



The Octagon

Severna Park United Methodist Church News

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Living in the Middle Miles (Still)

In the early stages of the pandemic that we've been living through for over 5 months now, I talked in a sermon about the fact that we were all going to have to get used to living in the "middle miles." It was a phrase I had learned from a runner/former parishioner who I had the privilege of walking

alongside as he grieved the loss of his 14-year old son. We talked often in the months and years following Derek's sudden death from an accident and at one point he compared where he was on his journey of grief and healing as being in "the middle miles."

(continued on page 4)

Middle Miles (Still)



Online Fall Classes

Bible 101: Reading the Bible for All It's Worth! with Rev. Ron
Wednesdays, 8pm. Starts Sept. 16.

The Bible is both life-giving and really complex. Consequently, many of us wish we knew more about the “Good Book” so that we’d be able to read it with confidence and tap into its soul-shaping power. But too often, if we’re honest, we feel like we have more questions than answers and sometimes aren’t even sure where to begin. Join Rev. Ron for Bible 101 this fall, a 6-week primer that will focus on reading the Bible faithfully, expectantly and thoughtfully. This is a great class for total beginners (there are no dumb questions) and for those looking for a bit of a refresher on how to read the Bible for all it’s worth! rfoster@severnaparkumc.org

Better Together with Rev. Carissa and Matthew. *Mondays, 8:30pm. Starts Sept. 14.*

Have you had a little more “together” time with your spouse during quarantine? Do you need a place to recharge, reconnect, and invest in your marriage? All engaged and married couples are invited to join Rev. Carissa and her husband Matthew

for an 8-week course that is sure to strengthen your relationship, no matter how long you’ve been together. The class will be tailored to the needs of the participating couples, covering topics such as personal stress, conflict resolution, finances, and navigating change, all through the lens of our faith. Better Together will meet on Mondays at 8:30pm on Zoom from September 14 to November 2, with a fee of \$35 covering the cost of workbooks and the use of the “Prepare and Enrich” curriculum.

csurber@severnaparkumc.org

The Gospel of Mark with Rev. Byron
Tuesdays, 7:30pm. Starts Sept. 22.

Are you ready for some good news? That’s what the Gospel of Mark is all about: the “good news of Jesus Christ.” Join Rev. Byron for a study of the story of Jesus that you won’t want to miss!

bbrought@severnaparkumc.org

Soul Reset with Todd Popham
Tuesdays, 7pm. Starts in November.

How is it with your soul? Is it time to reset? Junius Dotson had a great life, a successful ministry, and he loved the spotlight. Inside, he was suffering in silence and felt empty. What followed was a medical emergency and the need to change his life. Soul Reset, written by Dotson, is an invitation to live a life of wholeness. These interactive sessions will include scripture, reflection, and the opportunity to redirect your energy toward a life of spiritual joy. We are holding two 6-session classes, with a maximum of 15 participants each: September/October (full) and November/December. toddpopham@gmail.com

Fall Moms Connect with Erica Benjamin
Thursdays, 8:30pm, see dates below.

In *The Six Truths of Motherhood* you will tackle some of the big challenges facing moms today like discipline, resentment, identity, and family values. You can successfully navigate culture, parent your children and still find time for you, and *The Six Truths of Motherhood* will help you go from surviving to thriving. Moms Connect is open to any mom looking to grow in faith in an encouraging Christian community. New moms are always welcome.

ebenjamin@severnaparkumc.org

We will gather on Zoom 6 times this fall (Sept 17, Oct 1 & 15, Nov 5 & 19, and Dec 3) at 8:30pm.

Meeting ID: 829 0731 7996

Passcode: Moms

Women's Bible Study with Brenda Shields
Mondays, 8:30pm. Starts September 21.

