

From the Pastor's Desk

"We love because God first loved us." – 1 John 4:19

Dear Friends,

February often invites us to think about love, yet as people called Methodist, we remember that love does not begin with us. It begins with God. *"We love because God first loved us."*

This truth is deeply personal for me. For seventeen years, God was calling me into pastoral ministry, and for seventeen years, I ran as far as I could. I didn't feel worthy to be called, and I was convinced I didn't fit the norm of what a pastor should be. I even pointed to my three sisters, believing they were more religious, obedient and better suited for God's call than I was. In my mind, surely God had made a mistake.

But God did not give up on me.

John Wesley reminded the church that God's grace is always at work before we are aware of it. He called this *prevenient grace*—the grace that goes before us, seeking us out, awakening our hearts, and patiently drawing us toward God's will. Looking back, I can see that even while I was running, God's grace was already at work in my life.

God continued to reach out, not with condemnation, but with mercy and persistence, until the moment came when I finally prayed, *"Okay God. I give up. I'm tired of running from Your invite. Lead me where You want me to go."* In that surrender, I discovered what Wesley taught so clearly: we do not love God because we are worthy, but because God's love first meets us and transforms us.

This is the heart of our faith. God's love is offered freely, long before we have everything figured out. As we receive that love, we are shaped and sent—to love God with our whole lives and to love our neighbors with compassion and humility.

As a Wesley United Methodist Church family, may we continue to be known for a faith that is lived out in love—within our congregation and beyond our walls. This February, let us open our hearts again to God's grace, trusting that the love we share flows from the love we have first received.

We love, because God first loved us.

With love and blessing,

Pastor Nizzi





Ash Wednesday Community Gathering & Service

Imposition of Ashes

You are warmly invited to join us for our **Ash Wednesday Community Gathering and Service**, hosted by **Wesley United Methodist Church**.

We will begin the evening with a **Community Soup Supper at 6:00 PM**, a simple meal that reflects the spirit of Lent—gathering, sharing, and preparing our hearts together. Following the meal, we will move into a **joint Ash Wednesday Service** at 6:45 pm led and participated in by **United Methodist Churches from across Worcester**.

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of **Lent**, a 40-day journey of prayer, reflection, repentance, and renewal as we prepare for Easter.

What is the Imposition of Ashes?

During the service, worshippers may receive ashes on their foreheads in the shape of a cross. The ashes are a sign of our human frailty and our need for God's grace. As the words are spoken, *"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,"* we are reminded of both our mortality and our deep dependence on God's mercy.

Why do we receive ashes?

We do not receive ashes to shame ourselves, but to **begin Lent with honesty and humility**—acknowledging our need for forgiveness, healing, and new life in Christ. The ashes also point us toward hope, reminding us that God is always at work, calling us to repentance, renewal, and love.

This service is open to all—longtime church members, friends, neighbors, and anyone seeking a meaningful way to begin the Lenten season.

Location: Wesley United Methodist Church

Time: 6:00 PM: Community Soup Supper

Service to follow: Ash Wednesday Worship with Imposition of Ashes

Led by: Participating Worcester United Methodist Churches clergy

Come as you are and begin this sacred journey together.

Special Prayers for these Wesley Family, Friends, and Others...

Wabbey, Barbara Ingrassia, Earl Flagg, Susan Williams, Udeme Ukpong (Enoh's husband), Bishop Tom Bickerton, DS Megan Stowe, Pastor Nizzi, Pastor Nory Leachon and Mayela, Stacey Nichols-Byll and her daughter Mali Shawanna, Justin Bacon, Pinamang Boateng, Joseph Boateng, Stephen Boyns, Anne Burrows, Janice Capen, Janet DeNapoli, Xuan Diep, Alice Douglas, Dot Ellis, Barbara Fletcher, Beverly Grimshaw, Rosamond Hammond, Linda Keister, Charles Kiefer, Sandra O'Driscoll, Debbie Plant, Troy Potts, Shea Pugh, David Samanen, Janet Terzian, Donald Tremblay, Barbara Vietze, Grace Woode, Peter Woodcock, David Patrick, Francis Mosso, Troy & Cathy Potts, Melissa Houlihan, Robert Craft, Susan, Page, Libby T., Those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

We extend our sympathy to Evette and Sharon Walters and family in the death of their mother, Kathleen Hebert in St. Thomas. Cards can be sent to Evette and Sharon at 61 Dorchester Street Apt 1, Worcester, MA 01604.

