



Westchester UMC

VOLUME VII, ISSUE I

JANUARY 2026

Martin Luther King, Jr.—A Day of Service

Each year on the third Monday in January, we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a day of service. MLK Day is the only federal holiday that is also designated by Congress as a national day of service – a “day on, not a day off.”

Whether service meets a tangible need, such as fixing up a school or senior center, it builds a sense of community and mutual responsibility. Service can also look like donating money to a charitable cause, donating non-perishable food items to a food pantry, or putting together hygiene kits for those who are unsheltered.

No matter the , service empowers individuals, strengthens communities, bridges barriers, creates solutions and moves us closer to Dr. King’s vision of beloved community. The King Center’s theme for

2026 is Mission Possible II: Building Community, Uniting a Nation the Nonviolent Way—building a world where injustice ends, violence is replaced by compassion, and love becomes the prevailing force. The pioneering work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrated that Kingian Nonviolence is the sustainable solution to injustice and violence in our world, ultimately leading to the creation of the Beloved Community, where injustice ceases, and love prevails.

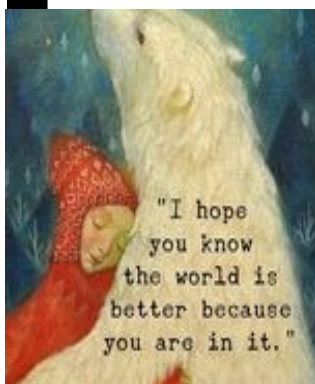
The Rev. Dr. King shared, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

The following statement which was once found on the U.S.

Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights website but was removed in 2025, stated, “In keeping with Dr. King’s example, let us embrace the belief that our destiny is shared and accept our obligations to each other, future generations and the American people by strengthening the bonds that hold together the most diverse Nation on earth.”

In a country which seems to be moving backwards—in a country where removing statements that celebrate diversity is now the norm, let us honor and continue the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

May his dream be our dream ... may his words be our words even when they are erased from government websites, and may his dream for this country and for the world come true. Soon.



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GOLDEN RULE
MEETS THE LAW
OF KARMA MEETS
MURPHY'S LAW.

- ANNE LAMOTT

Dates to Remember . . .

01/01—New Year's Day

The church office will be closed

01/04

8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church

10 am—Worship

4 pm—Sound Sanctuary Sound Bath

01/07—

7:30 am—Zoom Prayer Check In

12n—Craft Group Rm 16

5 pm—Soul-Full Soup Dinner
Church—RSVP by Sunday 01/04

01/11—Baptism of the Lord

8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church

10 am—Worship

01/13

11 am—Rhythm & Food Wellness
Drum Circle & Lunch—RSVP by
Sunday 01/11

01/14—

7:30 am—Zoom Prayer Check In

12n—Craft Group Rm 16

01/18—

8 am—Zoom Breakfast Church

10 am—Worship

01/19—MLK Day

The church office will be closed

01/21—

7:30 am—Zoom Prayer Check In

12n—Craft Group in Rm 16

5 pm—Holy & Hearty Dinner
Church—RSVP by Sunday 01/18

01/25—

8:00 am—Zoom Breakfast Church

10:00 am—Worship

The Sound Sanctuary

In 2025, we were delighted to launch the **Sound Sanctuary** - a sound bath experience created to support rest, reflection, and whole-person wellness. These gatherings invite participants to slow down, breathe deeply, and allow sound to gently guide body, mind, and spirit into a state of calm and renewal.

Sound baths use carefully chosen instruments — including singing bowls, chimes, gongs, and other resonant sounds — to create an immersive environment that supports relaxation, reduces stress, and encourages a sense of grounding and peace. Many people describe leaving a Sound Sanctu-

ary Sound Bath feeling more centered, restored, and gently reconnected with themselves and with Spirit.

The Sound Sanctuary is facilitated by Pastor Lyda, an Advanced Practitioner of Sound and Vibrational Therapies, who brings both professional training and pastoral care to each experience. These sessions are offered as a form of spiritual hospitality — a quiet place to be held, to listen, and to simply be.

