

## Lovely Lane United Methodist Church

MOTHER CHURCH OF  
AMERICAN METHODISM



2200 Saint Paul Street  
Baltimore MD 21218-5805

### Worship Online 10:15 AM

Office Hours  
Tuesday, Wednesday, &  
Saturday  
8 AM — 4 PM

Phone  
410-889-1512

Email  
Lovely.Lane.BCS@gmail.com

Website  
LovelyLane.net

PASTOR  
Rev. Debbie Scott  
revdeb8@aol.com  
301-641-4601

LAY LEADER  
John Strawbridge

ORGANIST  
Bill Scanlan Murphy

PASTOR EMERITA  
Rev. Nancy Nedwell

SEXTON  
Ivan Reyes

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT  
Shanna Webb



## From the Pastor's Desk: Putting Our Trust in God



Fred Craddock, the late great preacher, told of his younger years as a brash young Bible scholar. He had just finished reading Albert Schweitzer's "*Quest For The Historical Jesus*" and found it, in his twenty-year-old wisdom, woefully lacking — "*more water than wine,*" Craddock said. He marked up the book as he read and made notes in the margins. Raised questions. Challenged ideas.

Then one day, Fred read in the Knoxville News Sentinel that Schweitzer was going to be in Cleveland, Ohio to present a dedication concert for a new organ at a big church up there. According to the announcement, Dr. Schweitzer would remain in the fellowship hall for conversation afterwards. So Craddock bought a Greyhound bus ticket and — book in hand — went up to Cleveland.

He wrote out his list of questions on a separate page, references to the pages in the suspect book, and was ready to do religious battle.

Well, Fred got there and heard the concert. Then he rushed down to the fellowship hall where he was the first to arrive. He got a seat in the very front row. He pulled out his papers and organized his notes. Schweitzer had played a wonderful concert, and Fred was somewhat awed by the fact that this man was a master organist, a medical doctor, a philosopher, a biblical scholar, a lecturer, a writer — everything. But Craddock — the twenty-year-old zealot - was ready, sitting there with his notes. After a while, Albert Schweitzer came in — shaggy hair, big white moustache, stooped over, and 75-years old. Schweitzer thanked everybody for coming.

*"You've been very warm and hospitable to me. I thank you for it, and wish I could stay longer among you, but I must get back to Africa. I must get back because my people there are poor, and sick, and hungry, and dying, and I have to go. We have a medical station there at Lambarene. If there's anyone here in this room who has the love of Jesus, would you be prompted by that love to go with me and help?"*

Fred Craddock says he looked down at his sheet of questions and theological arguments. They seemed so absolutely stupid, he realized, in the context of Schweitzer's life. And, he says, "I learned, again, what it means to be Christian, and had hopes that I could be that someday."

What does it mean to trust in God and place our times in his hand? Even times of war? It means not to believe religious theories but to live in godly ways — like Albert Schweitzer. Like Jesus.

What does trusting God with the times of your life look like? It looks like Jesus, in the face of the worst crisis he'd ever experienced, still takes care of the responsibilities God had given him for his family and friends.

What does it mean to trust God with the times of your life? It means to *live well* in the moments you have. It means to *be faithful* in the face of adversity. It means to *take care of the business God has given you* even though the world is crumbling all around!



Now I know that there are many who are really being challenged by life these days. It may be that the pain is so great, the injury so severe, the depression so deep, the disappointment so huge, the betrayal so large, the problem so massive that it would be easy to simply give in and become bitter — self-absorbed — paralyzed people. Don't give in to that! Cast your lot with Jesus, who shows us another way. A better way. Trust God with the times of your life, take care of your family, love your neighbors, stand up for what's right, heal the broken, feed the hungry, live as God calls you to live as we move to the joy of Easter!

