



## **Community & Faith Inspired Relationships**

### **LIGHTING THE ALTAR CANDLES**

**MUSIC TO PREPARE US FOR WORSHIP** Sue Koeppe, Musician

### **WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Welcome to worship! It's the first Sunday in September. But, what happened to June, July and August? Over the course of this Labor Day weekend, Americans are celebrating the achievements of all workers. Labor Day recognizes the contributions workers have made to our country and our community's strength, prosperity, and well-being. Well, that's what Labor Day's original founders intended, anyway. But, I wonder, labor wise, aren't we a tad more concerned than celebratory these days? The shortages. The delays. The shutdowns. The shipping issues. Product availability! Are you at ALL concerned for our country's strength, prosperity and well-being? Does the church have a place in laboring to affect our strength, prosperity and well-being? Today, we're focusing on our Christian laboring and God's ideas about community? So, let's worship the God who formed this community of faith called Ottawa First United Methodist Church. Would you stand as you are able as Ann leads us in sharing our gathering words!

†**SHARING OUR GATHERING WORDS** Ann Russell, Liturgist

We are God's church:

**A community of faith who come together to worship.**

God has given us God's Word:

**We come together to learn from God and Christ Jesus.**

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God fills us with God's power:

**We go out to show others God's power in our lives.**

God has called us into God's family:

**We come together to share our lives.**

God gives us God's Spirit:

**We come together to serve our community.**

God has planned a glorious future for us and for this community of faith: **We go out to live our lives to please and glorify God in all we think, say and do.**

We are God's church:

**A community of faith who come together to worship.**

**OPENING SONG** "The Church is One Foundation" (vs.1,4 &5) #545

**JOYS & CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY** When we pray God, "let your kingdom come," aren't we just as much or maybe more so praying, "let my kingdom go." God, let my kingdom go and let your kingdom come is the prayer for our lives, our community, our country and the world...Let's pray.

### **PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER**

Holy and Most Hospitable God, today this community of faith is conscious of how we've just expected the "good times" to continue. How we arrogantly believed we would always be an approved voice in our community, a voice for love, peace and justice. How did we arrive at this place where the church's voice is so rejected and dismissed? Now, we realize we've not always taken the right stand, the courageous stand against intolerance, injustice or violence. Forgive us for all the times we failed to be your people, your voice, your hands and feet of compassionate love and acceptance. Grace-supplying God, thank you for this jolt of reality, help us re-evaluate who we are as a faith community in this ever-changing time. Do not let us be satisfied with our past? Ours is a lifetime commitment to your justice, love and peace for all people? Most merciful God, guide us in renewing our commitment to this community, to gathering together, to sharing the gifts you so generously give us. Today, we pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty. We pray for those who are empty emotionally—lonely and longing for companionship and love. We pray for all who are depressed or overwhelmed with grief. We pray for those who are spiritually empty—so troubled they don't know where to turn. Generous God, give us a community consciousness. Pour out Your Spirit on us so we come together to share from our abundance with those who have need, those suffering with no electricity, no homes and no food. Give our hearts to

laboring to make a difference for Jesus Christ in the Ottawa community and beyond. And, join our hearts and voices in prayer to you praying... Our Father who art in heaven... who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

**PRAYING IN SONG** “O, Spirit of the Living God” (vs. 1& 3) #539

### **INVITATION TO GIVE**

A seminary professors once described worship as a gift exchange. From a place of gratitude for all that God gives us, our only response can be to exchange gifts with God, to give gifts to God’s church, a gift that’s sacrificial and generous because God is so sacrificial and generous with us. May our gifts do the absolute best we can to labor for the building of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. So our community will know Christ’s compassionate love... If you’re in person you’re invited to put your gift in the tithe and offering box. If you’re worshipping online, you’re invited to use our website’s secure, paypal giving option. Now, let’s pray thanking God for this and every giving opportunity.

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION** Generous God, on our own, what we have to give may not amount to much in the light of all you give us, especially in a world filled with so much need. But, together as a congregation, what we offer you here in faith, hope and love becomes more, not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. God, bless our gifts, bless each giver, bless the use of these gifts for with the addition of your blessing, we know there will be more than enough for all. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

**THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE** Psalm 133: 1-3 Ann Russell, Liturgist  
How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

**THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES** Hebrews 10: 24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.  
Acts 2: 42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

