

2022



JULY



AUGUST

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF WAUSAU

THE MESSENGER



Dear First UMC Family of Faith,

This will likely be the most controversial pastoral letter I've ever had to write. Many Christians rejoice in what they see as a victory recognizing the sanctity of life. Many are elated to see what they view to be "Christian values" become the law of the land. Others lament the erosion of the separation between Church and State.¹ The Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe* is an earthquake, shaking if not shattering individual Christians and churches. I'll leave it to legal analysts to address the constitutionality of the decision.² This letter will focus more on its real-world ramifications and its effect on our faith. There is much more that could and should be said than this letter permits, so consider this a starting point.

For decades, two core questions have dominated the abortion debate: (1) When does human life begin? (2) Should a woman have the right to control her own body? In order to begin discerning what "Christian values" mean in the context of abortion, as individuals or as church, we will examine these two questions using Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

1. *When does human life begin?* It is a widely-held misconception that the mainstream belief of life³ beginning at conception is the continuation of an ancient tradition, one which has gone unchallenged until the last few decades. In fact, it wasn't until the last few decades that a very narrow interpretation of a handful of verses⁴ rendered this belief mainstream.⁵

There are two major Christian traditions of belief as to when life begins. For thousands of years, Jewish and Christian people believed life to begin at first breath, just as God breathed life into humankind (Hebrew *adam*).⁶ The Hebrew and Greek for the Holy Spirit—*ruach* and *pneuma*—mean "breath", which emphasizes the life of God which causes us to come to life. Another Christian tradition identifies the point at "quickening," the point at which a woman first feels the fetus move and kick, sometime around 20 weeks gestation. In the Gospels, Elizabeth's child (John the Baptist) "leaped for joy" in her womb when Mary, also pregnant with Jesus, visited her.⁷ These are the traditional understandings of when life begins, not at conception.

2. *Should a woman have the right to control her own body?* Women in biblical times were property of their fathers or husbands. This was women's lived experience. The purpose of women, forced on them by patriarchal societies, was to bear and raise children. Though all of Scripture is inspired and productive to increase our faith, much of Scripture is "descriptive," not "prescriptive." Though that describes the reality of that time and culture, God is not holding that up as ideal.

Instead, Jesus lets people know that women are to be fully respected and trusted. It is women to whom Jesus reveals himself at his resurrection. It is women whom he entrusts with the first apostolic acts. The Holy Spirit—Breath—comes to inspire not just men, but women, as equals. Scripture categorically affirms: "[T]here is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."⁸ As we reason from Scripture, tradition, and the experience of women therein, we find that the Bible leads us to a radical shift from the societies it describes to ones in which women are equal and endowed with free will to pursue their purpose.

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More recently, Rev. Dave Barnhardt of St. Junia UMC in Birmingham, Alabama challenges those who claim to be pro-life to recognize the sanctity of lives lived under oppression: “You can love the unborn and advocate for them without substantially challenging your own wealth, power, or privilege, without re-imagining social structures, apologizing, or making reparations to anyone. They are, in short, the perfect people to love if you want to claim you love Jesus but actually dislike people who breathe.”⁹

We are forced to deal with grievous inconsistencies in the so-called “pro-life” movement. As Sister Joan Chittister, a Catholic nun, has said, “*I do not believe that just because you’re opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don’t? Because you don’t want any tax money to go there. That’s not pro-life. That’s pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is.*” I’ll add that pro-life supporters would be more consistent and convincing if they also passionately advocated for affordable healthcare, childcare, paid parental leave, tighter regulations of firearms, and abolishment of the death penalty.

The Supreme Court justices who disagreed with the decision to overturn *Roe* lament: “Today, the Court... says that from the very moment of fertilization, a woman has no rights to speak of. A State can force her to bring a pregnancy to term, even at the steepest personal and familial costs.... [States] have passed laws without any exceptions for... rape or incest. Under those laws, a woman will have to bear her rapist’s child or a young girl her father’s—no matter if doing so will destroy her life. So too, after today’s ruling, some States may compel women to carry to term a fetus with severe physical anomalies . . . sure to die within a few years of birth. States may even argue that a prohibition on abortion need make no provision for protecting a woman from risk of death or physical harm.”¹⁰ The dissent recognizes the gruesome reality for women in a post-*Roe* nation.