Grace and Peace,  
Rev. Debbie Scott

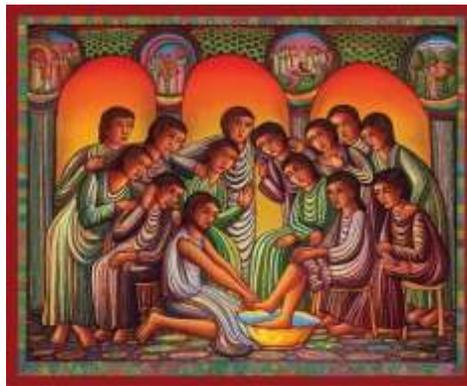


Dr. Albert Schweitzer  
Lambarene Medical Station

As we journey  
into spring, we  
move ever  
closer to the  
cross...



We begin Holy week on Palm Sunday 4/10 at 10:15 AM Worship



Maundy Thursday Service 7:00 PM in the Chapel with communion 4/14



Good Friday 4/15 at 12:00 PM by Zoom Link will be provided by email



April 17th Easter Festive Service 10:15 AM



Remember to wear your bonnet

## *From the Lay Leader...*

April is the first full month of spring. It is a month when we look forward to the re-awakening of the world, the blooming of flowers, the return of birds, and the lengthening of daylight. But it also holds one dark day – April 15<sup>th</sup>.

Now you may be thinking this day is tarnished because of a certain deadline that falls on this day in America. But I'm thinking of another event; the famous sinking of the RMS Titanic. In the first hours of April 15, 1912, the Titanic sunk, causing the loss of around fifteen hundred lives. It is an event which has endured in our collective memory and popular culture not just as a mortal tragedy but also for what it seems to represent. It was a turning point, the end of the gilded age. It was an exposé of class disparity. It was the failure of human over-confidence in technology over nature.

At the launch of the Titanic in 1911, an employee of the White Star line famously said, "Not even God himself could sink this ship." As Christians, we know that God would not have wanted to sink the ship and cause such suffering – but we do see the foolishness of people believing more in themselves than in God's grace. In the end, it was not God who took down the Titanic but compounded human failure.

And at the end, legend tells of a poignant return to God. It was said that as the ship neared its final plunge, the band played the English hymn, "Nearer My God to Thee" by Sarah Fowler Adams. Later historians have characterized the story of the band playing "Nearer My God to Thee" as mere legend - that the band was playing upbeat songs to lift the spirits of those on board. But others say that as the true hopelessness of the situation became apparent, the passengers asked the band to play hymns. The band's leader, Wallace Hartley, was a British Methodist and the son of a Methodist Choirmaster. He had requested that "Nearer My God to Thee" be played at his own funeral and might have chosen the hymn at such a time.

This hymn is so closely associated with this moment that we may have come to believe the title refers to being close to death and, therefore literally, "Nearer to Thee."

But Sarah Fowler Adams had not, in fact, written a hymn about dying. She based her hymn on Genesis, Chapter 28. Jacob has been sent by Isaac to his grandfather's house to find a wife. As he travels the sunsets, and Jacob, taking a stone for a pillow, lies down to sleep.

*Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;  
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee*

He dreams of a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth on which angles travel up and down. When he wakes up, he sets the stone pillow upright as a column, anoints it with oil, and calls the place "Beth-El" (House of God). Because he declares, "Surely the Lord is in this place!"

*Then with my waking thoughts bright with Thy  
praise,  
Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;  
So by my woes to be nearer, my God, to Thee*

This hymn, and the passage that inspired it, remind us that when we are far from home and comfort, alone, and lying in darkness, it is not that we are drawn closer to God, but God that comes close to us. We realize that we have been in God's house all along and need to wake up to this realization.

It reminds us of a turning point—a re-awakening.

This month, as spring is upon us... as flowers bloom and birds return and daylight returns, we may feel closer to God. As the fasting season of Lent gives way to the celebration of Easter, we may feel closer to God. But as Jacob learned in his dream, and as Sarah Fowler Adams reminds us in her hymn, God was near to us all along. It is we who need to wake up and realize we live in God's house.

