



EBENEZER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Newsletter

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1 Kings 19:9 While Elijah was on Mount Sinai, the LORD asked, "Elijah, **why are you here?**"

New Year. 2024 – that is incredible! Now, folks, we can be mesmerized by that, or we can take it on as a challenge. For me, I am going to take it on as a challenge. **2024 – What am I here for?**

God asked Elijah when he was hiding out in the mountain, "Elijah, why are you here?" Elijah's response was a whiney complaint, not what God wanted to hear. God gave Elijah a mission – (read 1 Kings 19). Elijah had work to do.

Friends, we have work to do! God has given me several things to contemplate. First was a message from Ephesians 3:20-21 CEV ²⁰⁻²¹ *I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.* I would like you to pay attention to these words. Especially verse 21. **His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine!**

Beloved of the Lord! God has blessed us mightily. Therefore, we carry a heavy responsibility to fulfill God's calling upon us. How do we do this? Let us enter this New Year with prayer and discernment. What is God asking the people of EUMC – Oldhams to be about?

Yes, we are asking: **2024 – What are we here for!** How are we to live into the Word of God according to the Lord's will? This is not just the responsibility of the pastor but must be fulfilled in each of those who worship and seek a deeper relationship with the Lord. Just as God asked Elijah, "Why are you here?" He asks the same question of us.

Do we want a **"feel good ministry?"** I want to come, relax a little bit, see my friends, do a little socializing... I want to hear the pastor tell good stories, something that makes me think a little but not too much... I don't want to be challenged to get out of my safety net... I don't want to give up time to donate to the church ... or too much money ... Is that the kind of church we want?

Or do we want **action, healing, ministry**, "Do we want to be like Peter and jump out of the boat and test the waters?" Do we want our faith challenged? Do we want it to grow? Do we want to see the hand of God working in and through us? If your answer is yes! Then keep reading...

1. We will be challenged to follow through with spiritual disciplines.

- Some spiritual disciplines are: prayer, fasting, tithing, intentional reading of scripture, journalling, visiting the sick and shut ins, contemplation, there are many others to choose from (pick at least 3 which meets your needs and abilities). Ask pastor for additional help. Have a suitable partner to help you remain accountable.

2. We will be given the opportunity to draw names from a basket and become the prayer warrior for the family names we draw.

- January 7th after we receive communion a basket will be available with family names and information; you are asked to draw one – make sure it is not your own. You are free to notify the family and ask what they would like you to pray for, or you could keep it a secret and let them know at the end of 2024 that you have been their prayer warrior for the whole year. You may send notes or remember their birthdays from time to time-work it

like a secret pal! If there are names left over – feel free to draw another – we don't want anyone left out. We will be keeping the whole church prayed up!

3. A Bible reading program will be available to assist us in reading through the Bible in 2024.
 - Pastor is inviting us to read through the Bible together. A list of weekly readings is being provided for us to read daily and if we are intentional in our reading by the end of the year we will have read through the whole Bible. If this is your first attempt, I suggest that you chose a Bible translation which is easy for you such as Good News or the Common English Version. Rather than reading one book at a time – each day of the week presents a different suggested theme. Sunday...the Epistles, Mon.–the Law, Tue.–History, Wed.–Psalms, Thurs.–Poetry, Fri.–Prophecy, and Saturday...the Gospels.
4. A Bible study on **the book of James** will be provided on Thursday mornings from 10:00 – 11:30, perhaps sharing in several volunteer homes. I hope this study will get us to Lent when we begin the Lenten study which will carry us to Easter.
5. **Sunday afternoon** – family time – maybe an opportunity to view the series of The Chosen; followed by a question-and-answer session.

Pastor is open for suggestions and will be flexible, this will take teamwork!

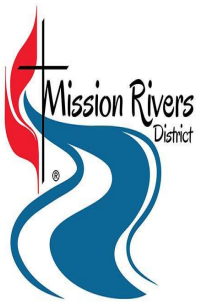


From the District Office: Saturday January 13th

Church Council members: If you have not signed up already you can get additional information from Pastor Loretta. She would like a good representation from our church leadership. If we are serious about rebuilding Ebenezer UMC Oldhams – this is where we need to start! Thank you for your interest and dedication.

Come and celebrate the start of a new year with a day of Worship, Fellowship and Education! Come for just the morning, just the afternoon or the whole day!