To the question “Should a woman have the right to control her own body?”, God answers us, through Christ, with a resounding “Yes.” People who have fought and claimed a victory with the recent overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* may be well-intentioned, but the resulting harm to women forced to carry pregnancies that are not viable or safe for any number of reasons is a denial of their autonomy and life. The essential question of a woman’s right to her own body was discarded by the Supreme Court with a careless “no!”. Our culture has long assumed women are supposed to be nurturing caretakers who must give of themselves and their bodies. Yes, God calls us all (including men) to be generous with our lives. But Christ also demonstrated countless examples of setting and keeping strong, healthy boundaries. I believe those boundaries include the separation of church and state and trusting women and their doctors to make difficult decisions during either unwanted or unviable pregnancies. As the people of First UMC of Wausau, let’s focus on loving Jesus *and* all people who breath. Let’s affirm and support women with equality and their ability to make difficult decisions. If you or someone you know ever needs to talk to someone about this, I’m available to listen and offer spiritual support.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Rebecca

¹Addressing counsel for *Dobbs* during oral argument, Justice Sotomayor asked: “How is your interest anything but a religious view? . . . It’s still debated in religions. So, when you say [abortion] is the only right that takes away from the state the ability to protect a life, that’s a religious view, isn’t it—.” Oral Argument at 26:35, *Dobbs v. Jackson’s Women’s Health*, 597 US (2022) (No. 13-1392), <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2021/19-1392>.

²*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org.*, 597 U.S. (2022).

³An ongoing dialogue could ask “What does ‘life’ mean?” Biological life? Imbued with some form of meaning? If so, what forms? There are also various Judeo-Christian beliefs regarding points of “ensoulment.” I would be happy to lend the book *Pro-Choice and Christian: Reconciling Faith, Politics, and Justice* by Rev. Kira Schlesinger.

⁴See, for example, Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 139:13–15

⁵In recent history, even evangelical Christians—some of the most fervent opponents of the right to abortion—have understood the necessity of the separation of church and state and the ability of a woman to choose. David Roach, *How Baptists became Pro-Life*, BAPTIST PRESS (Jan. 16, 2015), <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/how-southern-baptists-became-pro-life/>.

⁶*Genesis* 2:7 (NRSVUE).

⁷*Luke* 1:44 (NRSVUE).

⁸*Galatians* 3:28 (NRSVUE).

⁹Dave Barnhardt, FACEBOOK (June 25, 2018), <https://www.facebook.com/dave.barnhart/posts/10156549406811031>.

¹⁰*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Org.*, 597 U.S. (2022), (Breyer, Kagan, Sotomayor, JJ., dissenting).

FUMC Online

firstmethodistwausau.org
with links to the weekly
sermon in text and podcast

facebook.com/WausauFUMC

WiFi Network: FUMC Public
(password: *fumcpbublic*)

Phone: 715.842.2201



Update On Personal Needs Closet & Claire's Critter Closet

Happy summer, members and friends of FUMC Wausau! As a regular volunteer once a month to both the Closets our church has been serving our community, it seems like this is a good time to refresh everyone's memory about both of these service opportunities in our church. Now that the pandemic is generally behind us, hopefully some of you are looking for ways to once again help out in our church and in our community. (You can always wear a mask if you're more comfortable that way!)

On the 2nd Tuesday of the month, I am currently the only regular non-staff volunteer present during the open hours of 1:00-3:00 pm. While it is wonderful to have Pastor Rebecca, Martie, and Andy visible and present during this time, it would be even more wonderful if they did not have to be there as actual volunteers/workers! They could use that time in their offices sometimes, or if available to help, to visit with the people who come and share God's word with them. The 4th Saturday of each month is another day the Closets are open. While church staff members don't generally work on that day, the dedicated group of volunteers on that Saturday could use some extra help as well.

