



# Westchester

## United Methodist Church Newsletter

VOLUME V, ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2024

### Christian Nationalism 101

*\*WHEN JESUS SAID  
love  
your neighbor.  
HE KNEW YOUR  
NEIGHBOR WOULD  
ACT, LOOK, BELIEVE  
and  
LOVE  
differently than  
you.  
\* IT'S KIND OF THE WHOLE POINT.*

This election season, many of us have heard the term, "Christian Nationalism." I've been asked more than a few times what it means, and why so many people are concerned about its rise in America. Here is a "101" breakdown of Christian Nationalism (and why we should all be concerned about its presence) by FaithfulAmerica.org:

Christian nationalism is the belief that America is a "Christian nation" where a person's civic and religious identities are one and the same and there is no such thing as the separation of church and state. This political ideology paves the way to theocracy, granting special rights to conservative Christians while denying equality to others. As patriotic Americans, we can certainly honor our nation's flag, and as Christians, we venerate Christ before the cross -- but while both objects are of great importance to us, only one is Godly.

A major goal of Christian nationalism in the U.S. is for conservative Chris-

tians to seize complete power by any means necessary, no matter who gets hurt or how many elections have to be overturned—even though Jesus refused political authority when tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

Christian nationalism can be identified not just by its rhetoric, but also by its theocratic policy agenda. Despite Christ's commandment to love, adherents advocate for oppressive legislation—rooted in far-right religious beliefs—that strips away equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community, non-Christians, women, people of color, and immigrants, among others. According to the Human Rights Campaign, more than 540 anti-LGBTQ bills have been introduced in state legislatures this year (a record) and at least 45 of them have already passed.

Speaking in 2021 at a ReAwaken America rally in a megachurch known for its antisemitic founding

pastor, Michael Flynn declared that America should have only "one religion." This means that Christian nationalism is antisemitic and Islamophobic, and that it poses a threat to democracy and to the religious freedom of America's non-Christians—including Jews, Muslims, Indigenous peoples, atheists and agnostics, and more.

Christian nationalism encourages political violence: 40% of its adherents say that "American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country;" this ideology helped fuel the January 6th insurrection; the Anti-Defamation League has found that antisemitic incidents in the U.S. are at an all-time high after rising 36% last year.

Speaking at an event with Michael Flynn and Eric Trump, Pastor Mark Burns told an audience of thousands in March 2023, "Bible says the violent take it... and we take it by force."

**Continued on Page 3**

**"BE MINDFUL.  
BE GRATEFUL.  
BE POSITIVE.  
BE TRUE.  
BE KIND."**

- ROY T. BENNETT

### Dates to Remember . . .

11/03—Daylight Savings Ends

11/03—Communion Sunday & Remembering our Saints

8 a.m.—Zoom Breakfast Church

10:00 a.m.—In Person Worship

12n—Westside Food Bank 5K

Tony P's Restaurant Fundraiser 11/3 thru 11/7

11/05—Election Day—Vote!

11/06—

7:30 a.m.—Zoom Prayer Check In

12n—Crafters Group

11/07—

6:30 p.m.—Gospel of John Zoom Study

11/10—

8 a.m.—Zoom Breakfast Church

10:00 a.m.—In Person Worship

11/11—Veterans' Day

11/12—11 am—Rhythm & Food

11/13—

7:30 a.m.—Zoom Prayer Check In

12n—Crafters Group

11/14—

6:30 p.m.—Gospel of John Zoom Study

11/17—

8 a.m.—Zoom Breakfast Church

10:00 a.m.—In Person Worship

11/20—

5 p.m. - eat pray love dinner church community meal in Fellowship Hall—1st Year Anniversary!

11/24—

8 a.m.—Zoom Breakfast Church

10:00 a.m.—In Person Worship

11/27—12 n Crafters Group

11/28-11/29—Thanksgiving Holiday- Church Office Closed

# eat pray love Dinner Church



Some of our dinner church community!