Classes will include S/PPR Training, Church Finance 101, Safe Sanctuaries, Simplified Accountability Structure, How to Build a Youth Ministry, Growing Your Social Media, First Aid and Mission Possible!



WHERE: Ebenezer UMC –

161 Embrey Mill Rd, Stafford, VA 22554

WHEN: January 13th

WHAT: Morning and Afternoon classes,
Lunch and Worship for all

Tentative Schedule:

Registration/Sign In: 8:15am - 8:45am

Worship: 9:00am - 10:00am

Session **One:** 10:00am - 12:30pm

Catered **Lunch:** 12:30pm - 1:30pm

Session **Two:** 1:30pm - 4:00pm

Take a break and enjoy pondering this reading entitled "YOU" from Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat's book *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*. After reading it sit in silence – try 10 minutes. If you have done this before, take 20 minutes for silence.

Listen for the heartbeat of God.

YOU

The seed of the Blessed One is planted in us, but we have trouble accepting this reality. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate," writes best-selling spirituality author Marianne Williamson. "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who

are you not to be? You are a child of God."

Nicaraguan Catholic priest Ernesto Cardenal adds: "God has been thinking of me since before I was born, for all eternity. God loves us more than we love ourselves." Why is it so hard to accept the good news? Perhaps because we are our own worst enemies? Perhaps because others make us feel like damaged goods? Perhaps because we think it's too much of a burden to bear?

"Do you know what you are?" Spanish cellist Pablo Casals asks. "You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the world, there is no other . . . exactly like you." Sing your unique song with gusto. And remember the advice of the Baal Shem Tov, a Jewish mystic, "Compare not yourself with anybody else lest you spoil God's curriculum." We are each a unique blend of good and evil. In every moment, we choose which parts of ourselves to put out into the world. Thorin, speaking to Bilbo in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, says, "There is more in you of good than you know . . . some courage and some wisdom blended in measure."

Tap into that courage and unspool that wisdom. "We have a thrifty God," observes art historian Sister Wendy Beckett, "Who lets nothing good within us ever go to waste." The German mystic Meister Eckhart repeats the point: "Become aware of what is in you. Announce it, pronounce it, produce it and give birth to it."

You do not need to try to become special – the God-seed inside already makes you unique. "The Greek Orthodox have a spiritual injunction that implores a person to 'become what you are,'" writer Holly Bridges Elliott explains. "This means by virtue of your creation in the image of God and by your baptism, remember your true humanity, remember that your authentic self is inhabited by God and is a holy creation."

You have an assignment and a purpose in life. This is your mission, should you choose to accept it. "God's dream is to be not alone but to have humanity as a partner in the drama of continuous creation," Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes. "Life is a great adventure; we are partners with the Godhead, and though our role may be small, the honor is still ours."

"The world needs all of our power, and love, and energy, and each of us has something to give," essayist Merle Shain reflects. "The trick is to find it and use it, and give it away, so there will always be more. We can be lights for each other, and through each other's illumination, we will see the way. Each of us is a seed, a silent promise, and it is always spring."

Special Dates to look forward to!

January 1 = **Happy New Year!**

7 = Epiphany Sunday – Baptism of the Lord Sunday
Remember your baptism – Renewing our vows!
1 baptism and 2 join the EUMC family officially.

11 = **1st Bible Study meeting – 10:00 – place TBA**

13 = District Training Day. **Carpool** leaves the church at **7:15 am**

14th = Men's Breakfast – 8:30

19th = 1:00 PM Friday preparation for Saturday's food distribution. Volunteers needed!

20th = 8:00 AM Food pantry

21st = Change for Change

28 = Rev. Clarence Brown will bring the Sunday morning message

Covered Dish follows, and Rev. Brown will present considerations to begin using the Simplified Accountable Structure.





News from our Children's program

January 14th - Change for Change - Westmoreland County Public Schools Backpack Buddies Program

The Backpack Buddies program, in collaboration with the Healthy Harvest Food Bank, provides students in need with a bag of supplemental food for the weekend. Food items are all non-perishable and do not require refrigeration. Items can include canned fruits and vegetables, pasta, and snack foods. They often have quick meals, such as ramen or cans of soup as well. We also try to provide the students with hygiene items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, and deodorant as we have them available. This program is held at all four schools in Westmoreland County.

January 21st - Children's Event - "Sharing the Warmth of God's Love" - After the service.