**MESSAGE** “Community & Faith Inspired Relationships” Pastor Cheri

A story’s told about an ancient King who placed a large bolder on a roadway. He then hid himself and watched to see if anyone would move the boulder out of the way. Some of the king’s wealthiest merchants and courtiers came by. They simply walked around it. People loudly blamed the King for not keeping the roadway clear, but none of them did anything to move the stone out of the way. A peasant came along. The peasant was carrying a load of vegetables. When the peasant saw the boulder, he put down his burden and tried to push the stone out of the road. After much pushing and straining, he finally succeeded. When he went to pick up his vegetables, he noticed a purse lying where the boulder had been. The purse contained lots of gold coins and a note from the King. The King explained how the gold was for the person who removed the boulder from the roadway. The story’s moral: every obstacle we come across in life is an opportunity, an opportunity to improve our community’s circumstances. Laboring for the cause of our King Jesus is just rich like that. Like the peasant, God richly blesses our kind, generous hearts when we make and create opportunities, especially for those in need. But, hasn’t Covid significantly changed and challenged our ways of living in community? Our community feels like it’s shrunk!

Hasn’t the exposed racism significantly changed and challenged our ways of living in community? Haven’t immigration issues significantly changed and challenged our ways of living in community? The upcoming 2022 United Methodist General Conference decision regarding ordaining and including the LGBTQIA persons in our churches will significantly change and challenge our ways of living in community. Our political division, hatred and intolerance has most certainly and significantly changed and challenged our ways of living in community. And, now Afghanistan refugee situation is significantly changing and challenging our ways of living in community, too. The issue: our faith is meant to inspire not just some but ALL our relationships with Christ-like compassion. The church is a faith

community that exists in community. I wonder, have we so compartmentalized our lives that our faith and church no longer fit into our lives? Or, does our faith and church fit into only one part of our lives, the Sunday morning part, but doesn't affect the rest of it? Should we really compartmentalize our faith like that? Affects how we live together in community. What we know from today's OT scripture is this: the Lord bestows his blessings when there's unity! No wonder we feel so cursed. There is very little unity about anything these days. Used to be Church was society's social center, the week's highlight, a hub of activity. Church was such a community it was at the heart of life itself. So much so remember how you used to introduce yourself...I'm Ms. Mr. or Mrs. So in So, I have 3 children and I go to XYZ church. Do we even mention church to anyone anymore? Nowadays, one of the church's biggest issues is: we are a community that exists in community, a community that's "together challenged!" **On so many issues, we're not together AT ALL!**

We have beautiful buildings, upgraded technology, but since Covid, all things church have either stopped or has been significantly altered. We're not connecting with each other inside or outside the church. Our 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday lunches are a perfect example. We used to offer over the top hospitality the Jesus way inside the church. We used to feed anywhere from 50-90 guests, sometimes more sometimes less. Now, because of Covid, we open the door and hand our guests a grocery bag with a carry out meal in it. Now, we feed maybe 20. When Covid first hit, our guests lamented at not being able to come in the church, sit down, talk to other people over a cup of coffee and eat a meal. Simply put they missed our Christ-like hospitality. They missed being served in community. So much so, people have stopped coming.

Don't know about you, but I look out into the congregation and I see some of us are still missing. I understand. Covid affects how comfortable we feel coming inside in a large group. I know many of us watch the service online but it feels like we've lost our community. We hardly see each other or share coffee or even a LESS than better than average donut. But, you have to know: church to Jesus wasn't a building, technology or its programs. Church to Jesus is a group of friends, with himself at the very heart of it all, a community of believers, united in Christ. To be Christian is to be Jesus' friend and friends of one another. **Can you reach out to the friends we haven't seen since Covid?**

Christine Pohl authored the book "Living Into Community." Pohl says: "communities that practice hospitality discover that one of the most precious resources they have to share with people is their fellowship and friendship. Often

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the best gift we can give another person is our time and attention." A Facebook meme caught my attention. It said, "Churches that become passionate about people outside their walls will be far more effective than churches that are passionate only about keeping the few people they have inside their walls."

