM Bible Study	21 5:30 PM W & S	22 8 AM HOME Co-Op	23 5-7 PM Chili Cookoff	24
25 11 AM Ensemble Practice	26	27 10 AM Bible Study	28	29 8 AM HOME Co-Op		

Union Presbyterian Church

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Non-Profit Organization
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Reverend James Holeman
Pastor

Tammy Biddix
Administrative Assistant

Jennifer Nelson
Communications Director

Jieeun Ha
Accompanist

Church Hours
3:00 PM—6 PM
Tuesday and Thursday



Save the Date

February 1
February 18
February 23
March 1

5 Cents of Meal & World Communion
Valentines Luncheon
Chili Cook-Off
World Day of Prayer Service