



Westchester

United Methodist Church Newsletter

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FEBRUARY 2026

Black History Month

Each February, Black History Month celebrates the achievements, contributions and struggles of Black people throughout history. Carter G. Woodson developed the idea for Negro History Week to promote the history, culture and achievements of African Americans and other people of color worldwide. Woodson, the son of former slaves who became the second African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, recognized the importance of establishing an initiative that could be celebrated annually and on a national scale.

Designed to coincide with Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass' birthdays, Woodson launched Negro History Week in February of 1926 as a coordinated effort to develop lessons and encourage the teaching of Black history across the nation's communities and public schools.

Since the mid-1970s, U.S. presidents have issued proclamations supporting the Association for the Study of African American Life and History's

themes to celebrate African Americans' many achievements, culture and history.

This year marks the 101-year anniversary of the creation of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids by labor organizer and civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph, which was the first Black union to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor. Martin Luther King, Jr. incorporated issues outlined by Randolph's March on Washington Movement such as economic justice into the Poor People's Campaign, which he established in 1967. For King, it was a priority for Black people to be considered full citizens.

This year's Black History Month theme is "A Century of Black History Commemorations," which celebrates the contributions of African Americans over the past century. This theme honors the 100th anniversary of the observance of Black History Month

and coincides with the 250th Anniversary of the United States.

Like religion, social justice movements, and education, studying African Americans' labor and labor struggles are important organizing foci for new interpretations and reinterpretations of the Black past, present, and future. Such new considerations and reconsiderations are even more significant as the historical forces of racial oppression gather new and renewed strength in the 21st century.

With the government's anti-diversity efforts, and the erasing of the contributions of People of Color, Black History Month takes on new meaning. Westchester UMC will continue to celebrate and honor Black History Month, and acknowledges that much work still needs to be done to eradicate racism and inequity in this country.

Sources: *Assoc. for the Study of African American Life and History*; *National Museum of African American History*

"I HAVE DECIDED TO STICK WITH LOVE. HATE IS TOO GREAT A BURDEN TO BEAR."

- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

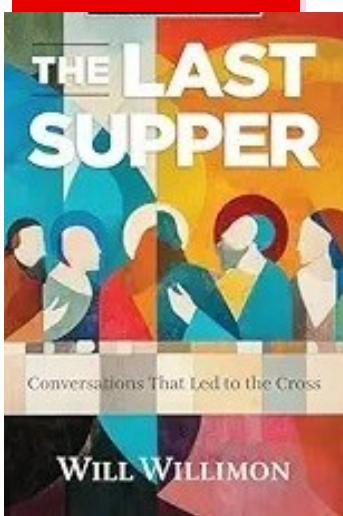
Dates to Remember . . .

02/01—Black History Month begins
8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church
10 am—Worship
02/04—7:30 am—Prayer Check In
12n—Crafters Group
5 pm—Soul-Full Soup
02/08—
8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church
10 am—Worship
02/10—
11 am—Rhythm & Food

02/11—7:30 am Prayer Check In
12n—Crafters Group
02/15—
No Breakfast Church
10 am—Worship
02/16—
Presidents Day—
The Church Office Closed
02/18—**Ash Wednesday**
No Prayer Check In

Drive Thru Ashes: 7:30 -9:30 am
2:30 -4 pm
5:00 pm—Ash Wednesday Dinner Church
02/22—
8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church
10 am—Worship
02/23—6:30 pm—Zoom Lenten Study Begins
02/25—7:30 am—Prayer Check In
12n—Crafters Group

The Last Supper



Our small group Book/DVD study for Lent is “The Last Supper” by Will Willimon. Along the road from Palm Sunday to the cross, Jesus told stories—riddles that revealed the heart of God’s Kin-dom.

Author Will Willimon invites us to walk that road again, listening to Jesus’ most memorable stories and parables as we journey toward the upper room.

Through stories of reckless sowers, searching shepherds, prodigal fathers, and open invitations, we discover a God who refuses to take no for an answer.

