

# THE CROSS & THE FLAME



January 2026

## *Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I*

As the Methodist movement grew, John Wesley trained preachers and encouraged them to proclaim God's word within each Methodist gathering and community. In order to communicate a consistent theological message that had been shaped and discussed within the Methodist movement, Wesley selected certain sermons and established them as Standard Sermons, recommending that Methodist preachers preach within the framework of these sermons.

Wesley initially chose forty-four sermons and designated them as the Standard Sermons. Later, he added nine more, bringing the total to fifty-three, and then removed nine, returning the number to forty-four. As a result, the Methodist tradition in Britain has maintained the forty-four Standard Sermons, while the Methodist tradition in the United States has continued to uphold the collection of fifty-three.

One particularly interesting fact that emerges from this list of Standard Sermons is that Wesley wrote no fewer than thirteen sermons based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapters 5 through 7—the Sermon on the Mount—and all thirteen are included among the Standard Sermons. This reflects how central the Beatitudes and the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are to Christian faith. Through these passages, Wesley articulated the spiritual and practical journey of Methodist believers.

Wesley regarded the Sermon on the Mount and his series of sermons on it as deeply significant, devoting a substantial portion of the Standard Sermons to these teachings. Through this sermon series, Methodists are able to learn essential elements of the Methodist understanding of faith and Christian living.

As we enter the new year of 2026, it is my hope that we may take time together to read, study, and reflect on Wesley's sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. Now we will start this journey with the first sermon, "*Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I.*"

In "*Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I,*" John Wesley presents the Sermon on the Mount as a complete description of true Christian life and character. Wesley explains that Jesus is not merely giving moral advice but revealing what genuine holiness looks like in the hearts and lives of God's people.

Wesley focuses especially on the Beatitudes, showing that they describe the inward dispositions of those who belong to the kingdom of God. The poor in spirit recognize their complete dependence on God and do not trust in their own righteousness. Those who mourn grieve not only over suffering but also over sin—both their own and the sin of the world. The meek are gentle and humble, submitting themselves to God's will rather than insisting on their own way.

Wesley emphasizes that hungering and thirsting for righteousness reflects a deep desire to be fully shaped by God's will. This righteousness is not outward behavior alone but inward holiness that transforms thoughts, intentions, and desires. The merciful show compassion because they themselves have received mercy from God. The pure in heart seek God with undivided devotion, and the peacemakers actively reflect God's reconciling love in the world.

Wesley also stresses that persecution is not a sign of failure but often a mark of faithfulness. Those who live according to Christ's teaching may face rejection, yet they are assured of God's blessing and future reward.

Throughout the sermon, Wesley makes clear that Christian holiness is both inward and outward, personal and social. The Sermon on the Mount calls believers not to a lower standard but to a life made possible by God's grace. True Christianity, Wesley argues, is a living faith that reshapes the whole person to reflect the love and character of God.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pastor's Letter .....	page 1
Birthdays/Anniversaries .....	page 2
Looking Back at December .....	page 3
Looking Forward .....	pages 3-5
Committee Reports.....	pages 6-7
January Calendar .....	Insert

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Peggy Selin	January 1
Chuck Mulvaney-Kemp	January 2
Matthew Ostrem	January 4
Ruby Roberts	January 16
Gus Roberts	January 20
Gregory Cheever	January 25

*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.

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



The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, **love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously** in local communities and worldwide connections.



**Kids Sunday School**

Sunday School will resume on January 11th, and then be held each Sunday during the Worship Service.

### FOOD PANTRY

We sent **132 pounds of food** and **\$35.71** to the Food Pantry after our November Food Drive.

Thanks to all who contributed!



### January Sunday Servants

	Ushers	Greeter	Communion Stewards
January 4	Joanne Hornby	Alice Sloane	Phyllis Kalnins Marlo Volden
January 11	Janet Welch Miny Hirschfield	Anita Frels	
January 18	Mary & Chuck Mulvaney Kemp	Betty Ross	
January 25	Anita Frels Cavan Fang	Barb Casper	

## Beware of Scams

Several people have received messages from Pastor Paul asking them to buy something for him. **This is a scam.** Pastor Paul will not ever ask you to do this sort of thing.

## Spring Rummage Sale

Planning has not begun for a spring rummage sale, but it's time to think about it. If you have rummage you'd like to donate, let us know.

## Book Group

The Book Group is reading *The Sentence* by Louise Erdrich.



This novel takes place in a small independent bookstore in Minneapolis that is haunted from November 2019 to November 2020 by the store's most annoying customer. Flora dies on All Souls' Day, but she simply won't leave the store. Tookie, who has landed a job selling books after years of incarceration that she survived by reading "with murderous attention," must solve the mystery of this haunting while at the same time trying to understand all that occurs in Minneapolis during a year of grief, astonishment, isolation, and furious reckoning.

The Group will discuss the book on Monday, January 5th at 7:00 pm. All are invited to join the group.

