



**Sparta**  
United Methodist Church

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Sparta, NC 28675

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**Sparta United Methodist Church**

**APRIL-MAY 2016 ~ THE CIRCUIT RIDER**

Feed Our Children  
**EMPTY BOWLS FUNDRAISER**

Monday, May 16  
11 am - 2 pm  
Sparta United Methodist Church

The seventh-annual Empty Bowls fundraiser, which helps raise money for the Solid Rock Food Closet's efforts to feed our children, is set for Monday, May 16, 2016, from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. at SUMC. Tickets are \$30 each and are available at Touch of Grace, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce and Solid Rock Food Closet.

Bowls is operated under the guidance of an all-volunteer board and funds raised are used to help provide Solid Rock Food Closet operating capital for the children's backpack and summer feeding programs.

The kick-off event for Empty Bowls 2016 will be a silent auction featuring items from local artists, artisans and others. The auction will run during the morning until 1:30 p.m. Over the past six years, Empty Bowls has raised over \$121,000 to help feed hun-

gry children in Alleghany County. Empty Bowls is hopeful this ministry will be able to continue in the years to come.

Feeding America's "Map the Gap" food hunger study for 2014 indicates approximately 610 Alleghany children face hunger on a regular basis. Without the Alleghany County school cafeteria and the Solid Rock summer feeding program many children would not have enough to eat.

If you can't attend the event, you can still help by donating:

- \$65 feeds a child for the summer
- \$110 feeds a child for the school year

Please make checks out to Alleghany County Ministerium and put "backpacks" in the notation line. All donations are tax deductible.

For questions or to volunteer for the summer (teens are welcome), please contact Theresa March at 372-6560.



*We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.*  
—Isaiah 64:8

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING EMPTY BOWLS

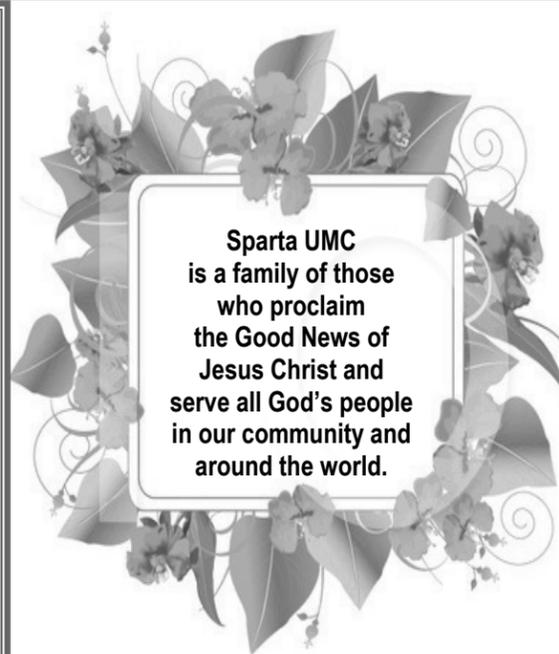
Rev. Bob Miller  
Pastor

Church Office Hours  
Monday-Thursday  
8:30 am to 3:30 pm

Phone: 336-372-4441  
FAX: 336-372-1534

Sunday Services  
9:00 am and 11:00 am

Sunday School  
10:00 am



**Sparta UMC**  
is a family of those  
who proclaim  
the Good News of  
Jesus Christ and  
serve all God's people  
in our community and  
around the world.

Email:  
office@umcsparta.com  
pastor@umcsparta.com  
bengatton@umcsparta.com  
music@umcsparta.com

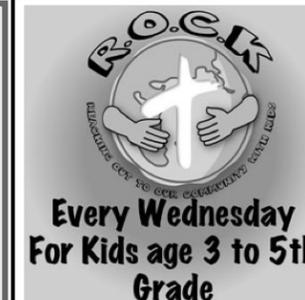
Website:  
www.umcsparta.com

Newsletter Deadline  
15th of each month

Bulletin Deadline  
Weekly by Tuesday

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We have been very busy learning the books of the Bible, planting seeds to watch grow into flowers, and participating in the Stations of the Cross. This spring we will continue to learn the books of the Bible and visit the residents of the nursing home in Sparta.

**We need your help**



Vacation Bible School is well under way and we need your help. There will be an informational workshop on Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup> following the 11 a.m. worship service. Please plan to attend if you are interested in volunteering.

## Seeing with New Eyes

By Pratt Davis

Several months ago our Director of Discipleship offered an adult study using a book titled, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. I loved the title and thought I might enjoy the class; but, as so often happens, life intervened. I found myself with one conflict after another until I missed the first three sessions, so I decided that this study would have to wait for another time for me. But I continued to think about this Jesus I never knew. I find the historical Jesus intriguing because we have so little factual data about him. I find the mystical Jesus fascinating because the mystery of God resonates with me. I decided to delve into the Gospels myself and see what I might find that reveals that which is not apparent on the surface and which I do not know about a man who came to teach us what God is like.

I have done little Bible study since I completed three courses in *Disciple Bible Study* almost twenty years ago. That study led me onto other paths of contemplative prayer and dream-work. Interestingly enough, those paths have circled back to Jesus in the past two years as they brought me three books about him from unique points of view. Those books opened up some new thoughts for me about both the historical Jesus and the mystical Jesus. So with those thoughts perking in the background, I find myself thinking about how to approach the topic that intrigued me about the Jesus I Never Knew.

As I thought about this project, I must admit that I reverted to my most comfortable process of thinking and organizing. I fantasized about making charts and comparing Gospels, about selecting key passages as I analyzed Jesus as Healer, Miracle Worker, Teacher, and Reformer. I went so far as to open my old version of *The Oxford Annotated Bible* from my college days when it was my textbook for a

course called "The Bible as Literature." It rather quickly became clear that this approach would not work. I had no desire to invest the number of hours it would take for some sort of comprehensive study. But in the process of turning through the Gospel of Matthew, three sequential little healing stories caught my eye.