We will explore:
Sowing, Seeking, Finding
Open Invitation
Feasting with the Found
Crumbs from the Table
Refusing the Host
The Host Who Becomes
the Meal.

Our Lenten small group study will begin on **February 23rd and continue through Monday, March 29th**. All sessions will begin at 6:30 p.m., and will take place on Zoom.

To RSVP and/or reserve your book, please email Pastor Lyda. A limited number of books are available at the church for \$13.00 or you can purchase a book at your local bookseller.

“Let us always meet each other with a smile, for a smile is the beginning of love.”
- Mother Teresa



Drive Thru Ashes

Ash Wednesday, February 18th, marks the beginning of Lent. A common Lenten practice is to “give up” something during this holy time before Easter ... sometimes it’s a favorite food (chocolate!) or a decision to give up watching television—knowing that after Easter Sunday, we can once again enjoy what we have given up.

This year, instead of giving something up, let’s make some space for God.

Find a few minutes at the end of your day to sit quietly. Thank God for your day. Think about all the things that happened, and all the things you did. Take a moment to reflect—where did you see or feel God’s pres-

ence during your day? What did you observe and how did you feel? Take a deep breath and give the day, with all of its blessings and challenges, to God. Be at peace.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of adherents as a sign of mourning and repentance to God.

It only takes a few minutes to receive the imposition of ashes, and a blessing. You will also receive an Ash Wednesday Meditation; The Sanctuary for Lent 2026 Daily Devotional; and a “faith, hope, love” pocket coin to remind us that we are all beloved of God.

This Ash Wednesday, drive thru Emerson Ave. on Wednesday, February 18th , at the following times:

7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

—and—

2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

At 5:00 p.m., a meal will be served in Fellowship Hall ... instead of our regular Hearty & Holy menu, on Ash Wednesday we will have a simple meal of soup, unleavened bread, and fruit. Please RSVP to Ash Wednesday dinner church by Sunday, February 15th at noon. During dinner, there will be an opportunity to receive the imposition of ashes.

Love ... Your Heart

The month of February is all about love ... and it's also about heart health! February is chosen as Heart Month because it is a time when many people reflect on matters of the heart, including love and relationships. It is a fitting opportunity to also emphasize the importance of heart health. Heart disease remains a leading cause of death worldwide.

Here are some ways to promote heart health during Heart Month and beyond:

Eat a Balanced Diet: Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy products.

Exercise Regularly: Engage in physical activity for at least 150 minutes per week.

Quit Smoking: Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Manage Stress: Practice stress-reduction techniques (like a drum circle

or sound bath!) to reduce the impact of stress on your heart.

Monitor Blood Pressure Regularly

Control Cholesterol: Follow a heart-healthy diet.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Limit Alcohol Consumption: Excessive alcohol consumption can contribute to heart problems.

Get Adequate Sleep: Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night to support heart health.

The Way

“You don’t choose a life, you live a life.” — The Way (2010)

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. —
Isaiah 43:19

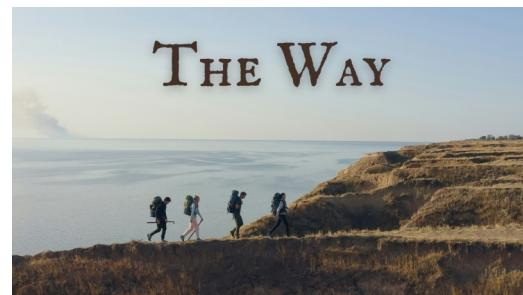
Lent is a time of reflection, and there's nothing like a pilgrimage to conjure that up. Making intentional journeys has been a ritual of humankind across time and traditions. Inspired by passages in the Judeo-Christian scriptures that talk about the journeys, roads, and pathways of life, we

will make our way together through this season.

The popular and poignant movie, The Way, about a father's pilgrimage in honor of his late son on the famed Camino de Santiago in France and Spain, accompanies us as our modern-day inspiration to live the life we've been given to the fullest.

