

THE CROSS & THE FLAME



**Viroqua
United Methodist
Church
221 S. Center Ave**

FEBRUARY 2024

The Journey to the Cross Leads us to Freedom

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,
and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
Galatians 5.1*



Lent is a call to inner liberation that can touch each person deeply. On Ash Wednesday we begin the journey towards the cross with a call to practice the exercise of prayer, fasting, prayer and generosity. And, although the call to practice these disciplines seems to be very far from being fulfilled; By receiving the ashes we have been invited to humility and conversion: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return", which means to delve deeper into our lives and deepen our faith.

Praying allows us to enter the depth of ourselves to find God again. Fasting is placing oneself freely in the face of spontaneous and apparently insatiable desires. And sharing our gifts helps us understand that we must resist the desire for power and possession in favor of generosity. It is not, therefore, in any way about complying with an external formalism. On the contrary, it is the path that makes us progress in interior freedom and brings us closer to Christ.

The entire Lent is oriented towards freedom as a fruit of the practice of the gospel. Moses' liberation of the people of the Old Alliance is nothing more than a sample of what Christ has prepared for us, freeing all humanity through his cross and resurrection from the slavery of sin and death.

The journey to the cross prepares us to have this experience of faith and forces us to become aware of the obstacles and burdens that chain our freedom. Christ with his light makes us see them, and with his power he lifts us up and makes us walk alongside him. Because although Christ is the one who sets us free; Freedom must be achieved by being willing to do our part as Christians.

We have forty days to train and receive the gift of freedom, to break chains, to update our intimacy with God, to make Jesus Christ occupy the center of our lives, to adjust all levels of faith, hope and charity.

We have forty days to set ourselves free with the help of God. I encourage you, therefore, to live this time of reflection by participating in the acts of piety of prayer, fasting and generosity. to read the gospel daily; to participate in worship services, to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; I invite you to meet again and reconcile with your Lord.

Celebrating Lent and Easter is an opportunity for each believer to renew his faith and consequently his life. DON'T miss this opportunity and come and rejoice in the Lord.

Pastor Erika Martinez-Flores

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FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARY

Dale & Jolene Gudgeon February 5



FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Sonja Bjerkos February 19
Barb Casper February 20
Stephanie Brown February 29

God's Blessings on You!



OUR PRAYER Viroqua UMC

God, the giver of life, generous giver of gifts and abilities, help us discover our talents and have the courage to use them to serve you and our community with unimagined new purposes and deepening love for Jesus Christ. Amen.

Long Range Objective Viroqua UMC

Develop a unique identity by becoming servants of the community and providing Christian opportunities for all people.

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

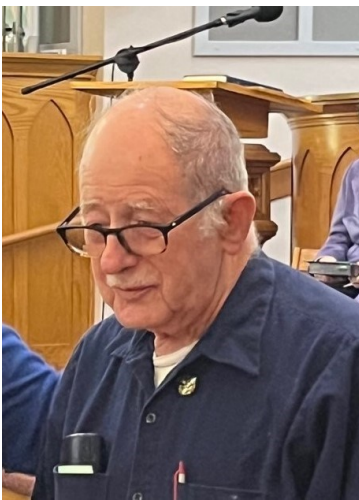
John Wesley





A service of music to celebrate Epiphany on January 7th

Thanks to all who came in to have their picture taken or who submitted a picture for the new Pictorial Directory! We had excellent participation so our directory should be a good one! We'll have it in a few weeks.



Jim Porter to Retire

Jim Porter, our faithful custodian, is retiring. Many thanks to Jim for his faithful service over the past 25 years! We pray the very best for him as he enters this new phase of life.

Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Psalm 62: 8

ONCE-A-MONTH WEDNESDAY FOR ALL

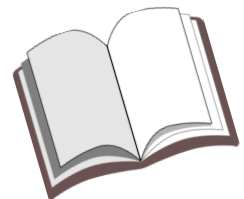
February 7th @ 5:30 pm!
We have a place reserved for you!
Be sure to come!