We also extend our sympathy to Ruth Ann White in the passing of her husband John (Jack) White. Cards can be sent to Ruth Ann at P.O. Box 26, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

Worship Attendance

January 4 – 127 January 11 – 98 January 18 - 71

January 25 (Snow Day) – Zoom: 35 logons

Lightings & Altar Flowers

The Rose window lighting for February is given in loving memory of Joan Ventura by her husband Gary, and in-laws James, and Deborah.

The Tower lighting for February is given in loving memory of our parents, Joseph and Rose Ventura, in honor of their wedding anniversary by Gary, James, and Deborah

The 2026 Altar Flower calendar is now available.

If you'd like to order altar flowers in honor, celebration or memory of a loved one, come to the Welcome Office and sign up in the book. Please take a form to complete and return it to the office with your payment. The cost is \$80 for both arrangements on the altar (\$40 per arrangement), or a single arrangement for \$50. You may still enhance your arrangement(s).

The single arrangement will be placed on a brass flower stand in the center of the altar. If by chance two people would like flowers on the same day, we will list them both and they will be placed in the same area as usual, on each side of the altar.

If you would like to donate the altar flowers on a given Sunday, you may sign up in the book in the Welcome Office or call me during the week. There is a form in the book as well that will need to be completed and returned to me with the payment. Please DO NOT leave your request in the binder in the Welcome Office. We will not get the order that way.

If you have any questions, please call the office (508-799-4191). Thank you.

Rose Window & Tower Lightings Available... The following lightings are available for dedication:

April: Tower

August: Rose Window and the Tower

October: Tower

If you'd like to dedicate any of these lightings, please contact Veronica in the office (office@wesleyworc.org) or call (508-799-4191). The cost of the lighting is \$40.

Keeping You Connected!

ONECALL TELLALL... Don't sit and wonder on a Sunday morning if a storm is going to cancel church. Instead, receive a phone call and find out immediately! Whether it be cancellation because of a snowstorm, a meeting that has been cancelled or even to remind you of a special event taking place at Wesley, we will reach out to you by phone. This is a pre-recorded call, so please make sure your voicemail has space and it should save the call in case you miss it.

If you would like to sign up for this, please put your name, home phone number and ***one phone number per household*** on the sign-up sheet just outside the Welcome Office.

This is just another way for us to help keep you informed of what is going on at your church.

Offering Envelopes... Offering envelopes are available in the Narthex. You may pick up your box at any time. If you would like to receive a box, please contact Veronica in the office (office@wesleyworc.org) or call (508-799-4191).

UWF Steering Committee Meeting...

The UWF Steering Committee will meet on Saturday, February 7 at 9:30 am in the John Wesley Room. All current Steering Committee members please mark your calendars for this meeting. Anyone interested in joining this committee to help plan events may come also. If you have any questions, please call or email Cordelia Ferdinand or Sandy McManus at the contact information above.

Wesley UMC Prayer Circle, Wednesdays from 12-1 pm in Mary Ellis Lounge. A church family that prays together stays together. Come as you are! Led by Pastor Nizzi.



Handbell Program... The Wesley Music Ministry announces the formation of a formal Handbell program and is looking for anyone interested in participating in this exciting ministry. Rehearsals will be held in Brewer Hall on Wednesday evenings with the goal of playing in worship at least once per month. If you are interested in joining, please contact David Potts at david@wesleyworc.org.

The February Community Dinner will be held on February 28th. Please join us Baked Stuffed Chicken, oven-roasted potatoes, vegetable, salad, beverages, and desserts.

March 2026 Herald: The next newsletter will be in the March 1st bulletin. The deadline for articles is February 24 at 9:00 am.

Thank you, Debi

A Quick Note from Debi... While I am out, we will not be scheduling any Events (mainly evening events, weddings, etc.). If a committee has a meeting that needs to go on the calendar, Veronica can take care of that. If you have an event that you would like to schedule for further out in the year, please send an email and I will respond as soon as I am able to after I return.

A message from SPRC...

Please keep Debi Reynolds in your prayers as she continues to recover from surgery.

In the meantime... ***WE NEED YOUR HELP!***

We need a volunteer to assist with answering phones on Thursdays and Fridays.

Veronica Winder has agreed to cover as many of the office responsibilities as she can during the time Debi's out. This means the church will continue to be open Tuesday – Friday, 9:30 am – 3:30 pm. Veronica has worked in a church previously and we are confident that together with her previous experience and your assistance, the office will continue to be a source of information and welcome for all.