This past December, we expanded the Sound Sanctuary with our **first-ever**

Winter Solstice event, a two-hour offering that began with a wellness drum circle and then transitioned into a sound bath honoring the longest night of the year. Together, we marked the turning of the season with rhythm, rest, and returning light — a powerful and meaningful way to welcome winter with intention and hope.

Rhythm & Food, our wellness drum circle & lunch, celebrated its 2nd Anniversary!

We look forward to offering more Sound Sanctuary gatherings in the year ahead and continuing to explore how sound can be a pathway to healing,

“For a new year to bring you something new, make a move, like a butterfly tearing its cocoon! Make a move!” - Mehmet Murat Ildan

Two Dinner Churches - Double the Fun!

At Westchester UMC, we believe some of the most meaningful ministry happens around a shared table — just as it did with Jesus. In that spirit, last year we began joyfully offering **two Dinner Church gatherings each month**, because it turns out that *two dinner churches equals twice the fun*.

On the **1st Wednesday of each month**, we gather for **Soul-Full Soup**, a cozy, soup-centered meal featuring soup, salad, bread, and dessert. Added to our Dinner Church rhythm last March, Soul-Full Soup has quickly be-

come a favorite — a mid-week pause that nourishes body and spirit with simple food, warm conversation, and a short, meaningful reflection.

On the **3rd Wednesday of each month**, we host **Holy & Hearty**, our original Dinner Church gathering. With hearty main dishes and a welcoming, family-style atmosphere, Holy & Hearty continues to be a place where stories are shared, connections are made, and faith is explored in a relaxed and relational way.

Both Dinner Churches follow the same heart: gathering people around a shared meal, inviting conversation, laughter, and honest reflection. There's no pressure, no expectations — just a table, good food, and space to be fully yourself. As Jesus showed us again and again, transformation often begins when people sit down together and break bread.

Whether you come for soup or a hearty meal — or both — you are always welcome at the table.



God is Holding Your Life

Life is a series of exclamations from “O No!” to “Help!” to “Oh Yeah!” We can swing between disappointment, helplessness, and gratitude on a daily basis. There are also seasons of our lives when we feel inundated with more of one than the others. As we enter the new year, we had hoped we would be past the “O No!” of 2025. Instead we find ourselves with ongoing prayers for “Help!!!”

The Book of Psalms knows all about this. Written over a span of time from exile, isolation and trauma to the re-

building of community, the poetry of the Psalms will accompany us in this series, reminding us that through it all, we can trust and even give our thankful “Oh Yeah!” because God is, definitely, holding our lives.

In series, we will be using music composed by Richard Bruxvoort Colligan. He is a modern-day interpreter of the Psalms – a “psalmist.” His music has easy to sing choruses that help us bring the seminal message into our voices and our hearts.

The New Year is already shaping up to be a time of challenge: 2026 could trigger mass uninsured, narrow networks, and crushing deductibles in healthcare; our climate and planet are in crisis; and the horrific attacks and deportations of those deemed “illegal” (whether true or not) calls many to question our humanity. And yet ... God is holding our lives and affirming that each life is precious. This New Year, we are taking time to pause in the Psalms and know that each and every one of us is worthy and beloved.

2025—a Year in Review

Here are a few of the ways we engaged in loving others:

Suicide Prevention Work

We were once again a proud sponsor of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services' Alive Together: Uniting to Prevent Suicide event. We donated \$2,500 to Alive Together, and raised \$700 this Christmas Eve for suicide prevention programs. Our Team participated in the 5K in September!

Great job everyone!

Food Pantry LAX

We donated Bag-It-Up Holiday Meals for families in need, in addition to donating our Thanksgiving offering to the Food Pantry.

Community

We offered our 3rd Blessing of the Animals in October—and made new friends (animal & human) in the community & collected pet

supplies for the Food Pantry LAX.

Offering Assistance

We offered rental, utilities and grocery assistance to many in need. We helped two people stay in their apartments, and helped many folks pay their utility bills. We gave out countless grocery gift cards, as well as gift cards to Subway, McDonalds, and Taco Bell. We are proud to share that we received a SNAP Grant from our wonderful West District to help us feed even more people in 2026!