Each week, we will explore:

“The Wandering Way”
“The High Way”



THE WAY

“The Way Around”

“The Way Home”

“The Free Way”

“The Other Way” and “Make Your Way” on Easter Sunday.

I'm Already Against the Next War ...

War is war. It is never justified. We must never fail to oppose it and work to replace it with something more worthy of the wonderful people we are all capable of being.

The United Methodist Church has long stood firm against war, violence, and the dehumanization of any people. Our faith proclaims that every person bears God's image, and no political goal or ideology justifies the destruction of human life or dignity.

In this month that lifts up love, we remember that war does not only happen far away. It also happens when fear is weaponized at home — including through the actions of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—ICE—whose practices have increasingly harmed families, neighbors, and communities across our country.

Love calls us to refuse violence in all its forms and to keep choosing justice, compassion, and peace — even when

doing so is costly. As people of faith, we believe love must always be stronger than fear.

This month, you are invited to choose one way each week to resist fear and practice love — speak up when dehumanizing language is used, check in on a neighbor who may feel unsafe or unseen, or support organizations working for dignity, justice, and compassion. Peace is not passive; it grows through small, faithful acts.

Westchester United Methodist Church

a place where love works

www.wumcla.org

8065 Emerson Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90045

Church: (310) 670 3777

Pastor's email: lyda@wumcla.org



**We are a Reconciling church!
ALL are welcome here.**



From Pastor Lyda . . .

We live in a world with a Doomsday Clock. It's a metaphor created by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists to show how close humanity is to self-annihilation — a symbolic warning meant to move us toward action.

This year, the clock was reset to 85 seconds to midnight — the closest it has ever been since it was introduced in 1947.

The Bulletin cited a worldwide failure of leadership. National leaders — particularly those in the United States, Russia, and China — must take the lead in finding a path away from the brink. Citizens must insist they do so. The message is clear: our current trajectory is unsustainable.

I think the whole world is yearning for some good news. I know I am. Yearning while my heart is breaking over the unimaginable things happening not only in the world, but in this country. We seem to have forgotten that there is no "side" in humanity.

Psalm 111 is the first of several psalms that begin with "hallelujah!" It's a word that holds both joy and relief — a powerful emotional combination. This psalm reminds

us that we don't wait for everything to be fixed before we express our praise, our thanks, our gratitude. But let's be honest — some days, that is really hard.

Living with a lot of bad news depletes our Serotonin levels in ways that are harmful to our resilience. Serotonin, called the "feel good" chemical in our brains, is one of the essential elements of well being. Science tells us that expressing praise and gratitude are important for making it through hard times. Offering our whole hearts in praise even for small things can keep us going when the going gets rough.

Throughout history, God's name has been used to justify violence, war, and division. But my conviction has only grown stronger: God is not a God of sides, hatred, or destruction. **God is love.** Even after centuries of failing to live Christ's message of peace and loving our neighbor, God's grace keeps showing up. Even as we lock up children, separate families, arrest journalists, murder without consequence, and destroy our planet ... God is good.

The psalmists knew this — the psalms were not written when everything was sunshine and rainbows. That's what this psalm is all about — God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

Do you remember at the beginning of the pandemic, hearts started popping up everywhere? They were in sidewalk chalk art in front of homes, and throughout neighborhoods. There were pictures of hearts in the windows of homes, stores, and empty schools. Do you remember? We need to keep seeing those pop-up hearts. We need to put them up again in windows and on sidewalks. We need to see them each time we look at another person, think about another country, stand against lies and hate.

The Doomsday Clock tells us how close we are to midnight. Psalm 111 tells us something else — that love and truth are still worth choosing, even now. Perhaps faith is not only about what we are waiting for — but how we wait.

This is our hallelujah: not praise that ignores the pain, but praise that refuses to abandon love while we wait. God is good all the time, and all the time God is good. Even now.