<i>February Sunday Servants</i>					
	Liturgist	Ushers	Greeter	Screen Operator	Communion Stewards
February 4	Cavan Fang	Joanne Hornby Sandy Skarda	Avis Marino	Grady Hanson	Phyllis Kalnins Kristine Starnes
February 11		Mary & Chuck Mulvaney Kemp	Betty Ross	Huxley Brown	
February 18		Janet Welch Cavan Fang	Alice Sloane	Finn Brenneman	
February 25		Dale Gudgeon Janette Hanson	Barb Casper		
February 28 (Lenten Service)		Phyllis Kalnins Marlo Volden	Joanne Hornby		

Book Group

The group's new book choice is *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* by Kristin Kobes Du Mez.. We will discuss the book on Monday, February 12th at 7:00 pm. All are invited to participate. Let the office know if you need help finding a book.



"Yard Sale"

The "Yard Sale" will be held on April 18th and 19th in the Fellowship Hall. You may bring items for the sale anytime. Call the office to arrange for dropping off items.

Housekeeping Duties

In Jim's absence, the Trustees and Council have made the decision to cover the Housekeeping duties voluntarily for now. If we can manage this, it will help our financial situation a great deal, as well as offer opportunities for all of us to serve the church.

The duties have been identified and divided up so that each job should be manageable. A person can sign up for one week or several, depending on your schedule. A new chart will be available each month.

Below are the duties. Take a look and identify something you will consider doing. Then sign up on the chart in the Narthex for the weeks you will do it.

Thanks so much! Let's all help to keep our building clean!

Housekeeping Duties (Weeks Start on Sunday and End on Saturday)

<u>Sunday Morning</u>	<u>Sanctuary</u>	<u>Vacuum/Dust</u>	<u>Dry/Wet Mop</u>	<u>Bathrooms</u>	<u>Fellowship Hall</u>
* Open doors @ 8:30	* Dust	* Narthex	* Front & Back	* Clean bathrooms	* Dry mop floor
* Turn on lights	* Dust mop	* Chapel if needed	Stairs	(5)	* Wet mop as
* Clear walks in front & back—salt if needed	under	* Lounge if needed	* Front Entryway		needed
* Ring the bell during worship	pews	* Dust all areas as needed	* Hallway to Lounge		
* Turn off lights & lock up after church	* Vacuum Carpet	* Vacuum outdoor front steps as needed	* Overflow room as needed		

Ash Wednesday – Lent Begins

Lent begins on February 14th—Ash Wednesday. There will be an Ash Wednesday service in the chapel at 1:00 pm and another in Westby that evening.

Details have not been finalized for the Ecumenical Wednesday night Lenten services, but we are planning to have an Ecumenical service here on Wednesday, February 28th. The Taco supper will be held that night also. Watch for more information about other Ecumenical services.

Lenten Devotionals / Offering Boxes

Thanks to all who wrote devotionals for the Lenten Devotional! We hear many people say they don't think theirs is very good, but they are all so meaningful! Devotionals will be available at the Worship Service on February 11.

If you would like a Lenten Daily Offering Box, they will be available that day also, along with a sheet of fun suggestions for how much to put in on a particular day (perhaps a nickel for each pet or a dime for each family member). Some folks enjoy this special Lenten offering activity, so pick up the supplies on February 11th in order to have it in time for Lent.

Viroqua UMC December/January Giving

Thank you to those who keep up their giving. This is so much appreciated, as we do our best to continue God's work. The amount needed each week to meet our 2023 Budget is \$2,952.

December 24	\$4,230.50
December 31	\$1,129.05
January 7	\$2,448.05
January 14	\$899.05
January 21	\$1,294.78

How You Can Help With the Chili Cook-Off
(Our biggest fund-raiser of the year)

- Pray
- Attend
- Invite your friends
- Donate

- Pies
- Baked Goods
- Baskets (\$20 value)
- Items for the sale table
- Services (dinners, helping hands, experiences, etc.)

