

THE CROSS & THE FLAME



October 2026

Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, X

In Matthew 7:1–12, Jesus talks about the things that can get in the way of a faithful life. He also shows us how to get past them.

The first problem is judging other people. Wesley says that Jesus' words, "Do not judge," do not mean we must pretend wrong is right. It means we must not think or speak about others without love. We judge when we blame people who did nothing wrong. We judge when we make someone's mistake sound bigger than it is. We also judge when we decide too quickly, before we know the whole story. Wesley says even good Christians fall into this habit very easily.

So Jesus tells us to look at ourselves first. Before we take the speck of sawdust out of someone else's eye, we need to take the plank out of our own. For Wesley, the plank is anything in our hearts that is not yet right with God, like pride or selfishness. And if someone really has done wrong, we should follow Matthew 18. We go and talk to that person alone, face to face. We do not talk about them behind their back.

The second warning is about holy things. Jesus says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs." Wesley sees this as wise, practical advice. Some people openly laugh at God. Pushing deep spiritual truths on them will only make them mock more. But Wesley adds a careful word. We should be very slow to put anyone in this group. And we should still be kind to them and keep praying for them.

Then Jesus gives the answer to every problem, and the answer is prayer. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Wesley reminds us that we cannot fix our hearts by our own strength. We need to keep coming to God. Parents on earth are not perfect, but they still give good gifts to their children. Our Father in heaven will give even more to those who ask him.

Last of all comes the Golden Rule. "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." Wesley says this rule is simple enough for anyone to understand. Just ask yourself how you want to be treated. Then treat others the same way. Do you want people to judge you quickly or talk about your faults behind your back? Then do not do that to them.

Wesley also says we cannot live this rule by trying harder on the outside. It comes from a heart that loves God. When God's love fills our hearts, we begin to love our neighbors too. Then the Golden Rule becomes a natural part of everyday life.

Pastor Paul

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OCTOBER ANNIVERSARIES

Nathan & Mallory Tunks	October 7
Sherman & Sherry Carney	October 12
Dan & Dawn Stalsberg	October 12
Cavan Fang & Kristen Parrot	October 14
Paul & Sonja Bjerkos	October 17
David & Lorna Peterson	October 24



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Janet Welch	October 1
Sherry Carney	October 2
Sunwoo Lee	October 10
Tom Steele	October 12
Nicolas Clements	October 12
Heidi Garrett	October 18
Sharon Alverson	October 21
Paul Bjerkos	October 22
Sua Lee	October 29

God's Blessings on You!



But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33

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.

Pete Gilman Turns 90!



Meet Our New Members

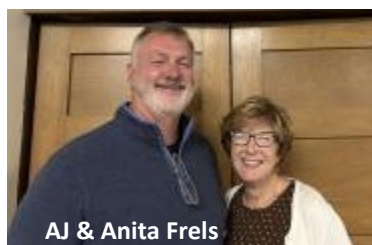
Fred & Sharon Alverson



Fred and Sharon Alverson came to this area from Kenosha, Wisconsin after Fred retired from working at Case Company.

They lived on an acreage near Ferryville for some years and attended a Lutheran Church there. They have lived in Viroqua and attended our church for a couple of years now. Sharon attends the Bible study group that meets at Kathy Hanson's. They enjoy the people and fellowship at our church.

Fred and Sharon have a son and a daughter.,



AJ & Anita Frels

AJ was born and grew up on the family farm near Osborne, IL (a town of 35 people). He played football, showed steer, sang in Moline Boys Choir and school musicals and loves riding anything on 2 wheels. He went to college at University of North Texas where he majored in vocal performance (and met Anita). He started his career as a singing busboy with Hyatt Regency (while also singing with the Fort Worth Opera) and worked his way into management there before opening numerous hotels and going into tourism. He's now the Executive Director of Explore La Crosse.

Anita was born in Los Alamos, NM, spent her elementary years in Richardson, TX, then headed back to Los Alamos where she finished high school years singing, performing in theater and backpacking. College started at University of New Mexico before transferring to the University of North Texas to major in vocal performance (and meet AJ). Her career has included singing with the Dallas Opera, working in publishing, HR, ophthalmology and now she's at UWL.

AJ & Anita have two children - son Garrett (married to Hanna) who lives near Los Angeles and works as a computer engineer for L3 Harris—and daughter Kate who lives in Minneapolis and works as a Marketing Manager for Rondel (the marketing arm for Target). They also have the world's laziest and sweetest British lab named Beau.