For anyone who would like to send well wishes to Debi during her recovery, the address is:
Debi Reynolds, 12 Old Colony Rd., Auburn, MA 01501

God Moment

A God Moment (or Three), Submitted by: Chris Flagg

It was time to plan for Pastor Nizzi's official installation as our pastor here at Wesley. While talking with her about the service, she shared her ideas for what she hoped would be a meaningful time for everyone. This included several church leaders bringing various props to the front—symbols of her ministry and her commitment to serve among us. We had most of what she envisioned, except for one item: a globe. We wrapped up the meeting thinking we would simply skip that part. After all, we could still have a meaningful service without every prop. (And if I'm being totally honest, I thought the whole idea felt a little over the top anyway!)

When I got home, my husband Earl told me that Pastor Nizzi had called asking whether we might also have a pitcher she could use in the service. The only one I owned was a large crystal pitcher, far too big. Amazon had options, but they were pricey, and it felt wasteful for something we'd use only once.

So, Earl and I decided to take a quick trip to the local thrift store to see if we could find a smaller, inexpensive pitcher.

The moment we walked through the door, there it was—sitting right in front of us on a shelf: a globe. I hadn't even thought to look for one, let alone expected to find it. We put it in our cart and headed toward the glassware.

As we walked, I called Pastor Nizzi to make sure she hadn't already found a globe. She hadn't. She also asked if Earl had mentioned the pitcher and gave me the details of exactly what she hoped for: "about 8–10 inches tall, ceramic, white." I listened, thinking there was no way I would find something that specific in a thrift store.

I hung up, turned to tell Earl how impossible this felt, and as I did, something caught my eye on the shelf just over his shoulder—a pitcher. About 10 inches tall. Ceramic. White. Exactly what she asked for. Some might call that coincidence. I call it a God moment. That was God Moment #1.

God Moment #2 came a few days later during the installation service itself. It was truly beautiful, and the props added real depth and meaning to the symbolism being expressed.

God Moment #3 came when I realized my own heart had been changed. I could have dismissed the props as unnecessary extravagances. But instead, I was reminded that God's love for us—yes, even for me—is extravagant. So why shouldn't our response be a beautiful, sometimes "over-the-top," symbol-filled expression of our commitment to love God?

DID YOU KNOW?

On Wednesday, February 18, we will begin our season of Lent with the observance of Ash Wednesday. Most people are aware that the name relates to the ceremonial imposition of ashes on the foreheads of worshippers included in Ash Wednesday liturgies in many denominations. Such liturgical use of ashes dates back at least to the 10th Century. However, the concept of ashes as a symbol of penitence is much older than that. In the early church, when public penitence was observed, penitents sprinkled ashes on their heads or received from the bishop a garment sprinkled with ashes. Ultimately this symbolism derives from the Bible in which the imagery of ashes centers primarily on the fragility of life. The association of ashes with death arises from the ancient military custom of burning enemy cities, and appears in the Old Testament stories of warfare as well as in prophetic and apocalyptic passages. Since the word *ashes* is an image of total destruction, ashes are used in the Bible in expressions of intense grief and loss.

Imposition of ashes was not part of the official liturgy in the United Methodist tradition until relatively late in the 20th C. Daniel Benedict, retired elder and former Worship Resources Director of the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship (now known as Discipleship Ministries), explains:

While many think of actions such as the imposition of ashes, signing with the cross, footwashing, and the use of incense as something that only Roman Catholics or high church Episcopalians do, there has been a move among Protestant churches, including United Methodists, to recover these more multisensory ways of worship. This is in keeping with a growing recognition that people have multiple ways of learning and praying. Worship that is oriented to the intellect or to the emotions, both interior, leaves out those who engage in prayer through vision, smell, touch, movement, and so forth. We are increasingly aware that people are formed in faith when practices become embedded in memory, nerves, muscles, and bone through sensory engagement. United Methodists have had resources for worship that include the imposition of ashes since 1979 when *Ashes to Fire* was published...This practice became part of our official worship resources in 1992 when General Conference adopted *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

For many years now, the Ash Wednesday service at Wesley had included the option for worshippers to receive imposition of ashes. The ashes are placed on the forehead not in some random pattern, but in the shape of a cross. Since ashes are a meaningful symbol of our mortality, this is a powerful way to remind us of our need for repentance and renewal. Our Ash Wednesday service not only links us with our biblical and historic predecessors in faith, but also provides a powerful invitation to repentance and recommitment of our faith as we begin our pilgrimage through Lent.

Submitted by
Deborah A. O'Driscoll



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