- Help at the Cook-off
- Kitchen help
- Dining Room help
- Make Chili (recipe provided)
- Make Dessert (recipe provided)

SIGN-UP SHEETS IN THE NARTHEX

CHILI COOK-OFF

**Fun and "Friendly Competition"
between Area Churches!**

Saturday, February 17, 4:30 - 7:00 pm
Viroqua United Methodist Church
221 S. Center Ave 608-637-3551



- Viroqua United Methodist**
- Immanuel Lutheran**
- Good Shepherd Lutheran**
- St. Mary's Catholic**
- Westby United Methodist**

\$10 per Ticket/Vote (\$6 under 12)

Come and vote for your favorite chili recipe. All chili proceeds go toward participating churches based on votes received

Also For Sale



- Baskets**
- Baked Goods**
- Bread of the Month**
- Ethnic Dinners**
- Samosas with Chutney**
- Pies**
- Dessert of the Month**
- Bread of the Month**
- Ladies Get-Away**
- Much More**



SPRC—Safe Sanctuary

Annual conferences often require churches to have written safety policies. One example of these policies is a written “Safe Sanctuary” policy related to risk management with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. From January to September 2023 the SPRC worked on developing its “Safe Sanctuary” policy. We have based our policy on the format suggested by the church conference for small congregations. The policy has been reviewed by the SPRC and the Ad Council and edited several times. We then presented the revised policy to the Ad Council which approved it in September of 2023. A one-page summary of this policy is included in this February newsletter. Please review the policy and address any questions to the members of the SPRC-Phyllis Kalnins (Chair), Avis Marino, Jolene Gudgeon, Angie Hanson, Layne Hanson, Chuck Mulvaney-Kemp, and Pastor Erika. If you would like a copy of the entire policy, please let the office know.

We also developed an “Opt-Out” policy for publication of photos of children and youth. If you do not want photos of your children used in any published materials, PowerPoint Presentations or church printed materials, please notify the office. Thank you. Phyllis Kalnins, Chair, SPRC

Safe Sanctuary Policy Summary

Congregational Covenant and Adoption

The Viroqua United Methodist Church’s purpose for establishing this Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Person Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical well-being, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people.

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism—that we will “nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy we renew our baptismal pledge to “live according to the example of Christ” and surround children, youth and other vulnerable people with a “community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God and be thus confirmed and strengthened in a way that leads to eternal life.” (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 96)

This policy coordinates and supersedes the previous policies used by Viroqua United Methodist Church.

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we are committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people, as well as all the workers with children, youth, and vulnerable people. By this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.

- A. **Training:** The Viroqua United Methodist Church through its SPRC will provide training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable people are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- B. **Screening:** All volunteers and staff who have direct involvement with activities covered by this policy will be screened in accordance with Southwest Wisconsin Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy will be rescreened at least every three years.
- C. **Supervision:** All activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.

Conclusion

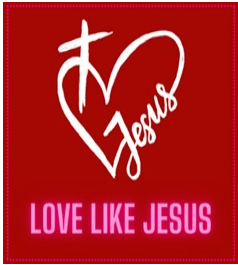
In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people, the Viroqua United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God’s children here will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (Baptismal Covenant 2, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.44)

This Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy is adopted by the action of the Governing Board of the Viroqua United Methodist Church this 20th day of Sept, 2023

Appointed clergy and/or supply pastor(s): Erika Martinez-Flores. EMF
Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee: Phyllis A. Kalnins
Chair, Church Council: Kathy Hanson

Love Like Jesus & Lenten Meditation

February & Lent Online Studies



As we approach February, it may feel as if love is in the air. Stores are filled with heart-shaped boxes of candies, fresh flowers, shiny jewelry, and other fancy gifts enticing us to buy them for our loved ones for Valentine's Day. But does all this stuff merely lend to the appearance of love? What does true love look like?

We know that true love looks like Jesus... and we aspire to live like him every day. But how can we learn to live like Jesus if we don't first love like Him? Join us in the days leading up to Valentine's Day as we learn from the experiences of others and the Scriptures that inspire them to fully live and **Love Like Jesus**.