Elaine Strait



Elaine currently lives in Readstown, Wisconsin. She was married to Dick Strait, who was a long haul trucker and he passed away in 2004. She has a daughter, Debbie, and a son, Jim, who passed away in 2019.

Elaine was born and raised on the Earl and Thurley Lester farm, located just a mile from Gays Mills, Wisconsin. She was baptized, confirmed, and married by her grandfather, the Rev. Dennis A. Long, a United Methodist minister.

Elaine has a long and meaningful history of involvement in the United Methodist Church. In Gays Mills, she participated in worship services, Sunday school, teaching Sunday school, and Ladies Aid activities. She later continued her church involvement in Readstown and is now looking forward to being a member of the Viroqua United Methodist Church.

Elaine is blessed with two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Her grandson, Tim Moran, and his wife, Melissa, live in Saint Charles, Minnesota, with their two daughters, Emma Jo and Ella Kaye. Her granddaughter, Kelly Donner, and her husband, Ryan, live in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, with their two sons, Cole Ryan and Easton James.

Elaine enjoys spending time with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, visiting friends, reading, gardening, and exploring rummage sales and thrift stores.

She is excited to meet new friends at Viroqua United Methodist Church and looks forward to serving the Lord and being part of the church family.

Banners



Banner Team

Anita Frels, Phyllis Kalnins, Sonja Bjerkos, Kathy Hanson, Peach Hoiland

The Banner Team was formed last spring as an offshoot of the Redecorating Committee. Following the painting of the Narthex, it was decided that banners should hang on the west wall between the windows, and a sign up sheet was put out to recruit members to make them.

The Banner Team made the decision to portray the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) since the windows create three spaces. During the first meeting, they chose the graphics to use from a pattern book and made the plan to get them done. Many of the materials used were here at church and left by Marge Jefferies, who made so many of our beautiful banners in days gone by. Supplemental items were donated by team members. It only took three more meetings—one for each banner—to finish the job!

The team is done with their work for now, but who knows? Maybe next summer we'll do more banners!



Street Construction

You have probably noticed that the street in front of the church hasn't changed for several weeks. It seems that some old telephone wire vaults were encountered, which meant that they had to wait for Frontier's contractor, Driven Construction, to come to remove them. Work on that is progressing and will soon be complete.

We should start to see some change very soon in front of our building. We need curb and gutter and driveways. We have been told that they won't do both driveways at once, and that we will have access to the parking lot on Sundays.

Christian Nationalism

Do you wonder what Christian Nationalism is? We see the word "Christian" and think it must be good. But is it? Is it really Christian?

Our book group will be reading *The Seven Deadly Sins of White Christian Nationalism: A Call to Action* by Carter Heyward this month.

Perhaps this is something that we should learn more about. All are invited to join the group.

Discussion of the book will be held on Monday, October 19th at 7:00 pm. If you need help to obtain the book, let the office know.

Ushers, Greeters, Communion Servers

The sign up process for these important jobs has changed. We need you, so please take note of how to get on the schedule.

Note: We have added an Outdoor Greeter to the schedule.

Three Easy Ways to Sign Up (choose the one that works best for you)

1. Sign up at church

Paper sign-up sheets are available in the **Narthex** for you to sign up.

2. Sign up online

Use our new online sign-up form:

[Sunday Server Sign-Up Form](#)

3. Call the church office

If you would rather sign up by phone, call the church office at **637-3551**, preferably during office hours.

October Sunday Servants

	Ushers	Indoor Greeter	Outdoor Greeter	Communion Stewards
October 6	Joanne Hornby	Lorna Peterson		
October 13	Aaron & Angie Hanson	We're just getting started with the new system of sign up. See above.		
October 20	Miny Hirschfield			
October 27				



Charge Conference

*for Viroqua UMC and
Westby UMC*

**Sunday, October 25, 2026
at Viroqua UMC**

Potluck begins at 5:00 PM

Conference Meeting begins at 6:00 PM



THURSDAY & FRIDAY

OCTOBER 22 & 23

8:00 AM—6:00 PM

**UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH**

221 SOUTH CENTER AVE.

VIROQUA

AND

BAKED POTATO SALE

BEGINNING @ 10:00 AM

Potato Trimmings Include:

Chili or Ham

Butter

Sour Cream

Cheese

Onion



Coffee & Sweet Treats

Available All Day

Tell your Friends about This Silent Auction!

Bids Close on November 1st!

Pick up complete fliers with information about how to bid in the Narthex.



October Online Studies—It's Harvest Time



It's Harvest Time!