**Peace,**  
*John Strawbridge*  
**LAY LEADER**



*\*\*\*In light of the announcement to postpone General Conference for the United Methodist Church until 2024, the new denomination, Global Methodist Church, has announced it will be forming May 1, 2022. They do not want to wait for General Conference before they create a split in the United Methodist Church. With all the concern this raises, I found this to be a very helpful commentary from a different perspective. Please read and let me know your thoughts. Rev. Deb*

### "Parting Words & Words of Witness"

**Rev. Steve Harper (retired elder of the Florida Annual Conference and seminary professor)**



On May 1st, the Global Methodist Church (GMC) will officially begin, and some congregations will disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, the first wave of a separation process that will take years to complete. I will not be going with them, and as the GMC day of departure draws near, I am pondering why I will remain in the UMC. I offer the following thoughts as parting words to those who will disaffiliate, and also as words of witness to those who will stay.

I do not say “good bye” apart from a deep sadness. I still believe that unity is a higher biblical value than division. But I have had to accept the fact that there is a difference between a theology of religion and a sociology of religion. We sum up theology in the word Gospel, and we describe sociology in the word institution. The Gospel is the wine, and the institu-

tion is the wineskin. Sometimes the wineskin cannot hold the wine, and it bursts. New wineskins are necessary. We will, of course, continue to disagree about which new skin has the “best wine”—division does not bring that debate to an end—but from the vantage point of sociology, it is time to go our separate ways.

But I do not say “good bye” apart from the remembrance that until I was 66 years old (Lent of 2014), I lived and worked in the part of the UMC that is soon to become the GMC. My time included leadership in Good News and the Confessing Movement, as well as teaching/administration at Asbury Theological Seminary—the seminary now most-aligned with the WCA/GMC split. [1] I did all this in the context often described as “welcoming but not affirming”—that is, thinking I was being as relational and charitable with LGBTQ+ people as the Gospel would allow. [2]

I lived this way willingly. I trusted those who taught me the non-affirming theology. They taught me many good things about Christianity; why would their beliefs about human sexuality not be good too? I accepted what I was taught (and went on to teach it myself), not taking the time to do my own homework until 2014, quickly discovering that to do so put me “outside the camp” in short order.

Where I now stand comes from the mixture of having been a conservative “insider” for so long (steeped in its scholarship and ecclesiology) and the ensuing eight years on another path. This journey is full of details, points and sub-points, many of which I have previously written about. In other words, my decision to remain in the UMC is an informed one, a decision that advances on several key components.

**First**, I have learned that progressive theology in general and with respect to human sexuality in particular is as substantive, scholarly, and plausible as conservative theology. I have learned that progressives believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture as much as any conservative does. Our differences are about hermeneutics, not revelation. For those of you reading this as longstanding progressives, you may say “tell us something we don't know.” But living for six decades within conservative Christianity, you must believe me when I say this was a transforming discovery.

With conservative Christianity's “one-stop shopping” disposition, I was not encouraged to explore liberalism—mostly with a “no need to do so” attitude (benign neglect), but also with an occasional “if you do so, you will be on a slippery slope” warning that alleged I would be descending into “Christianity lite,” unorthodox, and perhaps even heresy. It took firsthand experience to see this is not so.

My parting word to GMC folks is that I have learned progressive theology is as credible as conservative theology.

My witness to those who will stay in the UMC is that you will remain in a denomination that is biblical. You do not have to join the GMC to be faithful to Scripture.

**Second**, I have discovered that LGBTQ+ people live as committed Christians and devoted disciples of Jesus as much as conservatives do. They do so on the same basis as any Christian—fidelity to the covenant. [3] And they do so made in the image of God as much as anyone on the nonbinary spectrum of humanity.

Additionally, I have seen them live their faith as ignored, demeaned, and persecuted people and do so with a depth of commitment greater than I have had to live it in a heteronormative environment. By expanding my understanding of humanity through the witness and friendship of LGBTQ+ people, my experience of God has been deepened and widened beyond what it once was.

My parting word to GMC folks is that in beginning a new denomination which continues a non-affirming theology of human sexuality that then prohibits full access by LGBTQ+ persons to the church's ministries (ceremonies and callings) you are providing a seedbed where other divisive, regulatory, and exclusionary seeds can grow, as they have done in other split-off denominations.