Hugs & Stitches: Crafting Care One Stitch at a Time

What began as a small group of crafters from the United Women of Faith group has grown into a vibrant, community-based ministry of care. Hugs & Stitches continues to turn yarn, fabric, and love into tangible hope for people across our region.

In 2025, the group donated an extraordinary 1,963 handmade items to Yarn Angels South Bay and other partner charities. Their generosity flowed steadily throughout the year—742 items in April, 564 in August, and 657

in December—a testament to both dedication and compassion.

Their major projects included 258 tote bags, 987 soft toys, 282 NICU hearts, 174 bibs, and 40 pieces of clothing, including pajamas. Each item was thoughtfully made to bring comfort, dignity, and reassurance to someone in need.

Hugs & Stitches served a wide range of organizations in 2025, including Harbor-UCLA Pediatrics and the

NICU, Miller Women's and Children's Hospital, St. John's Oncology Unit, Project Ropa, Mindful Veterans Project, and the Venice Family Clinic—reaching infants, children, patients, veterans, and families alike.

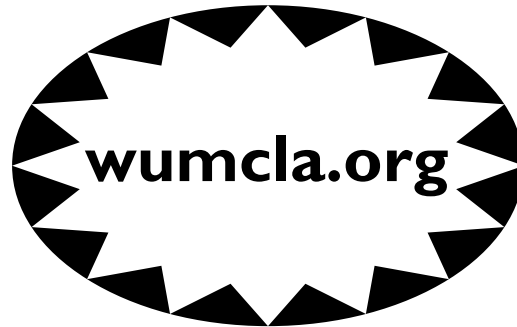
Every stitch tells a story of care. Every item is a reminder that community, creativity, and compassion can make a real difference. We are deeply grateful for the hearts and hands of Hugs & Stitches—and for the countless lives they continue to touch, one handmade gift at a time.

**Westchester
United Methodist Church**

www.wumcla.org

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We are a Reconciling church!
ALL are welcome here.



From Pastor Lyda . . .

The nativity story is not a fairy tale. As I've shared before, it is a political story. It's a story of power, fear and resistance. And into that story come the Magi.

In her book, *The First Advent in Palestine*, Kelley Nikondeha helps us peel back layers we may miss. These wise ones were not simply starry-eyed mystics. They knew what it meant to live under rulers who claimed to bring peace while extracting loyalty and crushing dissent. So when they saw a sign in the heavens, they were not just curious. They were searching.

Searching for a different way. Searching for hope that did not come wrapped in violence. And when they encountered Herod, they recognized him for who he was. A narcissistic ego-maniac who ripped people's lives apart on a whim or over any perceived slight. Herod asked them to return with news of this newborn King, but they did not.

As Ms. Nikondeha writes: "Herod had requested that they return with news. Instead, **they went home another way, taking with them another treason-worthy gift: new hope.**"

I believe that many people in this world are yearning for something better. Not chaos. Not violence. But dignity. Safety. Hope. A future where joy and love are not rationed for the few, the wealthy, the powerful.

Which brings us to the holy family. An angel tells Joseph: Take the child and his mother and flee. Cross a border. Seek safety elsewhere. Dr. Marcia McFee reminds us to ask ourselves some hard questions: Do we believe God only sent **one** family across **one** border **one** time? Or are we open to the possibility that God is still doing this? Still urging parents to flee danger. Still pushing people toward safety. Still prioritizing human life over political lines on a map.

God does not care about borders. God cares about people being safe. Too

many claim to be married to scripture, to each word written in the Bible ... but turn around and are unkind to refugees – and under the current administration, actively cruel and inhumane. We call people "illegal aliens." We reduce them to labels. We forget they were someone before they were displaced. We let our labels take away another's humanity.

Ms. Nikondeha shares, "Hard places are the places of the first Advent... God's peace was unfurled where life wasn't working. Where people hurt most. Where hope was on the run. And here, God declared, and here peace will bloom."

This year, may our fire be lit anew. May our hearts remain open. May our churches become places of sanctuary, courage, healing, and hope. And may we always remember: God's peace blooms where we show up. God's light shines when we refuse to look away. God's love moves whenever we choose another way.