Here in rural Wisconsin, we are no strangers to the harvest. Our area farmers are busy on their equipment bringing in the summer's crops before the cold and snow of winter arrives. But there is another harvest that is ready. It's a spiritual harvest and the work is up to you and me!

In Matthew 9, Jesus compares spreading the good news to the harvest. Just as he sent out his disciples to bring in the harvest, today he is calling us to head out into the fields. During the month of October, we will explore the concept of being the harvesters, God's heart for the lost, and the work that lies before us. Together, we will shift our perspective from one of seeing obstacles to one of seeing a plentiful harvest that needs our focused intercession.

Sharing Jesus does not have to feel intimidating. Come along with us as we learn and grow to be workers bringing in the Lord's harvest. The Lord of the Harvest is calling... will you answer the call?

Our October online studies begin on Thursday, October 1st. You are welcome to join us at any time. All are welcome to participate.

The Harvest Is Ready (6 days) – starts October 1st

Link for Bible App on mobile device: <https://bible.com/reading-plans/55450/together/82147591/invitation?token=UGeAsQa6uzC-NLgIKOz7gQ&source=share>

Link for Bible App on computer: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/55450-the-harvest-is-ready>

A Great Harvest (8 days) – starts October 7th

Link for Bible App on mobile device: https://bible.com/reading-plans/55410/together/82147621/invitation?token=jWl88HXNhOdBBIn_fWUN0w&source=share

Link for Bible App on computer: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/55410-a-great-harvest>

Difference Makers Harvest (7 days) – starts October 15th

Link for Bible App on mobile device: <https://bible.com/reading-plans/16820/together/82147640/invitation?token=lzRQFei5rJiwCkQKTb8TJg&source=share>

Link for Bible App on computer: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/16820-difference-makers-harvest>

Praying for the Harvest (7 days) – starts October 22nd

Link for Bible App on mobile device: <https://bible.com/reading-plans/72125/together/82147653/invitation?token=3R3P-DWmTHijbKETnKjypQ&source=share>

Link for Bible App on computer: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/72125-praying-for-the-harvest>

Missions Update

The Missions Committee will participate in the upcoming church-wide rummage sale this month. We will have a bake sale table, and the money we raise will go to support our missionary, Temba Nkomozepe in Zambia. Please help us to have lots of delicious baked goods to offer the community! In particular, we will need some individual desserts available, like cookies and bars, to sell to shoppers who are purchasing the lunch.

Our church will celebrate World Communion Sunday on October 4. World Communion Sunday calls the church to reach out to all people, and to model diversity among God's children. We will take a special offering that day, using envelopes that will be found inside your worship bulletins. The special offering supports World Communion Scholarships, the Ethnic Scholarship Program, and the Ethnic In-Service Training Program. Our gifts are a blessing to individuals who face financial obstacles while preparing for the vocation God has given them.

In honor of World Communion Sunday and its emphasis on people all over the globe, church member Maris Kalnins shares his story with us here:

My Journey From Riga, Latvia Via Germany to the USA 1944-1951

Maris T. Kalnins

At the beginning of our journey, my family consisted of my maternal grandfather, my father, my mother, my older brother and my younger sister. My grandfather had founded the first scientific library in Latvia, and my mother was a well-educated, multi-lingual librarian. My father was a high school teacher who taught Latvian, Latin, German, and other languages. He had been drafted into a labor battalion of the German air force in 1944 where he worked as an interpreter. I was 4 years old, my brother was 7 and my sister was 1.

Early on the Russians had demanded bases in the Baltic States which got them into Latvia. There were Russian spies who made lists of Latvian Nationalists who were then deported to Siberia. My Godfather was one of the people deported. He was a Latvian Lutheran minister who refused to leave his congregation. My Godfather did return from Siberia; but, upon his return, his hair had turned completely white and he died shortly thereafter. There also was a Latvian poet who lived with his family on the first floor of my grandfather's 3 flat. He was taken by the Russians, deported and died in Siberia. Later, my family discovered that our names were on the list for the next wave of deportations. My mother also told a story of coming home one day and finding Russian soldiers standing along the entire staircase in the 3 flat. She spoke to them in Russian, but they didn't answer and eventually left without harming her.

In 1944 I remember being awakened during the night by my parents for an air raid drill. I also remember the day in 1944 when we left for Germany. Our travel group was my mother, my brother and sister, and me. My grandfather did not leave with us because he felt that he would not survive the trip. He died shortly afterward in 1945.