## Waiting...

### January Online Bible Study Series



For many, January is seen as a month of waiting. With the holiday rush behind us and the cold snow of winter keeping many indoors, we long for the warmth of spring and the chance to get outside and enjoy life *comfortably*. We try to fill our time, keeping busy until those green blades of grass appear. However, we get a little stir crazy. Our anxiety naturally peaks when we are faced with the unknown and as a result, we become restless. The truth is, waiting for something can be hard!

We face plenty of times of waiting on our faith journeys as well! We often see waiting as being a state of inactivity, however it is one of the most active periods on a Christian's journey!

Just look outside... even in the bleak winter the birds are flying, moving from tree to tree. Deer frolic in freshly fallen snow. There is still life in these times of waiting! It's time to open your eyes and see these waiting times in a whole new light! We invite you to join us throughout the month of January as we explore what it means to faithfully wait and the challenges we face in waiting patiently on God. We will also learn how to embrace the necessary mind shift to benefit from our waiting seasons. It is a lesson we can all learn from!

**Faithful Waiting** – begins Thursday, January 1<sup>st</sup>

<https://bible.com/reading-plans/48193/together/77659324/invitation?token=hBkblBtjWN-sys8FwcRiPw&source=share>

**Waiting by the Brook: Learning to Wait Patiently on God** – begins Thursday, January 8<sup>th</sup>

[https://bible.com/reading-plans/31096/together/77659496/invitation?token=RgTIQFjneLZhydd50u\\_RA&source=share](https://bible.com/reading-plans/31096/together/77659496/invitation?token=RgTIQFjneLZhydd50u_RA&source=share)

**The Waiting Room** – begins Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup>

<https://bible.com/reading-plans/37302/together/77659520/invitation?token=np4CVoltR8PxEXK1ey-abQ&source=share>

**What Are You Waiting For?** – begins Sunday, January 25<sup>th</sup>

[https://bible.com/reading-plans/14164/together/77659602/invitation?token=XvpvJNWfB93Nv\\_y-jfJLsA&source=share](https://bible.com/reading-plans/14164/together/77659602/invitation?token=XvpvJNWfB93Nv_y-jfJLsA&source=share)

This online study and more can be accessed through the Bible App or [bible.com](https://www.bible.com) website, which are free resources. In addition to wonderful devotional and reading plans, they provide a verse of the day, and you will be able to read the Bible in a wide variety of versions. The Bible App is available in your app store on your mobile device, or accessible online at [www.bible.com](https://www.bible.com). Please note that Bible.com online no longer supports Plans with Friends. You will need to open the Bible App on your mobile device to continue to use this feature.

Plans have begun for the Meatball & Lefse Fundraiser to be held in February.

Lefse will be made on January 10th & 11th here at the church. Potatoes will be cooked and riced on Saturday and the lefse will be rolled and baked on Sunday. Sign up sheets are available in the Narthex.

Please watch for more information about how you can help.



## **Meatball & Lefse Dinnet**

**Meatballs**  
**Homemade Lefse**  
**Mashed Potatoes/Gravy**  
**Vegetable**  
**Coleslaw**  
**Homemade Pie**



**\$15**

**CARRY OUTS AVAILABLE**

**Wednesday, February 11th**

**4:30—7:00 pm**

**Viroqua United Methodist Church**

**221 S. Center Ave., Viroqua, WI**

**608-637-3551**

## *Hospitality Committee*

December 11, 2025

Members Present: Barb Casper, Alice Sloane, Avis Marino, Kathy Hanson, Betty Ross, Joanne Hornby.

The group enjoyed a casserole meal together for our last meeting as a group and to celebrate the holiday season.

We then assembled fruit boxes for our homebound people.

Barb and Kathy delivered the boxes following the meeting. They were received with pleasure.

Alice Sloane will be the Hospitality rep on the Ministry Team. The rest of us will be a support/work group.

## *Missions Update*

Thank you to all who contributed to our Toys for Tots mitten tree in early December. Our church contributed one big box and many smaller bags of toys and warm clothes, plus a monetary donation, to this local missions project.

Artists, now is the time to start working on your creations for the annual art silent auction in the spring. Winter is a great time to make art! All types of art are welcome. Proceeds from the auction will benefit our missionary, Temba Nkomozepe, who works at Mujila Falls Agricultural Centre in Zambia. More details to come.

The first United Methodist Special Sunday in 2026 will be Human Relations Day on January 18. This is the Sunday before the observance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s., birthday. Human Relations Day is focused on social justice, on serving the people who live unnoticed in the margins of society and who struggle to survive and thrive.

One of the wonderful aspects of the United Methodist Church is that we can do so much more together than we ever could do on our own. On Human Relations Day, we join other UMC congregations in a special offering to support three national projects: neighborhood ministries through Community Developers, community advocacy through United Methodist Voluntary Services, and work with at-risk youth through the Youth Offender Rehabilitation Programs. Thank you for participating in the Special Sundays.