It's hard to believe, but this month marks the 1st Anniversary of *eat pray love* community dinner church!

This year, we lived into what it looks like to follow the Jesus model and gather together around the dinner table. The Gospel of Luke is full of stories of Jesus eating with people—“Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal” (Robert Karris).

At the meals of Jesus, we discover: God graciously includes those the world excludes; we reflect God's welcome of us in the way we welcome others; and meals express grace and community (“A Meal with Jesus” by Tim Chester).

We have experienced the power of meals to shape and reshape community. The gatherings of the early church were shared meals. Not an occasional meal being offered before or after their gatherings—their gatherings **were** meals.

We have experienced the grace of coming together, cultivating relationships and sharing a meal with people we may never see on a Sunday morning. We have experienced sharing and growing together—in addition to a lot of laughter and eating!

Two of my favorite Rachel Held Evans quotes are: “The church is God saying: ‘I'm throwing a banquet, and all

these mismatched, messed-up people are invited. Here, have some wine.” and “This is what God's kingdom is like: a bunch of outcasts and oddballs gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, because they said yes. And there's always room for more.”

As we reflect on this past year of community meals, praying for each other, and sharing stories over dinner, we are so very grateful for new friends, new recipes, and so much joy. We are also planning for the future ... when we will gather not once a month, but twice a month—so stay tuned for more Dinner Church excitement in 2025!

*“I'm grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual ... O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.”*

- Henry David Thoreau

## Bag It Up Holiday Meals

The Food Pantry LAX is an emergency food resource for those experiencing food insecurity in Inglewood, Westchester, El Segundo, Hawthorne, and portions of Los Angeles.

We are again participating in their annual “Bag It Up” holiday meal, which will run from now through December 1st—the **meals will be picked up on Sunday, December 1st after worship**

**The requested menu for a family of 4 is:**

1 can 16 oz ham or other meat (no chicken or Spam)

1 box of instant potatoes (mashed, scalloped, au gratin, etc.)

2 cans of vegetables (15 oz each)

1 can of fruit (15 oz)

1 can of soup (no broth please)

1 package pudding or jello mix

1 jar of peanut butter (no glass)

1 jar jam or jelly (no glass)

1 cake mix & frosting or complete dessert mix

1 box dry cereal

1 box pancake mix

2 boxes of macaroni & cheese

Please—no perishables, glass containers or oversized cans—items must not require refrigeration.

We request that additional items not on the suggested menu not be included in the Bag It Up meals. Extra items may be donated separately.

The addition of a reusable bag in the Bag It Up meals would be greatly appreciated.

**On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 24th, 100% of our offering will be donated to the Food Pantry LAX.**

# Christian Nationalism 101 ... continued from page 1

As the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign notes, "[Christian nationalism] often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation." This is why you will also often hear the related and important term "white Christian nationalism." Here's what Jesus teaches:

- Love vs. Bigotry
- Peace vs. Political Violence
- Truth vs. QAnon Conspiracy Theories
- Community vs. Theocracy & Power for all vs. power for ourselves

Jesus taught us to love our neighbors — no exceptions. Christian nationalism contradicts this teaching by scapegoating

the LGBTQIA+ community, non-Christians, people of color, women, and its political opponents in hateful and intentionally divisive terms.

Jesus is called Prince of Peace, and forbade his disciples from using force to stop his arrest. Christian nationalism encourages political violence, especially when its followers fail to win elections.

Truth is a fundamental Christian value. Christian nationalism is a hotbed for disinformation and misinformation—anything that can be used as a wedge issue to divide the population and seize

authority, valuing power more than truth. A primary goal of Christian nationalism is to seize political power for a specific group of people—straight, conservative, white Christians—at any cost.

In the face of so much hypocrisy and twisted Scripture, where is the church? The answer is, we're right here. The Church has a spiritual duty to call out the abuse, weaponization, hijacking, and distortion of our faith. This duty does not cease when that weaponization is done by politicians.