We left Riga in a truck and drove to a train station to get the train to the port of Liepaja where we would board a ship to Germany. We hoped to reunite with my father there. In Liepaja, during an air raid, we took refuge in a building which was possibly an old factory. We hid in a hole in the concrete floor with a sheet of metal over us to protect us from shrapnel during the bombings. While we were hiding, a kind German soldier lifted the metal cover to give me some water.

During our travels and because my mother spoke fluent German, she was often mistaken for a "Volksdeutsche", a Nazi term for Germans not living within the borders of Germany. This greatly facilitated our travels. From Liepaja we took a ship to Danzig (Gdansk) in Poland and then a train to Jena. During this part of the journey, the train stopped often with the lights off to avoid the Allied Forces bombing the area. I saw many damaged military vehicles in the streets. At one place my mother wanted to get on a train; but the conductor told her there was no room. She pleaded with him to let her get on the train because she had 3 small children with her. The conductor replied, "Don't tell me you have 3 small children with you. Tell me you have cigarettes or liquor." Somehow, we got on the train to Gera where my father was able to reunite with the family after the war ended.

From Gera we moved to Amberg. In this city other family members joined us: my mother's sister and brother, a cousin, and my father's mother. In Gera, where we survived many Allied air raids, there was one that especially stood out. After hearing several explosions, we heard one that seemed extremely loud and caused our basement air raid

shelter to shake, the lights to flicker, and debris to fall from the ceiling. I was terrified. Next, we moved from Amberg to Hersbruck, which had been a former concentration camp but was now run by the relief organizations UNRRA and IRO. During the train trip to Hersbruck, as our train was stopped in a railway transfer yard, I had gotten in trouble with my father. He promised to spank me later. But apparently, I decided not to wait and ran away. Evidently, I was gone for so long that my uncle organized a search party. Fortunately, my aunt noticed a corner of my coat sticking out from a brakeman's cab of a railroad car where I had fallen asleep. The next day that train had been scheduled to leave for Russia.

In Hersbruck, where we lived for about three years, significant things happened in the life of my family. My younger brother and sister were born. Also, as American soldiers would drive by on the road and stop for a break, they would toss candy to us through the barbed wire fence. I really wanted that candy, but my father said we couldn't take it because we were not beggars.

Healthwise, I had some interesting experiences here. I had a tooth pulled without Novocain...very scary and painful. Then I was admitted to a TB sanitarium twice between 1947 and 1949. During this time, Russian communists visited the camp trying to convince Latvians to return to Latvia. My uncle decided to return to Latvia because his wife and two sons were still there. He would be in no danger if he returned because the Germans had forced him to work for them. Also, in this camp my father worked as a teacher and my mother tutored French in our room. My parents were paid partly with American cigarettes which they used to buy goods on the black market.

From Hersbruck we moved to Traunstein, to a former German military installation, where we lived for about a year. After that we moved to Rosenheim, which was also a former German military installation, where my youngest brother was born. We were now a family of 8 which made finding a sponsor for our immigration difficult. People were not as willing to sponsor large immigrant families. We were in Rosenheim for about 1 year where I again had a unique medical experience. I had a tonsillectomy without anesthesia.

My father was chosen as the spokesman for the Latvians of this camp because of his linguistic abilities. At this time my older brother became an entrepreneur. My brother got involved with an older man who realized that money could be made by selling copper wire. Where could they get the wire? Steal it from the motor pool buildings of the camp. My mother said that often the lights would dim on one side of the camp or the other because of the missing wire. The German camp officials became concerned, but because there was a Presbyterian church in Chicago which was willing to sponsor us, the camp officials indicated that there would be no charges if we left.

From Rosenheim we went to Munich to prepare for the trip to the USA. We were given many inoculations there. Then we traveled to Bremerhaven to board an old troop ship, the General Harry S. Taylor. On the ship my family was separated. My mother and the younger children had a cabin. My father, older brother and I slept in military-style, canvas, metal-framed bunkbeds which were stacked at least 3 high. There were about 18 inches between the bunks. I was claustrophobic so I went to sleep on the metal floor in my mother's cabin. On this 7-day "cruise", I was introduced to Planters' Peanuts. I loved them. (so much better than the bread and lard we ate in the camps). It took 5 days to reach Halifax, Nova Scotia and then 2 days to reach New York City. The first morning we were there, I went on deck to see the Statue of Liberty. We then landed at Ellis Island. From there we went by train to Chicago where the streets were going to be "paved with gold" and the city would be full of gangsters.

The Presbyterian minister had an apartment for us which was near some of Chicago's housing projects. It was a 5-room apartment in a very old frame house. The rent was \$10.00 per month. (The flat was worth every penny of the \$10.00.) It had no hot water, no bathing or shower facilities and a kerosene space heater that worked occasionally. These hardships benefitted me because eventually I learned how to either fix or replace all of them. I thereby learned skills that have served me well throughout my adult life.