This fall, we will begin studying the book *The Will of God* by Rev. Leslie Weatherhead. This book is a collection of his sermons that were written during the WWII era, when he was trying to help his congregation understand the will of God in all of the pain and suffering that they were seeing around them. Even today, when we struggle with these difficult times, and grieve, we ask similar questions: how can all of this be part of God's plan? What is God's will in all of this? We are excited to start this class together and we hope you will join us. Email Brenda with questions.
beefox03@yahoo.com

11th Hour Sunday School

The 11th Hour Sunday School class led by Reid Reininger will continue to meet *weekly on Sundays at 11:30am*, discussing the book of Acts.

Sacred Worth Group

The Sacred Worth group led by Rev. Ron is also resuming, meeting on the *3rd Tuesday of each month at 7pm*. You can read more about this group here and access group meeting times and Zoom links on the Events page.

Faith & Grace Group

The Faith & Race group led by Rev. Ron will resume meeting on the *4th Tuesday of each month at 7pm*. You can read more about this topic on our Faith & Race resource page, and access group meeting times and Zoom links on the Events page.

LIFT (Living In Faith Together)

LIFT is a fellowship group that requires no prep work - everyone is welcome to attend! Each meeting they explore a topic with some guided questions, and just see how it goes.

LIFT will resume in September, meeting via Zoom, at 8pm on the second Thursday each month. Email Tracy with questions.

Visit severnaparkumc.org/fall to sign up for classes!

Middle Miles (Still)

Still Living in the Middle Miles

(continued from page 1)

Not the exciting full-of-adrenaline first few miles of a marathon or the last leg when the end is in sight and the crowds are cheering you on. No, the dreary middle miles, which as any distance runner will tell you, can sometimes feel like they stretch on forever. They are the loneliest and most challenging.

Friends, we are still in the “middle miles.” Things aren’t back to normal yet – most of us are still working remotely, most of our kids are headed back to school virtually, we can’t go to Camden Yards to cheer on our O’s in their mini-season – and we don’t know when they will be. It’s hard living with fuzzy horizons.

But we’ve also covered some significant ground, as we have all had to adapt our normal rhythms and habits and that’s been true at SPUMC, too. We have been in worship together online through our livestream for 24 consecutive Sundays now, including some “big ones” like Palm Sunday, Easter and Pentecost. We’ve gathered in “Brady Bunch boxes” for virtual Bible studies, prayer groups, book discussions, youth group, Sunday School and Leadership Team meetings. We had to cancel our Garage Sale, Appalachia Service Project week and Volunteers in Mission trip to Costa Rica even while we have sought new and creative ways to reach out to serve others through Heaven’s Kitchen and SPAN food drives. We held our first-ever backyard/driveway/family room VBS. Your giving has been phenomenally generous through this strange time and as of the end of July we

were holding our own.

As the fall begins and the middle miles linger on, we are not sitting still but rather pushing forward with our very best efforts. On September 13th, we’ll begin some Sunday morning in-person worship at 8am in the parking lot (to go along with our Wednesday night worship that has been happening for two months now) even as our 10am Livestream service will continue. We have an exciting slate of new classes and ongoing groups so there will be chances for you to find community, deepen faith and engage with the world. And we’re getting creative with a drive-through backpack/laptop/tablet blessing (September 6, 11am-1pm) for our students, baptisms happening again in multiple ways and a re-imagined Rise Against Hunger food-packing event in October.

Back in May, our Regathering Task Force established some foundational principles to anchor all of our efforts to stay connected with one another through this public health crisis. We agreed that we would be guided by Patient Faith, Cautious Hope and Creative Love. Ever since, that is how we have been trying to move forward, one step at a time, one decision at a time, one middle mile at a time. I couldn’t be more grateful for your continued love and support, the incredible efforts of lay leadership and staff and for simply being on this road together.

May God continue to strengthen all of us as we journey together.

Be God’s,

Rev. Ron



Sunday Morning In-Person Worship Returns!

