

# ELY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*"The Little Church With the Big Heart"*

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**Parish News**

**April 5, 2024**

## A Note from Pastor Craig

Two respected research institutes recently released surveys about the rapid decline of organized religion in the United States. According to one of these studies, the largest single religious group in our country are the unaffiliated at 26%, including 40 million people who have left churches in the last 25 years.

I've browsed the printed sources and listened to a radio program that was well done. My response is threefold: Concern, irritation, and sadness. I'll describe each in turn.

**Concern:** Both surveys highlight areas for deep self-examination and repentance (meaning authentic change). We have turned inwards, away from our communities, rather than throwing our doors open to the community we are in and moving out amongst others as ambassadors for Christ.

The Church has covered up sexual abuse. We have been slow to recognize racism in our society and within ourselves. We haven't been accepting of the LGBT community. (Note: Warmly embracing all God's sons and daughters without judgement, while listening carefully and being willing to learn, does not necessarily mean throwing all we believe out the window.)

The reasons people leave the church and organized religion ought to prick our conscience.

**Irritation:** I sense a whiff of self-congratulatory "I told you so" in these stories. This may be my defensiveness, but I don't think so. These kinds of reports circulate every so many years - it's nothing new. Some of you may remember the "Death of God" movement in the 1960's. Several hundred years ago, there was such a wave of dismissal of religion as antiquated among philosophers that theologian Frederick Schleiermacher wrote the book "On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers." Today, it can be an altogether-too-convenient excuse for those who would prefer to slide religion into the dustbin of society and their life, to do so.

**Sadness:** Deep sadness, however, is my primary emotion when I see these reports/surveys because they discourage people from seeking the true source of abundant life, the living Reality without which our lives will never be whole, never be complete, never be holy.

My sense is most objections people have to religious faith are "straw men;" in other words objections that don't hold up to scrutiny. For example:

*Religion is Against Science:* Yes, some religious groups reject modern science, yet a growing awareness is dawning that there is no contradiction between faith and science; in fact the most credible theology thoroughly embraces science. And the best science isn't antagonistic toward

religion either. For instance, Jon Haught, the speaker at the Conference I'm attending next week, has spent 30 plus years exploring the intersection between science and faith.

"I Don't Believe in God." When someone presents one pre-eminent New Testament scholar with the above statement, the scholar's response is "Tell me about the God you don't believe in." Upon hearing the answer he responds "I don't believe in that God either."

The we open ourselves to Scripture and to God's Spirit within us, the more credible faith becomes, the more we are drawn to learn about God, the more we want to know God personally, to love God, and become part of the Body of Christ in the world. Christ lives in us!

"I Don't Believe in Organized Religion." A common statement today is "I'm spiritual, but not religious." This really does fit the mood of our age doesn't it. When I was growing up in the 1960's and 1970's we all wore the same clothes, listened to the same music, ate the same kind of food, and watched the same shows on television. Today we are blessed with cuisine from around the world and have a multitude of options in fashion, music, and streaming of TV shows.

Being able to choose is the order of the day. Why not with faith also? Why not assemble a little bit of this and a little bit of that, so our faith is something, which is congenial to us? It seems to me the shape/the content of some people's faith looks like a comically-put-together Mr. Potato Head - the pieces they've assembled don't fit together well. (I hope I'm speaking descriptively here, not judgmentally. I've worked hard for years to have my faith be coherent. It's not easy.)

G. K. Chesterton, the British writer, famously said: *"The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."*

So where to end this already too long note? We Christians have a lot of self-discovery ahead of us. God has much for Ely UMC to learn, as do each and every congregation. I'm inspired by this challenge, rather than discouraged. This moment in time is an opportunity to open ourselves to what God is seeking to teach us. To extend ourselves more intentionally into the Ely community. To be open to people approaching us, who may be different from who is already part of our congregation.