Church is all about community, growing, healthy church have a tremendous sense of community. Today's scripture talked about all the ways believers were together, in worship, teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. Sure, they had their own lives, but the life they shared in Christ was THEIR community. So, ok, you could argue our society doesn't function ANYTHING like society then. You could also argue that even in our lifetimes, the definition of community has changed with the generations. Yet, feeling connected is a universal, basic human need. From the silent generation of the 1920's to the 1940's to the baby boomers of the late 1940's to mid 1960's to Generation X'ers born from 1965 to 1980's to millennials from 1981-1996 and then Generation Z's (1997 -2012) each generation has stereotypes for how their community communicates. Baby boomers mostly communicate face-to-face or via the telephone or hand-written letters. They grew up before the 1980's when email was widely adopted. Remember the first dial up internet? So many boomers still do not embrace the digital communication world. They still prefer the phone. Generation X'ers were the first generation to truly embrace digital communications. They prefer typed communication. But, Gen X's aren't necessarily huge fans of social media. Millennials and Gen Z'ers are the first "digitally native" generation. They grew up with cell phones, so they text and instant message. To them, talking on the phone is inefficient. Generation Z'ers have grown up with a screen in front of their faces. Unlike Millennials, they grew up with lightning-fast internet. So, they too prefer texting and instant messaging. And, they expect an instant response. Safe to social media has changed our concept of community. Online communities just aren't the same to a baby boomer who prefers face to face, in person communication. Some would argue they're not real communities. Now, even Sunday church has gone online. Online church isn't the same Christian community experience. Last year, when we were all in Illinois and I recorded the service at the parsonage, worship felt like a performance instead of a community connection. Overtime, I became grateful. At least we had an online connection. Can't deny the benefits of Church online! Church anytime and anywhere! While social media unites us in previously impossible ways, community and our investment in one another's lives is drastically different. We are more isolated and individualized. How do we apply our sacred Old and New Testament

texts to our lives today? Then, God’s people gathered to worship, to experience community, and then radiated out to engage in mission. They were together. Their lives were strengthened and grown in a community that was way beyond a weekly Sunday service. Gatherings were inclusive, male and female, Greek, Jews, even gentiles. They were commitment to their community. they didn’t limit themselves to worship once a week. They also met in homes to pray, eat and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. They taught, learned, and took the Good News to the world around them. The early church was connected. They lived life together. They devoted themselves to their Christian labors. And, with glad and generous hearts, they praised God and enjoyed the favor of all the people.”

Hasn’t our compartmentalizing, our individualism, our polarization and isolation cursed the church and our communities? Hasn’t our individualism, polarization and isolation destroyed our ability to sacrifice and work together for the common good? Hasn’t our individualism, polarization and isolation promoted only self-fulfillment? Hasn’t our individualism, polarization and isolation reduced God’s blessings, the blessings of community? The New Testament Greek word for community is *koinonia*. Koinonia is the idea that we experience life together, a life that is no longer our own, but Christ living in us. If Christ truly lives in us and Christ lives in other believers, no amount of political polarization and differing of opinions should disturb that community. Nothing, no one, not our race, our sex, class, gender orientation, none of that matters to a true koinonia. My friends, we must come together and recover our sense of koinonia, of community. Our coming together’s essential for our survival. Otherwise, we self-destruct. Our world has never been more broken. Shouldn’t we be about building a safe, welcoming, inclusive koinonia to help heal our broken world? I want you to listen to this VIDEO that talks about community and hospitality the Jesus way.

Are we together? If we are then God will not only use us to build a community that can help heal our broken world; God will bless us. Community is God's desire for us. Clearly, our society faces some profoundly difficult struggles ahead, struggling our way through Covid and all the hatred and division to restore true community. The church, that’s us, needs to speak prophetically into this. We need to insist that community, that relationship, that love, that hospitality the Jesus Way are our only solutions. We can do it if we come together IN CHRIST! Our Acts 2 scripture said: ‘day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.’ If that’s how God’s Spirit guided them, that same spirit can guide us to love, include and welcome every other online or in person.

Reminds me of the story about a shop owner. He put a sign in the window that said: "Puppies For Sale." Signs like that always attract young children. NO surprise, a boy saw it and went to the store owner asking, "how much are the puppies?" The store owner replied anywhere from \$100 to \$150. The little boy pulled some change out of his pocket and said; "I have \$2.37. Can I please look at them?" The shop owner smiled and whistled. Momma Lady came running down the aisle followed by five cute little tiny balls of fur. **But**, one puppy lagged behind the others. The little boy quickly singled out the lagging, limping puppy. He asked, "What's wrong with that one?" The shop owner explained how the veterinarian examined the puppy and discovered it didn't have a hip socket. The puppy would always be lame. The boy got so excited. "That's the puppy I wanna buy." The shop owner said, "No, you don't want that one. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you." The boy got really upset. He looked the store owner straight in the eyes and said, "I don't want you to give him to me. That puppy's worth just as much as all the others. I'm paying full price. I'll give you \$2.37 now, and 50 cents a month until I pay for him." The shop owner countered, "No, you really don't wanna buy that puppy. He'll never run and jump and play with you like the others." To his surprise, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg. He showed the store owner his badly deformed, crippled left leg. His leg was supported by a huge metal brace. He looked up at the shop owner and softly said, "Well, I don't run so well myself. That little puppy needs someone who understands!" And, the story's moral is: we all need a community who understands us? We all need a place of belonging, of acceptance. We all need a community where everyone understands without judgement, without conditions and with a whole lotta love and sacrifice. Ottawa First UMC, I ask you, do you feel seen here? Do you feel welcomed? Do you feel a part of this faith community? And, are we together in Christ for the task ahead of us, the task of laboring to build God's beloved community, the task of welcoming everyone, the task of being hospitable like Jesus is hospitable? Who's missing and will you reach out to let them know you care and their absence from this community is noticed? They are missed! Jesus has made us all friends! Wouldn't we move boulders to be together