We are excited to announce that beginning **Sunday, September 13**, we will be adding an **In-person Outdoor Worship** service at **8am** for as long as the weather allows this fall. Sign up online (space is limited to 80 people), wear a mask, park in every other parking space as directed by our Hospitality Team and come out to reconnect with familiar faces and some new ones, too! We will be continuing our Livestream Worship Service at 10am each Sunday, as well and if there is enough interest, may be adding a 10am live worship option, too. Our plan at this point is to continue our **Wednesday Night Worship** at **6:30pm** (note time change beginning **September 9**) through the end of September.

Health and Hospitality Team Needs You!

As we expand our outdoor in-person worship services to Sunday morning beginning September 13, we are in need of an expanded team of individuals willing to welcome people to worship, help direct parking, seat people in safe spaces, offer water and more. If you are willing to arrive at 7:30am for the 8am service and can help out in this way, contact Rev. Ron. Thanks! rfoster@severnaparkumc.org

Survey

The Regathering Task Force has been hard at work and is looking to take the pulse of the congregation once again. As we head into the fall, we want your feedback about what we've been doing so far as a mostly "virtual church" and what kinds of in-person and online events you might be willing to participate in. Visit severnaparkumc.org/reentersurvey to take a short survey and tell us what you think. Thanks.

Congratulations

Congratulations and God's blessing on:

- Christie & Randy Deltuva on the birth of *Ellie Johanna* who was born on July 1.
- Craig and Meghan Linehan on the birth of *Colton Ellis* on July 22.
- Jeremy and Patti Beall on the birth of *Brinlee Laura* on July 30.
- *Kelly Parker and Kevin Cook* who were married on August 28.

Sympathies

Heartfelt sympathies go out to the friends and families of *Norma Irish* who passed away on June 17, to Gina Ingel and family on the death of *Dave "Bear" Grimsley*, to Rev. Sandra Taylor and Jennifer Taylor-Cox on the death of *David Taylor* who passed away on August 28, to Lynn Kitzmiller and family on the death of *Bill Harris* on August 7, and to the family and friends of *Ruth Kight* who passed away on August 29

Support Our Local Teachers

As the kids head virtually “back” to school, this is a hard year to be a teacher. We want to bless the teachers of Brooklyn Park Elementary School (our Backpack Buddies partner school) by giving each teacher a \$50 gift card to Staples, Office Depot, Target, or Amazon for them to use in the most effective way for their students. You can help by donating a gift card for a teacher! Just bring gift cards to the church on a Sunday morning, Wednesday Night, or during the Drive-Through Back to School Blessings on **Sunday, September 6**. Our goal is to collect enough gift cards for all the BPES teachers by Labor Day! Email Rev. Carissa (carissa@severnaparkumc.org) or Norma Graber (nlgraber@gmail.com) with questions.

Baptisms Are Back!

We are beginning to offer the sacrament of baptism once more for families who had baptisms postponed or have been waiting to schedule one. There are options for outdoor baptisms as part of the Wednesday night worship, Sunday morning 8am worship (**starting September 13**) or in the Garden at another time. We are also scheduling baptisms in the Sanctuary during the livestream service or at other times for smaller groups of people.

Contact Rev. Ron (rfoster@severnaparkumc.org) or Rev. Carissa (csurber@severnaparkumc.org) if you'd like to talk about scheduling or rescheduling a safe and joyful baptism!

New School Year Blessing

Whether starting off the fall learning virtually, in a school building, or both, God is with us as we embark on a new school year. Join us for a back to school blessing during online worship on **Sunday, September 6 at 10am**. Then all students and educators are invited to join us for a Drive-thru Blessing of the Backpacks/Laptops/Tablets celebration in the church parking lot from **11am-1pm**. There will be gifts and a photo booth. Masks are required.