The arrival of Valentine's Day also marks Ash Wednesday – the beginning of Lent for this year. We will be holding a special online Bible study over the course of the Lenten season during which we will be commemorating and mediating on Christ Jesus in the days leading up to Easter. We invite you to join us on this Lenten journey as we deepen our faith in Jesus and encourage each other as we reflect on His life, death, and resurrection.

Please join us this month as we learn to love like Jesus and then journey through Lent meditating on the days leading up to Easter. The first online study this month will begin on Feb. 1st and the second study will begin on Feb. 14th.



- **Love Like Jesus** (13 days) – begins Feb. 1st

<https://bible.com/p/64054794/ee319672f2f6a2debe5a16c1bf42decc>

- **Easter: The Worship Initiative** (40 days) – begins Feb. 14th

<https://bible.com/p/64054829/7ef4faab8152d3bf3fef40ba84a82855>

Worship Committee

January 4, 2024

Members present: Pastor Erika, Avis Marino, Kathy Hanson, Phyllis Kalnins and Barb Casper.

Pastor Erika opened the meeting with a prayer.

Chuck Mulvaney-Kemp came and talked to us about honoring those who have served in the Peace Corps. The last week in February is the week that they are honored nationally. So he will work with 1 or 2 others to plan a short segment of the service on March 3rd and maybe even an event of some kind.

We did a review of Advent. The only ideas that were given to us were to have only very familiar hymns and keep them shorter by not singing all of the verses.

Pastor would like to see us form a drama group to put on skits/plays during services or whenever the need arose. She will work with the education committee to start it out, but we would also like to have several adults join the group.

Ash Wednesday service will be here at 1:00 in the chapel and the evening service will be held at Westby at 6:00.

Which Lenten service will be where and when is still to be determined, but Pastor Erika should know by our next meeting.

We have so many odds and ends of Palm Sunday and Easter bulletins that we decided to use them up this year. So not all of the bulletins will be the same on some services. Waste not, want not.

Choir rehearsals all have to be changed during Lent due to Wednesday night services. Cavan will have that schedule and the chosen music schedule and which services they will sing at by the next meeting.

Communion will be moved from 1-7-24 to 1-14-24 due to Epiphany music service.

We discussed ways to become more organized regarding tasks that need to be done in the sanctuary as far as getting things up on time and down at an appropriate time (so that they are removed before the next service and subject matter doesn't overlap). I will be keeping a log this year on what is done each week so that we can make a check list/job list for upcoming years.

Our next meeting will be on 2-1-24 at 6pm.

Worship Chairman, Barb Casper



Administrative Council

January 17, 2024



Present: Cavan Fang, Kristen Parrott, Kathy Hanson, Barb Casper, Pastor Erika, Aaron Hanson, Phyllis Kalnins, Heidi Garrett, Jolene Gudgeon, Gregg Roberts, Gregory Cheever, Dan Brown.

The meeting was opened with a devotion from the Upper Room.

Announcements: Members were asked to sign up for writing a devotion for the Lenten Devotional.

Church Directory pictures will be taken on Tuesday and Wednesday next week, the 23rd and 24th.

Plans for the Chili Cook-Off were announced. It will be on February 17th. Committees are asked to donate baskets or other items for sale.

It was decided to offer a room to Layne Hanson for rent in the education wing. Aaron will coordinate with him.

Committee Reports:

SPRC: Phyllis updated the group about Jim Porter's leave and possible retirement. She will draft a letter to him requesting that he make his decision by March 1st. We are very appreciative of his service to the church and pray the best for him. We will try covering duties on a volunteer basis for now.

Missions: Human Relations Sunday was last Sunday. The group will meet in February and begin planning for their art silent auction.

Trustees: The group did not meet in January. Aaron has been covering Sunday mornings in place of Jim during January.

Education: The Taco supper will be held on February 28. Several youth activities are planned for January and February. See Education Committee minutes.

Worship: The group is planning for Lent. The Ministerial Association has not set Ecumenical Lenten services yet, but we are planning for the Taco Supper on February 28, prior to the Lenten service here. A drama will be planned for the Easter Sunrise Service. We'd like both youth and adults to participate. Chuck Mulvaney-Kemp is organizing a gathering and sharing of former Peace Corp workers. We will do something during the worship service on March 3rd and also a possible potluck.