My witness to those who will remain in the UMC is that you have not compromised or diminished your faith by commending acceptance, inclusion, and the common good. You have, in fact, decided to personify Micah's exhortation to "do justice" (Micah 6:8), and doing so in ways that a "pure church" mentality does not do. [4]

**Third**, I have chosen to remain in the UMC because the two previous points (along with others) produce a theology of love that's deeper and wider than the stated intentions of the GMC. Of course, GMC folks will disagree with me on this (as they do also on the two previous points), but I believe the potential for a theology of love is greater in the future UMC. And because a theology of love is at the heart of Wesleyan theology, I must remain where it is practiced to the greatest extent. [5]

My parting word to GMC folks is to judge the new denomination "by its fruits"—the heart of which is love, and see how it defines and practices love in actuality. Pay attention to who is affirmed and not affirmed, who is welcomed and who is turned away, and who is given "in" status versus who is "out." Notice how this happens, and why.

My witness to those who will remain in the UMC is that you can be confident that you are staying in a denomination committed to love in an "all means all" fashion (Colossians 3:11). You will be in a denomination that sees its mission to remove walls that divide (in the spirit of Ephesians 2:14) so that Galatians 3:28 can be realized.

In sum, my parting word to the GMC is "good bye" because it does not offer anything I have failed to find in the UMC. If you believe otherwise...then go.

In sum, my witness to those who will remain in the UMC is this: if you want to be in a denomination where biblical authority, a credible theology of human sexuality, and a commitment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself is in full force---you need not leave. [6]

[1] I go into more detail about this in chapter one of my book, 'Holy Love.'

[2] I now understand that the "welcoming but not affirming" position is harmful, along with other non-affirming stances.

[3] I write about this in chapter two of 'Holy Love.'

[4] In the Bible, the word justice means equity, fairness, inclusion, and common good. Walter Brueggemann writes about this in his book, 'Journey to the Common Good.'

[5] The writing of Thomas Oord is shining bright light on a theology of love. I am reading his latest book, 'Pluriform Love' with great benefit, helping me to see that the focus of John and Charles Wesley on love was an "openness theology" in the sense the United Methodist Church affirms and teaches it.

[6] My decision to remain in the UMC does not ignore the fact that the future UMC has challenging work to do. Some have already given up and gone to denominations where progressive theology is more fully lived. Like John Wesley, I confess that I have drawn a picture that I/we have not attained, but it is a vision to live in to after the GMC is gone. We will not ultimately be judged by the GMC's leaving, but what we become once they have.

We have received the following donations since we published a listing in the March 2022 Tower edition.

**The Restoration Fund** – to maintain building integrity

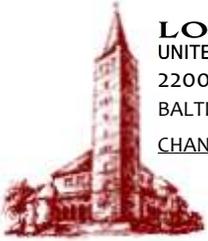
Joan Kraft IMO E. Anne Seeger

**The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Building Project Fund** – to improve building for greater community use

Michael P. Rouse

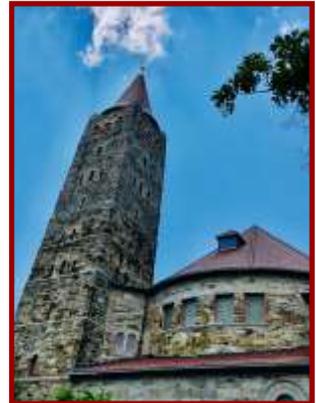
To make a new donation to either of our Building Funds,  
please send checks--payable to the church and indicating "Restoration" or  
"21st Century Building Project" in memo line of the check--  
to Lovely Lane United Methodist Church, 2200 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21218  
or go to our website to donate online: [www.lovelylane.net/donation](http://www.lovelylane.net/donation).

**OUR MISSION:** To celebrate the vision of God's Good News in Jesus Christ in liturgy, learning, and life, through the revitalization of our congregation, the restoration of our building, and the strengthening of our traditions, while recognizing our unique presence and mission in Baltimore City.



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