Another Way to Help the Church

Did you know that if you give to the church by way of credit card, through Text-2-Give or Tithe.ly, the church gets charged a fee? This charge is approximately 3% of your gift amount which lowers the ultimate amount that the church receives. However, did you know that you can make this fee part of your gift to the church. This will allow your intended gift to go entirely to the church and not get partially eaten up by a credit card fee. And, the extra that you pay is also tax deductible as a charitable gift. So, if you give to the church via a credit card, please consider this option. If you give through texting, text “options” before entering your gift amount and you will see how you can choose to “cover” fees. If you gift through Tithe.ly, simply click the option to “cover fees.” Further, you can also set up recurring automatic giving – a great idea. It is all so simple and quick. For more information about gifting to SPUMC, visit our website. severnaparkumc.org/giving-options

Financial Update

We continue to be humbled by the ongoing generosity of the congregation, even though we've seen a pretty normal pattern of decreased offerings over the summer months. As of July 31, our combined giving and income was \$711K v. \$703K for the same period last year. Our expenses are running below budget and total \$759K for a current year deficit of \$48K. By comparison, last year we were in a deficit position of \$96K at the end of July. It is not unusual to be running a deficit at this point of the year – and certainly not surprising during a national health crisis! The Finance Committee continues to believe we are in pretty good shape all things considered and will continue to monitor our finances each month. Your faithful support matters and you may continue to give to the church by mailing in checks, giving on-line (have you considered setting up a recurring donation?) or via your cell phone through our Text-2-Give program. Thanks so much.

severnaparkumc.org/giving-options

Steeple Lightings

The steeple was lit in August in memory of *Warren & Elaine Zinck* from Betty Brown, in memory of *Jan Szczerba* from Joe Szczerba, and in loving memory of *Julia Wells* from Cecil Wells.

The steeple is lit in September in memory of *Jan Szczerba* from Joe Szczerba, and in loving memory of *Barbara Davis* from Sandy, Kevin, & Matthew O'Donnell.

VBS Photos



Middle Miles (Still)

Third Grade Bibles

Each fall, it is our tradition to present Bibles to our 3rd graders and those children in 4th & 5th grade who have not yet received a Bible. We have exciting plans in the works for how our first Bible celebration will work this fall and we would love to gather your info so we can contact you directly with all the details. All children who receive a Bible must attend a one hour class on Zoom with a guardian prior to receiving their Bible (multiple time slots will be offered). Please complete the form at spumc.breezechms.com/form/bibles. If you have any questions you can email Erica. ebenjamin@severnaparkumc.org

Livestream Two-Way Thanks

We asked and you responded! We want to thank everyone who generously made donations over the last 2 months that will enable us to greatly expand our Livestream capabilities. We have received over \$18,000 in gifts that made possible the purchase of new cameras, video mixing software, a high performance PC and several other vital pieces of equipment. We cannot thank you enough!

Our most significant donor in this effort turned out to be not a member, but a friend of our church (actually a member of another UMC!) who has been worshipping with us regularly throughout the pandemic. In a letter she wrote about why she was moved to make such a sizable contribution, she said:

I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to the SPUMC team for everything you have been doing these last several months during this time of COVID.

I have joined the weekly virtual services of several churches, and SPUMC's is far and away the most meaningful to me. You all have sought new and better ways to engage us all, no matter our preferences or age. Each service is so welcoming, creative, inspiring, realistic, comforting and hopeful. And your obvious hard work to continue to improve, get more tech savvy, be relevant, seek feedback and speak to our hearts is so clear.

As a lifelong Methodist and, for many years an average alto choir-singer, music is such a huge part of my worship experience. Any music accompanied by a skillfully played loud and majestic pipe organ makes my heart swell as I sing out loud in my living room. And as someone who spent my high school years in the Young Life community, I was introduced to and also found a love of contemporary Christian music. All of the ways you make music such an integral part of every service is eagerly anticipated each week.

And church wouldn't be church without messages that speak to our hopes, our fears, our struggles and our blessings. I want to learn something every week and you never disappoint. Thank you for your ministry. I am sure that, for many that are anxious or suffering, this service is their most joyful hour every week.