Finance: See minutes.

Hospitality: The group meets tomorrow.

Meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer. Next meeting: Wednesday, February 21st @ 8:00 pm.

Hospitality Committee

January 18, 2024

The meeting was opened with a prayer by Kathy.

Avis Marino will be our new card person and member of the committee. Welcome, Avis, and THANK YOU!

We shared experiences in delivering our Christmas gifts.

We will send regular card Valentines to our Homebound folks. Kathy will get some cards and Avis will address them.

We discussed making a basket for the Chili Cook-off. It was decided to make a basket of our favorite recipes and some baking items. We each drew an item to bring.

Communion for the shut-ins was discussed. Erika has been doing it, but would welcome someone to go with her. Barb will do it the first time. They will organize a get-together of our folks at Maplewood and at Vernon Manor for a time of visiting and communion. They will aim to do it on the second or third Thursday about 3:00 pm.

Our next meeting is on February 15 @ 1:00 pm. We'll put together our basket at that meeting.

Education Committee

January 8, 2024

Present: Pastor Erika, Kathy, Janette, Avis, Joann, and Heidi

Old Business:

Once a Month Wednesdays (OMW) are going well. Everyone really enjoys them. The question was brought up to continue them through the Summer and/or possibly increase the frequency to twice a month. The ideas have been tabled for now and will be re-visited again closer to summer. It was also commented that the activities during OMW were really fun, and everyone also enjoyed the Bible trivia and discussion questions on the tables. There was discussion surrounding the offering collected at OMW as well as Adult Sunday School, as well as teaching the children the importance of giving their time, talents, and tithes to the church. At present, Adult Sunday School offering gets placed in the general offering and OMW offering is held in a fund to purchase Christmas Gifts for needy families. Starting in 2024, Sunday School (Children + Adult) offering will be recorded separately from general offering, but still added to the general fund, since Adult Sunday School & Children's Sunday School supplies & materials are paid for through the general fund.

Adopt a Family

This year we adopted a family of four, a Mom, Dad, boy, and girl. Gifts were purchased, wrapped, and delivered in time for Human Services to distribute them to the family. We were able to stay spot on our budget. We budgeted \$300 for the family and total cost ended up being \$301.

Christmas Program

The Christmas Program was very successful and enjoyed by all. It was discussed to expand the cast & crew of future programs to include adults as well. This would give the kids another intergenerational opportunity. Everyone felt this was a good idea. Intergenerational options will be discussed in conjunction with the Worship Committee for an Easter program to be performed during Sunrise Service.

New Business:

Safe Sanctuaries Policy -Background Checks

The new Safe Sanctuary policy was shared & explained with the committee. Everyone felt this was a good policy. Part of the new policy requires that anyone who will be working with children in a situation where there is only one adult present needs to pass a background check. Erika recently had a background check done for Conference, so she does not believe another is necessary. Heidi, Janette, & Joanne all have to have background checks run frequently for work & volunteer positions. Do we need to spend the money to re-run these people? It was decided to recommend that Kathy and Avis have background checks performed, as they are the only members of the committee that have not recently had one.

Youth Winter Activity

We scheduled several Winter Activities for the youth & anyone else who would like to join us! Wednesday, January 31st @ 5:30 will be a movie night. We will be having a light meal & watching the movie "The Journey to Bethlehem" starring Antonio Banderas. Sunday, February 11th, we will be joining Westby UMC at Living Water Bible Camp for their annual Winter Fun Days. And Feb 24th we will be traveling to Fort McCoy to go snow tubing at Whitetail Ridge. More information will be released as we get closer to each date.

Taco Supper Planning

The Taco Supper will be Wednesday February 28th. Traditionally, the youth & their parents have served the meal. Erika will confirm with the Ministerial Association that we will have the service at our church on that date. More details will be planned at next month's meeting.

Easter Program Planning

It was discussed with the Christmas Program that we will try for an intergenerational Easter Sunrise Program. We will work with the Worship Committee to come up with ideas for the program. Easter is on Sunday March 31st.

