

## **A Great Big Thanks**

During the weeks preceding Christmas, I had encouraged you to prayerfully consider special gifts toward projects that were dear to our hearts. I can gratefully say that your response was overwhelming. Over \$24,000 was raised to be split between three projects: Sanctuary ceiling repair, capital funds for a future youth worship area and a church mini-bus. All these funds will remain in our local church and help us improve our ministries and facilities. Thank you so much!

## **New Members Joining**



Pictured above are our new members joining December 19. On left: Terry Boaz, on right: Loretta Morgan.

## **A New Year & New Opportunities**

Christmastide is followed in the church year with Epiphany. Epiphany is one of those words we don't hear in our vocabulary very often. The Season of Epiphany precedes Lent in our church year, and is often associated with the story of the wise men from the East who came looking for the one born "King of the Jews."

An epiphany is an “Aha!” moment of sudden insight, or that of one’s thinking taking a paradigm shift that had never occurred before. I would say that they are God breaking into our mundane thinking and overturning our preconceived notions.

The wise men or ‘magi’ were learned men who studied astronomy, read prophecies, and looked for signs that God was giving. Interestingly, there weren’t any wise men who came from Israel—their thinking about God was so in a rut that they couldn’t even see the signs that were in their scriptures and before their eyes. It would be good for us to take a note from them, so that we don’t shut our spiritual eyes to what God would have us see.

I believe that God continues to give epiphanies to those who pray for God’s will to be made evident to them, to those who read and study the scriptures, and to all who are willing to let God’s Spirit speak to them. Yes, not just wise men, but also to wise women. However, our rapid and hurried lifestyles don’t help us with the focus that is often needed to listen. In this New Year, instead of resolutions to cut our chocolate or diet sodas, what if we resolved to really listen to what is saying to us as individuals and as a church? I believe God can and does give us signs that will lead us toward truth when we are ready and willing to receive them.

Sometimes God asks us to journey with him to where new insights are given. Such is the story of the Patriarch Jacob, who laid his head down and dreamed of angels ascending and descending from heaven. Later, he wrestled with the angel of the Lord (and with himself) about trusting his family and life to Esau, whom he had wronged. In the end, God was given glory and peace was made where once there had been animosity. With God nothing is impossible!

So, I share this message of hope with you because God is ready to share insights that will change our lives. The question is, “Are you ready?”

## **A Bitter Pill**

Remember that time you were trying to wash down that big antibiotic pill and it didn’t go down with the first swish of water? Suddenly your mouth was flooded with that bitter taste that you hated, and then you had to quickly swish some more water to get it down, but the bitter taste lingered. That is an appropriate analogy to our United Methodist churches having to deal with the lawsuit aimed at the Boy Scouts of America and its chartering organizations.

It is a sad fact that some people connected with scouting through the years were sexual predators who took advantage of young boys. A lawsuit filed on behalf of some 87,000 claimants has brought about the Chapter 11 Bankruptcy filing of the BSA. As Christians we grieve for those wrongly abused and pray for their healing.

Because our United Methodist churches have filed for protection in the BSA’s bankruptcy case, we recently held a called charge conference to vote against what the UMC and its attorneys felt was an inadequate plan that wouldn’t protect our churches from further litigation. We also voted to turn further consideration of timely action back over to our board of Trustees so that we could make quick consideration of further developments in the case.

It seems that the multitude of no votes coming in from United Methodist churches had its desired effect on the bankruptcy attorneys representing the claimants: a settlement was reached to have the United Methodist Church make a settlement payment to be collected over three years that would release all United Methodist chartering churches who voted for an amended plan from any further legal action by the claimants. The United Methodist Church then sent word to our bishops asking our churches to now vote yes for the plan to settle the suit.

Last Monday, our Trustees met to vote on the amended plan, which vote had to be received by December 28 to be valid. Much discussion was had without any real substantive value available to us that individual churches might be responsible for in the settlement plan. Our Trustees considered that the possible future legal representation needed if we rejected the amended plan was also an intangible figure, but could be quite high. In essence, we were facing a lose-lose proposition whether we voted the amended plan up or down. In the end, the Trustees voted to swallow the bitter pill of settling further legal battles by voting unanimously for the amended plan to settle.

What is our next step? Bishop Mueller, with concurrence of the District Superintendents, in accordance with ¶603.5 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, has called a Special Session of the Arkansas Annual Conference to be held online as authorized by Arkansas State Law at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, January 11, 2022. The special session will be limited to resolutions or legislation provided to the Conference by the Conference Secretary that come from the Cabinet, Appointive Cabinet or Conference agency in response to the proposed United Methodist settlement in the Boy Scouts of America Bankruptcy Reorganization.

More information will be forthcoming in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, please pray for those who have been irreparably hurt by the misconduct of some in the scouting ranks, and pray for continued wisdom for our Bishop, our General Church, and our local Trustees who have been charged with looking out for our local interests.

## **Giving Reminder**

Don't forget that you have until December 31<sup>st</sup> to make charitable contributions to the church that count toward your charitable tax deductions for 2021.