Part of the Presbyterian minister's plan for the immigrants who came to Chicago was for them to integrate black communities. He thought that this would be feasible because the newcomers would not be prejudiced. His church had a black congregation; and he tried to have the Latvians attend his services. This turned out to be futile because not only were the Latvians Lutheran or Catholic, but the language and cultural practices did not mix well.

In Chicago I was able to learn English, graduate from high school and college, and obtain employment which by 1965 allowed me to purchase a larger, more comfortable home in a better neighborhood for my family. We had fulfilled our American dream.

Pictures on Next Page



my brother, sister and me



my mother and grandfather



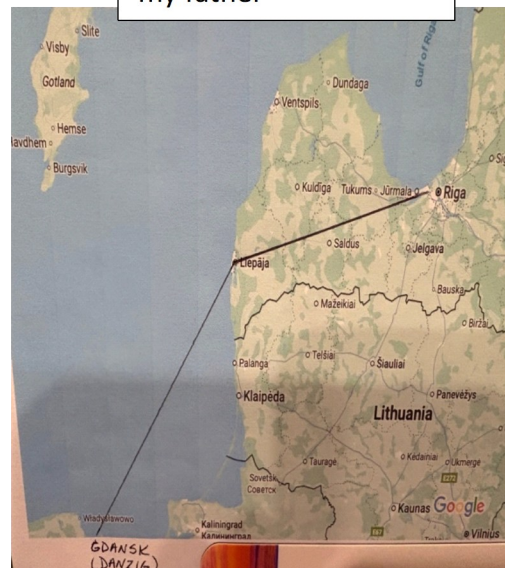
my father



Our 3 flat in Riga, Latvia



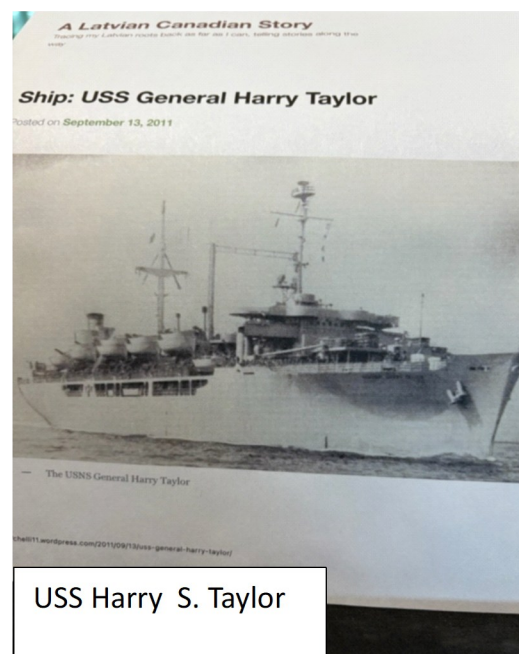
my parents, grandmother, aunt, brothers and sisters and I



Route from Riga to Poland



Cities where we lived in Germany



USS Harry S. Taylor

October 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 10:30am Exercise Group	2	3
4 9am Adult SS 10:30am Kids SS 10:30am Worship w/ Communion	5 1pm Rummage Sale Prep	6 10:30am Exercise Group	7 8:30am Prayer Group 6pm Choir Practice	8 10:30am Exercise Group	9	10
11 9am Adult SS 10:30am Kids SS 10:30am Worship	12 1pm Rummage Sale Prep	13 10:30am Exercise Group	14 8:30am Prayer Group 6pm Choir Practice	15 10:30am Exercise Group	16 8:30 am Redecorating Committee	17
18 9am Adult SS 10:30am Kids SS 10:30am Worship 4pm Bible Study @ Kathy Hanson's	19 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE 1pm Rummage Sale Prep	20 10:30am Exercise Group	21 8:30am Prayer Group 6pm Choir Practice	22 10:30am Exercise Group Rummage & Baked Potato Sale	23 Rummage & Baked Potato Sale	24
25 9am Adult SS 10:30am Kids SS 10:30am Worship 5pm Potluck 6pm Charge Conference	26	27 10:30am Exercise Group	28 8:30am Prayer Group 6pm Choir Practice	29 10:30am Exercise Group	30	31

*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

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OFFICE HOURS

SUNDAY MORNING SCHEDULE

Adult Sunday School Class—9:00 am

Worship—10:30 am

Broadcast on

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



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.