We are the busiest usually from 1:00-2:00, when First Presbyterian's food pantry is also open. Things get a little quieter between 2:00-3:00. Being a volunteer for one of our Closet days is both fulfilling and not very difficult. One person is needed to be a greeter and help each person navigate the registration process as he/she comes into the building. People are then called by their registration number to the computer room, where they are officially checked in. Then a volunteer helps them get their items from either the Personal Needs area or the Claire's Critter area, or both. Some people do need help out to their cars if they have a lot of items, but usually that works out between the volunteers present if there are heavier things. We also now have a cart to help with heavy items, like cat litter or large dog/cat food bags.

The people who come into the Closets are so grateful for the help and support they receive. It is a wonderful way for our church to reach out into the community to those who need the help. Please consider giving some of your time on either the second Tuesday or fourth Saturday of each month to help out in these areas!

Bonnie Goertz



July We assist families in need by providing pet supplies for their critters large and small. Claire's Critter closet is open twice a month to pick up needed pet supplies. Donate loose change, put cash in the small brown envelopes in the pews or write Claire's Critter Closet on memo line of your check.

August donations support our Community Dinner Ministry. On the 5th Sunday of the month, we take the lead in providing a community meal for anyone who is hungry. With Covid-19 we are offering boxed meals and handing them out in the parking lot of the First Presbyterian Church. We look forward to being able to serve inside the church when it is deemed safe. If you want to get involved, we will be needing baked goods to add to the meal. Please contact Jen Johnson at 715-470-2527 and she will arrange a time to pick up any baked goods. Thank you to the volunteers that grocery shop, prep meals, bake and help serve. Our next meal will be July 31st, 4:00pm at the First Presbyterian Church. Please also keep our dinner guests in your prayers.

Thank you, Jen Johnson

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Newsletter Reminder

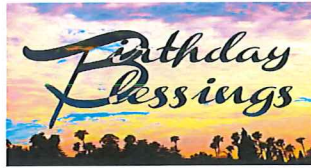
All items for the
September
newsletter are due
in the office on
August 18th.

**Live and Share
God's Love ...**

*with
peace, joy & hope*

**Fun
for
Seniors**

Savvy Seniors will meet
on Monday August 1st,
11:30am at Wausau
Mine Company.



July/August Birthdays

July

19 Zoe Martin
21 Dick Rayborn
Mark Johnson
23 Samuel Cowan
24 Bev LaCrosse*
Thomas Krueger
26 Michael Marzu
29 Blake Grogan
31 Gloria Rybarczyk

August

2 Gwen Carey
Dwight Steinke
Cooper Stamp
4 Don Kissinger
7 Judith Mattiaci*
6 Rebecca Voss
8 Logan Rohland
9 Bob Frame*
12 Terry Flath
17 Wil Bloy
Nancy Flath
22 Pamela Zietlow
25 Eileen Denfeld
Lynn Reichelt
27 David Mariani
Sheryl Del Conte
Liesl Seiser
30 MacKenzie Marquardt

** Signifies a member who cannot be at church regularly. We invite you this month to remember these members in your prayers.*

July 30-31 MCCI Welcoming Weekend



We are excited to have our first MCCI
Coach, Jason Moore, visit us from Ohio.

With prolific experience in helping churches become more welcoming and relevant to their communities, we can benefit greatly as we learn together.

Saturday, July 30 10 am—4 pm Training Seminar

Whether you're an usher, greeter, server, or simply believe that "My Church Can Improve", this important training by Jason Moore is for all members and will help us understand how to more effectively welcome people both in person and online. Lunch will be provided during the training. After the training we will go downtown for dinner with those who are available.

Sunday, July 31 11 am—12:30pm All-Church Lunch

After the 10 am worship service, we will enjoy an all-church lunch in the Fellowship Hall and hear an update on our journey with the Missional Church Consultative Initiative. With Jason Moore's experienced yet fresh perspective, we'll be encouraged and filled with hope as we dream about our future possibilities together.