Thanks to our Tech Team of Rob Smith, Clint Murray, Matt Barger, Greg Parcher, Ryan Hennesy, Dave McKinney and Chris Dillard for their above-and-beyond efforts to keep us all digitally connected in worship. And thanks again to all of our donors for helping us to do this work with even greater excellence.

MYF Back for a Full Fall

Our life is full of change and challenge, and our youth ministry is no exception. After a necessary break from Zoom, our MYF is ready to resume with new and creative programming. Rev. Lee and the team of counselors have been working hard, with input from the youth themselves, to keep MYF as interesting, fun, and meaningful for our youth as it ever was.

We will start all together, as we always have in the fall, with a Zoom call on Sunday, September 13, 7pm. This will include introductions of the leaders, an inviting video by our senior class, and a power point of all the great activities we were able to enjoy together until mid-March.

Then starting September 20, we will attempt outdoor small group (properly-Distanced, with masks) games, discussions, devotions. Small groups will start by grades, then move to combined grades for group building purposes. At this stage, if it is bad weather, we will resort to zoom with creative, new ideas and the use of breakout rooms. Later in the fall, that may change. We may also be shifting the time, as it will get darker sooner. Full details will also be mailed to our youth, including necessary links and the way to get text reminders.

With the somewhat impersonal learning that most of our youth will be experiencing, a group like MYF can offer them some personal and sincere care that they will really need. It will keep them connected to each other and to the church. MYF is for youth in grades 7-12.

If your youth have not been connected, it would be easy to join. Please let Rev. Lee know by text at 410-562-9811 or email: lferrell@severnaparkumc.org.

MYF Awards for 2019-20

Leader Award: Sophie Piepmeier, Ian Russell

Spirit Award: Olivia Unger, Brendan Johnston

Counselor's Own Choice, Counselor of the Year: Delanie Colborne

Outstanding Performance in SNL: Tim and Fran Zyla, The Wonder Twins

Lifetime Achievement in Waffle Toss: Logan Dill

Heavens Kitchen Pics



Middle Miles (Still)

Add Your Info to “Breeze” - Our New Database Is Live!

We are thrilled to announce that our new, secure, cloud-based database, “Breeze,” is live and ready for you to check it out! This new system will integrate many of our internal processes, but will also give you access to an online photo directory, and ability to manage your class registrations and print your own financial statements.

Right now, we want you to **be part of our Phase 1 launch**. By **Friday, September 11**, you will receive an email inviting you to make an account with Breeze. Use this email to (1) set up your login, (2) upload a photo of yourself (and your family members), and (3) make sure we have your current information. If you don't receive an invitation email on by September 11 (check your spam folder), reach out to Beth Frank for help: bfrank@severnaparkumc.org

Rise Against Hunger

We are so excited to hold our third annual Rise Against Hunger meal-packing event! Even though many ministries are still closed due to COVID, the need for these meals at schools and hospitals around the world is great. We will gather on **Sunday, October 18** with the goal of packing **20,000 meals**, working in 1-hour shifts of 20 people so that we can remain safely masked and socially distanced during the event. If you are interested in volunteering, add your name to the list on our website at severnaparkumc.org/rise-against-hunger. Elementary kids, youth, and families are welcome! Email Becky Clapp with questions. becky.clapp23@gmail.com

Summer Worship Photos





**We're here to
help.**

We're Here to Help

If you are feeling anxious, sad, or in need of support, we are here for you. We are ready to talk with you, and able to help you find even more support, if that is what you are seeking. Our church has a counseling center, and we can also help you identify other resources in our community. Please reach out to any of your pastors – our

calling is to help you navigate life's waters with faith:

Rev. Ron – 240.672.1321 | Rev. Carissa – 301.642.9729

Rev. Byron – 443.924.4669 | Rev. Lee – 410.562.9811

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