## **2025 Church Charge Conference Meeting Minutes**

### **Viroqua United Methodist Church & Westby United Methodist Church Dec. 3, 2025 ~ Held at Westby UMC**

Present: D.S. Amanda Stein, Pastor Paul Lee, Pastor Kim Brumm, 10 members from Viroqua UMC and 7 members from Westby UMC

Welcome: D.S. Amanda Stein welcomed everyone and presided over the meeting.

Election of Secretary for this Conference Meeting: Linda Weilnau, from Westby UMC, was elected as the secretary.

Opening: D.S. Amanda Stein opened with prayer.

Everyone read the Mission Statement in unison:

*The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.*

A video of a message from Bishop Schwerin was played. The theme of the message was "Practicing Hope" and was based on Psalm 130:5.

Superintendent Sharing: D.S. Amanda Stein shared some thoughts and discussed the new vision statement for the United Methodist Church. She encouraged that our churches put this vision statement in our bulletins periodically to let everyone know about it.

(continued →)

## **(Charge Conference Meeting Minutes Continued)**

Ministry Review: Members of Viroqua UMC shared some of their ministries.

Pastor Paul Lee is doing things with the youth.

There was a food drive in November.

A new fundraiser, a Meatball Dinner, was tried and it was very successful.

They are planning to have a new committee structure starting in 2026.

There was an Easter Egg Hunt for the neighborhood.

A few people attended the Vernon County Protecting Churches workshop.

Members of Westby UMC shared some of their ministries.

There was a food drive during Lent.

Flashlights were handed out during the Westby Business Trick or Treating on Halloween.

There are ongoing Missions of the Month. For December, donations are collected to give gift cards to needy families to help them have a nice holiday meal. Gifts are purchased for residents of the Norseland Nursing Center.

Personal hygiene items are collected each month and donated to Bethel Butikk for the people who qualify for assistance.

Both churches have an exercise group for seniors and are working to discern God's vision for each church.

Pastor Kim Brumm suggested that each church obtain a demographic report for 2026 to help determine areas of need in the community for future ministries.

Safe Sanctuary Policy: D.S. Amanda Stein encouraged both churches to review our Safe Sanctuary Policy to ensure that everyone is aware of what it states. We need to be self-aware and situationally aware of what is happening, even for the congregation during worship. We should have training and always have 2 adults present when working with children, no matter how many children are involved.

Actions Requiring a Vote:

Approval of Lay Leadership Report 2026 – Viroqua UMC indicated that they will be adding At Large people later on, due to their committee restructuring. Both churches approved this report for their prospective churches.

Approval of Pastoral Compensation 2026 – Pastor Paul Lee is now a Provisional Elder and will receive an increase in his compensation in July 2026. Phyllis Kalnins, from Viroqua UMC, indicated that there is a new percentage split for 2026. This was approved by both churches.

Approval of Accountable Reimbursements – This was approved by both churches.

Approval of Resolution on Housing or Furnishing Allowance – This was approved by both churches.

Approval of Lay Servants and/or candidates for ministry – Ardith Hoff is a Lay Servant for Westby UMC but hasn't taken any classes in several years. D. S. Amanda Stein said that Ardith should take a refresher class periodically. Pastor Kim Brumm indicated that she will be teaching Lay Leadership classes at La Farge UMC in 2026 and she will forward us the information. Some members from Viroqua UMC were encouraged to take Lay Leadership classes.

Removal of Membership – No action needed for this.

Approval of 2026 Budget – Viroqua UMC has some concerns with their budget because 47% of the trustees' budget is for building insurance. Their building insurance has increased several thousand dollars since the Conference switched to a new insurance company. The value of doing insurance together, as a group was discussed. There is a desire to indicate the dollar amount a congregation would like to insure their building for instead of using the value given by the insurance company. Both churches approved their budgets.

Pastor Paul Lee ended with prayer.

Kristen Parrott and Ardith Hoff motioned to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned.

*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**

**REV. PAUL LEE**

(262) 393-8416

pastor.dplee@gmail.com

**CHURCH OFFICE**

221 S. Center Ave.

Viroqua, WI 54665

Phone: 608-637-3551

Email: [viroqua@viroquawestbyumc.org](mailto:viroqua@viroquawestbyumc.org)

Website: [www.viroquawestbyumc.org](http://www.viroquawestbyumc.org)

Office Staff: Kathy Hanson/Barb Casper

**OFFICE HOURS**

**SUNDAY MORNING SCHEDULE**

**Adult Sunday School Class—9:00 am**

**Youth Sunday School—10:30 am (beginning Jan 11)**

**Worship—10:30 am**

**Broadcast on**

**WVRQ 1360 AM/107.3 FM or on**

**Facebook Live**

**Check Us Out On Facebook!**

**Happy  
New Year!**

**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.