Our Financial Picture for May 2022			
May Revenue		May Expenses	
Pledged Offering	\$ 12,361.16	Staffing	\$ 17,670.88
Non-Pledged Offering	\$ 4,620.00	Programming	\$ 761.91
Other Revenue	\$ 1,971.25	Apportionments	\$ 3,986.00
From Endowment	\$ 1,672.72	Building Operations	\$ 4,580.25
Total Revenue	\$ 20,625.13	Total Expenses	\$ 26,999.04
		Net MTD	\$ (6,373.91)



A Chicken or an Eagle? August

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

Once upon a time, a man found the egg of an eagle. It had been abandoned for some reason by its mother, but as it was still warm, the man took it and put it in the nest of one of his backyard chickens along with the other eggs that were there being brooded upon.

After a period of time, the eaglet was hatched, and along with the other chicks from his next began to go about the back yard doing what the other chicks did. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He looked for the corn that the man would throw into the yard. He clucked and cackled as best as he could, and as he grew, he would, like other chickens, thrash his wings and fly a few feet in the air.

Years passed in this way, and the eagle grew very old. One day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided majestically among the powerful wind currents, soaring and swooping, scarcely beating its long golden wings. The old eagle looked at it in awe and asked, “What is that?”

“That is the eagle, the king of birds,” said one of his neighbors. “He belongs to the sky and to the high places. We belong to the earth, we are chickens.” The old eagle knew this was true, and so it was he lived and died as a chicken, for that is what he believed he was.

In life, our perspective determines our reality. For instance, most people believe that they need more money to be “okay” financially. How much more? It didn’t matter if they were making \$25,000 or \$250,000, the answer to how much more they needed was always right around 10% more. The truth is, if we haven’t learned how to manage well what we have, having more will leave us with the same set of problems.

On the other hand, developing an attitude of gratitude, an abundant mindset, and planning for giving and saving in our spending plans (aka, budgets) can help us discover contentment no amount of money can give.

Rev. Jason Mahnke, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation

Random Thoughts: How Can I Help You?

by Mike Zahn

“How can I help you?” That’s not just a line from your friendly hardware folks at Ace. That’s what the prophet Elisha said to the widow in 2 Kings 4:2.

This was in response to a plea: the widow was the wife of a man from the company of prophets, and she cried out to Elisha: “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as slaves.” Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” “Your servant has nothing there at all, except a little oil.”

The Lord then, through Elisha, proceeded to perform a miracle. Elisha instructed her to borrow as many empty jars from her neighbors as she could. Then she was miraculously able to fill all the jars with oil, enough to pay her debts and live on the money left over!

Elisha was a prophet of God in a dark time. 850-800 BC was during the era of kings in Israel and Judah. This was a savage era, a time of wicked kingdoms, constant wars, deceit, mass killings and volatile loyalties. In this environment, Elisha was a breath of fresh air. He performed many miracles, and most of them were to help people in distress. Elisha was filled with divine grace, Holy Spirit, and he used them for the good of people. He brought kindness to a cruel world.

We can make a difference in today’s cruel world. God needs us to do so. Every good thing, every act of kindness is from the Lord, whether we recognize it as from God or not. Every time we help someone, we hold the wickedness of the world at bay and bring the kingdom of God to light, if even for a brief moment. May we always be more willing to be kind than to criticize or condemn.

The Messenger

First United Methodist Church of Wausau
903 Third Street
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Church Purpose:

Live and Share God's Love

Worship in July and August

Sunday Worship Times

8:00 a.m. Worship in the Chapel

10:00 a.m. Worship in the Sanctuary

Sunday, July 17 Living in a Bitter Day

Psalm 15, Colossians 1:15-23, Amos 8:1-12

Sunday, July 24 Pity on the House

Psalm 85, Colossians 2:6-15, Hosea 1:2-10

Sunday, July 31 Cords of Kindness

Psalm 107:1-9, Colossians 3:1-11, Hosea 11:1-11

Sunday, Aug. 7 Learn to Do Good

Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16,
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Sunday, Aug. 14 I Knew You

Psalm 71:1-6, Hebrews 12:18-29,
Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sunday, Aug. 21

Blessing of the Animals, Both Services

Psalm 148, Genesis 2:18-25,
Revelations 5:11-14, Matthew 6:21-29

Sunday, Aug. 28 Cracked Cisterns

Psalm 112, Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16,
Jeremiah 2:4-13