The next meeting will be held in the Church Lounge on Monday Feb 5th @ 6:00 PM

Missions Update

Calling all artists! The Missions Committee is having a silent auction of art to raise money for our missionary Temba in Zambia. Please put your artwork in the box in the narthex. Artwork submissions are due by noon on Thursday, February 22. The silent auction will run Sunday, February 25, through Sunday, March 3. Artwork will be displayed with bidding sheets in the narthex. Get your final bids in by 11:45AM on Sunday, March 3. Thank you to all of our artists, and to all of our art patrons!

The next meeting of the Missions Committee will be Sunday, February 11, at 11:45am.

Finance Committee

January 17, 2024

Attendance: Gregory Cheever (Treasurer), Gregg Roberts (Secretary), Cavan Fang, Aaron Hanson, Kathy Hanson, Phylis Kalnins, Pastor Erika Martinez Flores, Dan Brown (Chair)

Meeting Called to order: 7:12 PM

Joys and Concerns: Jlm, MacGregor family, Janet



Secretary's report (presented by Gregg Roberts): Still need to issue payment to the General Fund for approximately \$2,000. Investment accounts have increased and are currently valued at approximately \$254,000.

Action item: Check on Vanco fees of \$141.55

Action item: Determine the purpose of the Franklin Templeton Fund

Action item: Open CD for camping fund

Action item: Redeem \$30,000 worth of securities to fund the General Fund

Motion to accept (G. Roberts) the Secretary's report as presented. Motion seconded (D. Brown). Motion carried.

Treasurer's Report (presented by Gregory Cheever)

Motion made (by G. Cheever) to accept the Treasurer's report as given (It should be noted that Vanco deposits in the amount \$1971.46 is not reflected). Kathy Hanson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Fundraising Activities:

Big Thing

Yard Sale (April 18 and 19)

Mexican dinner (October)

Ministry Enrichment Grant (Gregory Cheever will learn more about the Grant process)

Additional business: Add Strategic Budget direction to Finance Agenda going forward. Motion made by Aaron Hanson, motion seconded by Gregory Cheever. Motion carried.

Next Finance Committee Meeting (February 21, 2024)

The Cross & The Flame is published monthly
for our congregation and friends. *We welcome you
with open hearts, open minds and open doors.*

VIROQUA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PASTOR

REV. ERIKA MARTINEZ-FLORES

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OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday 9:00am - 12:00pm

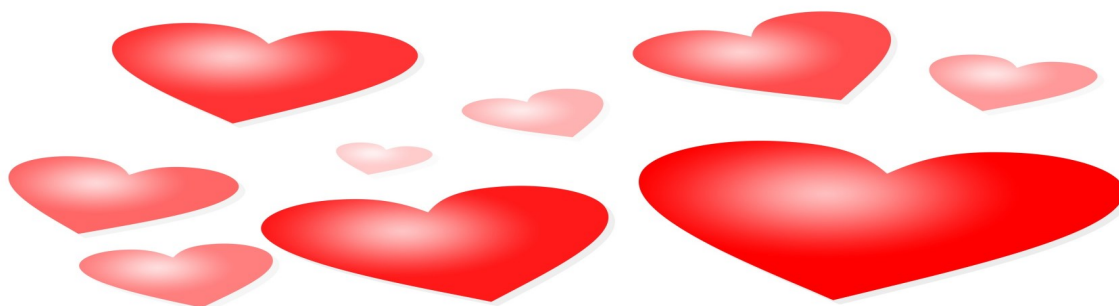
SUNDAY MORNING SCHEDULE

Worship—10:30 am

Adult Sunday School: 9:00 am

**Broadcast on
WVRQ 1360 AM/107.3 FM or on
Facebook Live**

Check Us Out On Facebook!



Viroqua United Methodist Church's Mission Statement

The Viroqua United Methodist Church exists for the purpose of carrying out Christ's Great Commission by enabling all who come to personally know the joy of God's love and forgiveness and to lovingly share this joy in the fellowship of the church and in reaching people throughout the world.

God does nothing except in response to believing prayer.

John Wesley