Even though I've only been your pastor for six years, I think you're aware that I'm fairly cautious when it comes to change - in thinking and in my personality. I'm not one to "throw out the baby with the bathwater." I also believe that most efforts at change fail and most change is unanticipated. (For instance, our sudden pivot to live-streaming our services when Covid-19 hit. I doubt this would have happened the way it did minus the pandemic.)

It's always been about testing the winds of the Spirit, about praying without ceasing, about thoughtful and open conversations with each other as servants of God, and so on....

This is a wonderful moment to be alive and to be Christ's church in Ely. Why? Because of God's providence, our faith in Christ, and our commitment to work with one another. Pastor Craig

The Ely United Methodist Church

**Prayer Wall**

April 5, 2024

This is a guide for prayer this week. The *Prayer Wall* is a reminder of those needing prayers during devotional times. Thank you for dedicating some of your personal prayer time to lift up these requests.

**1 John 5: 14-15 (NIV)**



***"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know he hears us – we know that we have what we asked of him."***

**We lift up the following in prayer...**

- **Laurie Kantonen** – Please pray for our church District Superintendent, Laurie Kantonen. She will be having surgery on April 9<sup>th</sup> to repair an aortic aneurysm.
- **Carrie** – Linda Hane asked for prayers for her niece, Carrie, who is having cataract surgery.
- **Victims' families of the Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapse** – Pray for peace & comfort for those families.
- **Matt Rolando's family and friends** – Matt was Pat Rolando's son. He died on a family scuba diving trip.
- **Dick Taylor** – Dick is having back surgery on Monday, April 1st for pain relief and stabilizing his scoliosis. Please keep Dick in your prayers for a successful surgery and subsequent recovery.
- **Welty family** – Gail Haney asked for prayers for the Welty family – her cousin's great grandson has been killed in a car crash.
- **Candy & Gary Herberg** – Margie Olson reported that Candy Herberg is fighting a serious infection and her brother-in-law, Gary Herberg, is having heart surgery.
- **Lynn Turnbull** – Mike Turnbull's uncle, Lynn, is having heart issues and is also dealing with cancer.
- **Logan Loe** – Please pray for Logan Loe who has been diagnosed with Crohn's disease.
- **Bob Sandilla** – **Update: Bob has bacterial meningitis. He opened his eyes, off the ventilator, unable to speak or move his left side. He will be hospitalized another 6-8 weeks.** Erin Moravitz's best friend's brother, Bob Sandilla, has multiple myeloma blood cancer and had 2 strokes and an embolism shower at the base of his brain. His lungs have collapsed, and he is intubated. Bob is married with 3 children.
- **Bonnie Berglund** – Bonnie fell and has a hairline fracture in her left shoulder. Pray for comfort & healing.
- **Peggy Koschak** – Paula Mattila's sister, Peggy Koschak, has a bad cold requiring her to go back on oxygen. Please pray for healing.
- **Kris** – **Update: Kris had her eye removed and is hospitalized for severe pain. Pray for comfort and healing.** Lisa Porthan's mother, Kris, will have one of her eyes removed due to a childhood injury.
- **Derwood's family & friends** – **Update: Lisa Porthan's uncle Derwood passed away.** Pray for comfort.
- **Dick Reinhardt** – Vicki Wagner asked for prayers for her brother Dick Reinhardt, for multiple health issues.
- **Curt Laine** – **Update: Curt Laine has started treatment for his cancer at Mayo.** Susan Laine's husband, Curt, has been diagnosed with cancer of the lymph node behind his tonsils.
- **Lisa Porthan's father & mother** – Lisa's mom & dad are struggling with the progression of his Parkinson's.
- **The Russia / Ukraine conflict • Political Unrest in Africa • The Military, Humanitarian & Political Crisis in the Middle East** – Pray for a world-wide lasting resolution, safety of the people, and peace.

We include all the United Methodist Churches and Pastors, both active and retired, in our MN UMC Annual Conference as we work in extraordinary ways to keep our congregations and communities free from infection by the COVID-19 virus.