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

### **Call to Reconciliation**

Day by day, God waits to lead us to places of hope and healing, while moment by moment, we continue to follow sin down all the wrong paths. Let us confess our lives, as we draw near to the One who would restore us to wholeness. Join me as we pray together, praying,

## **Unison Prayer for Forgiveness**

**The wrong paths to foolish lives and repeated mistakes? We know all too well where they are, Gate of our lives. Stirring up the waters with trouble comes all too easy to us, we confess. And locking the doors of our hearts so we don't have to love others is second nature to us.**

**Forgive us, our Goodness and Mercy. May our hearts overflow with hope for others, as you gather us together to receive this Holy Meal. May we share from our abundance with all who hunger for life. May we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, to the places of service and life with you forever.**

*(Moment of Silent Reflection)*

## **Receive this assurance of Pardon**

Our Comforter leads us to that place where God's Table is spread with forgiveness and grace overflowing. Here, we are called to life and love.

**We will live as God's people: forgiven to serve, blessed to share, loved so we might care. Thanks be to God. Amen**

## **Join me in the responsive Great Thanksgiving**

May the God of Community and Opportunity be with you!

**And also with you!**

God calls us to open our hearts to others,

**for they are filled to overflowing with grace.**

Every day, let us rejoice in the Restorer of our lives.

**We sing glad songs to the One who leads us.**

You watched over creation, God of patience, as it emerged out of nothingness: meadows where sheep could rest, still pools of water teeming with tadpoles, paths worn smooth by mountain goats. You shaped us in your divine likeness, anointing us with Spirit's breath of life, so we could wander the garden by your side. But that thief, sin, and that bandit, death, climbed into Eden by another way, and we followed these strangers' voices. Day by day, you sent prophets to us, who challenged us to lead God-centered lives, but we devoted ourselves to that life which is empty and bitter. So then you sent Jesus, shaped in human likeness, to us, so we would know you are with us. With those who walk your paths, with those who long to find their way, we offer glad and generous hearts to you:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, Guardian of our souls.**

**All creation praises you day after day after day.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who trusted in you alone.**

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### **Hosanna in the highest!**

You alone are holy, Gate of the Way, and Jesus Christ, your Child. He is our life’s Shepherd. He kept to the path of righteousness, so we might learn how to walk in his footsteps. Knowing our voices, he followed us to death’s gate, where the keeper let him in, locking the gate behind him. But you came another way and, knowing your voice, Jesus followed you out of the tomb, receiving life, abundantly, for all your children. As we gather in prayer and worship, as we seek to devote ourselves to following Jesus, we sing of that great mystery known as faith:

**Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross;**

**Christ was raised by you out of death;**

**Christ will come, so we might live for what is good, right, truth and loving.**

You lead us to this Table where we want for nothing, for your Spirit transforms everyday foods into a sacred feast. Your bread and cup comfort us, nourishing us so we might be together in everything with our siblings. The broken bread strengthens us to provide clean, still waters to all; to build shelter for those who sleep rough; to feed those who are hungry. We eat the bread that helps us remember Christ.

Your grace overflows into us so we may share the cup of companionship with all those who wander shadowed valleys. You invite us to open the gate to those longing for a community; to be voices of compassion and hope to the oppressed.

When we follow goodness and mercy

to the end of time, we will find you coming out of the kitchen, setting dish upon dish of peace and hope on that great table prepared for all your children. We drink the cup of our salvation remembering Christ’s sacrifice for us.

**Having received the Holy Meal, we are joined in heart, hands and voices into a community of love. You have nourished to serve you as you have served us. We will forever sing Your praises, God in Community, Holy Three in One. You are grace unending. Amen**

†**CLOSING SONG** “We Are the Church” (vs.1-4)

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### †**BENEDICTION & SENDING FORTH**

Come together in Christ.

Let’s labor in love for the building of beloved community.

God loves you. I love you. Let’s love our every neighbor, the Jesus Way.

Life together’s all about community. Cooperation. Relationships. Faith. Unity.

**MUSIC AFTER WORSHIP**

Sue Koeppel, Musician