May our lives—and our votes—reflect love over hate, grace over greed.

## Westside Food Bank's Walk Against Hunger

The Westside Food Bank's mission is to end hunger in our communities by providing access to free nutritious food through food acquisition and distribution, and by engaging the community and advocating for a strong food assistance network.

The WSFB provides nutritious food for over 200,000 individuals in need and their families with the help of nearly 60 member agencies throughout their service area—our local LAX Food Pantry is one of them.

It only takes \$1 to provide 4 meals for our neighbors in need.

You can join the 34th Annual 5K on Sunday, November 3rd at Santa Monica's Ocean View Park on 2701 Barnard Way, or you can fight hunger in West Los Angeles County by donating to Team Westchester UMC.

Puppy Pastor Molly and Pastor Lyda are raising money for the Westside Food Bank—you are invited to make a donation to Team Westchester UMC!

To register, join team Westchester UMC, or to donate, you can visit the Food Bank's website at: [www.wsfb.org](http://www.wsfb.org). Simply click on the

"Hunger Walk" button, and search for Westchester UMC.

Check In begins at 12n, the pre-walk festivities start at 1 p.m., and the Hunger Walk starts at 2:00 p.m.



## Around the Campus ... Blessing of the Animals



## Westchester United Methodist Church

a place where love works

[www.wumcla.org](http://www.wumcla.org)

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Pastor's email: [lyda@wumcla.org](mailto:lyda@wumcla.org)



**We are a Reconciling church!**

**ALL are welcome here.**



## From Pastor Lyda . . .

One of the publications I read religiously (pun intended) is Sojourners. Sojourners is an ecumenical Christian media and advocacy organization that works towards social and racial justice. Sojourners inspires and mobilizes people of faith for social justice through its advocacy initiative SojoAction.

In these moments before another polarizing election in the United States, I know I'm not alone in clinging to the hope that regardless of who is elected to the highest office in this country, calm and a peaceful transition of office will happen. Sadly, violence and unrest are the predicted outcomes after the votes are tallied.

An email I received from Sojourners recently caught my eye: "Hope is an action word." I got excited ... perhaps this was the message I needed to hear in these challenging days as many struggle with these questions, "Do all Christians have to vote the same; should I be a single-issue voter, does my vote support genocide, how would Jesus vote; and how do we actually build a better

world?" Writer Jim Rice shares, "People of faith can't forgo civic responsibility—which includes the ballot box—with claims of apathy or that they're not impacted by "politics," because what happens in the public sphere, of which partisan politics is only one piece, has consequences for everyone. Followers of Jesus have the mandate to act in ways that consciously treat those in the most marginalized situations as bearers of God's divine image. In other words, Christians are called to live, and vote, mindful of the left out and left behind."

Will our newly elected President change the world and bring about God's peace-filled Kingdom? Probably not. But who is elected will make a world of difference in the lives of the most vulnerable.

The reality is that common ground is sometimes not possible. As we live on uncommon ground, our work must include tending to one another as "kin" worthy of respect and care despite our differences.

When it feels like the world is falling apart, compassion offers us a bridge. When we have compassion for another person, we strive to see "with" their eyes, hear "with" their ears,

understand "with" their perspective.

Is it possible that we might find surprising commonality and kinship with people who think differently than us by simply sharing a few things? When we start sharing things with one another, even small things like coffee and snacks, we can make room for compassion between us. And when we make room for compassion, we begin to create something contagious that all of us are yearning for: peace.

This work also requires making the case for love. A love of action, of blessing, of kindness, offering care to one another even in the face of divisiveness. Love that chooses to focus on the humanity we share with others ... focuses on what we share in common.

To borrow a little wisdom from Facebook: "Discussions are always better than arguments, because an argument is to find out who is right, and a discussion is to find out what is right."

And maybe then, we can make room for compassion, justice ... and peace.