Matthew covers a lot of ground about Jesus, describing his birth, baptism, and wilderness experience. Following these stories, he devotes three chapters totaling 110 verses to what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. These teachings are considered by Bible scholars to contain the core of Jesus' teachings. Many of them are not easily understood, and I think of these teachings as the Upside-down Teachings because they turn our usual dualistic thinking upside-down. At the conclusion of this Sermon, Jesus comes down the mountain. It is here that Matthew tells the three healing stories that caught my attention.

I must confess that I have always, from the time I was a child, struggled with the Gospel stories of miraculous healing. I just didn't think that happened. Over time I have solved my angst by thinking of healing and cure as two different, though related, things. (The dictionary uses these slightly different meanings as well, although it also considers these two words as synonyms for each other.) I use cure to mean relieved of the symptoms of a disease; while healing means to be made whole, emotionally and spiritually healthy.

There are some people who are cured, but not healed. Others are healed, but not cured. And some of course are both, or neither, cured or healed. It is the healing, the making whole, that I think is meant by these stories in Matthew. They are pictures of God as the universal healer, the mender of souls.

It is quick and easy to read these, or any of the stories of Jesus' healing, as stories of a miracle worker who is God and therefore is all powerful and able to cure dis-

ease. But if that is the only way I read these stories, I miss seeing new concepts of the depth and breadth of the power of God. I miss the opportunity to explore my individual spiritual journey that is about a life-long process of transformation, a process of soul tending. And I miss opening to a view of others that expands my consciousness. Looking at Jesus, his works, and teachings, in this way is not comfortable; but Jesus did not teach comfort and convenience. He taught transformation.

Jesus' teachings should disturb me. If I just hear what I want to hear, then his teaching is not working. I won't change if I feel comfortable. Jesus' teaching should be an irritant that gets me to look at God, my own inner psyche, and the world around me with new eyes. That new look at the landscape of my belief system takes me on a real voyage of discovery.

The three stories of healing are presented one after the other almost as if they are part of a larger, single story. I wonder if perhaps Matthew placed these stories here because they show us visual images of the ideas that he has just recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. A teacher may give a lecture then present a visual or lab experience so that students can experience what the lecture is describing in words. These healing stories present us with a lab experience. They contain vivid images that convey to us what the words may not have been able to convey. The images show us personal, physical encounters between Jesus and a suffering person; and the images engage us in a physical encounter felt in the body. This experience is different from sitting on the mountain and listening to a sermon. Perhaps this bodily experience demonstrates an important idea: we can learn about God from listening to teachings, but we can only experience God in a face-to-face encounter. It is these images of an encounter

*Seeing With New Eyes-continued on page 6*

## Big Sigh Ministries, Inc. Grows

Big Sigh Ministries encourages renewal in pastors and congregations through our *GRACE BREAK* program. Phase 1: *GRACE BREAK, Planning Your Renewal Leave* (three workshops for pastors), Phase 2: *GRACE BREAK, Caring for Our Pastor* (a six week video and written study for congregations) and Phase 3: *GRACE BREAK, The Pastor's Family* (to be developed).

We need your prayers and financial help as we seek to renew Christian Leaders for the revival of Christian disciples. One way you can financially support our ministry is through the Amazon Smile program. Please see below for details.

### Donating to Big Sigh Ministries While You Shop



Do you shop on amazon.com? Did you know that the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate a portion of everything you spend on specific Amazon.com products to the charity of your choice? The process is simple, and there is nothing you need to do except to continue shopping using the smile.amazon.com address (rather than amazon.com).

This site is identical to your familiar amazon.com site. You use your same amazon.com login and password. As you do, a portion of what you spend on designated products is donated to the charity you choose.

Here's how it works. Navigate in your browser to Smile.Amazon.com. The first time you log in, you will be asked to register your preferred charity. If you use the link below, you will go directly to Smile.Amazon.com with Big Sigh Ministries designated as your preferred charity. As you shop, you will see products marked "Eligible for AmazonSmile donation." A portion of your purchase price on these items will be donated directly to Big Sigh Ministries!

Here is the link: <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/47-3254498>

To make it easier to remember, you might want to bookmark the smile.amazon.com address in your browser. Then, every time you access the site, it will automatically designate Big Sigh as your charitable organization of choice. You will be supporting ministers as they prepare for and take renewal leave. For more information, please see the following page: <http://smile.amazon.com/about>

Thank you for supporting Big Sigh Ministries!

\*The Amazon Smile logo is borrowed from google images.



## BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT from Larry Prince

We are finally on track to start an aggressive schedule for our building and should start seeing positive activity. Our contractor has been battling a melanoma cancer on his nose and in his lymph nodes. At this time he has been declared free of cancer and just has a few more skin transplant and skin graft surgeries.

The preparation for pouring the slab for the main floor will start this week. Plumbing and electrical will start on April 12 and electrical the following week. With this in place, we will start pouring the slab the week of April 27. We will start putting up stud walls the first week of May and this should take about a month to complete. Windows should be installed the second week in May for the two sides and back. The front brick fascia should start the third week of May.

Inside construction will start as soon as the front is completed and the windows installed. We are waiting for a schedule from our grader and we expect that the grading for the back parking area should be started during this time frame.

Our current target for completion is the end of August and hopefully a move in date on Labor Day September 5.

I regret we have had so many delays and look forward to better weather and better scheduling. Thank you for your patience and prayers! We thank God for the healing process for our Contractor David Gray.

Seeing with New Eyes-continued from page 2

with God that cause us to take a look at what Jesus says and does with new eyes.

Let's begin looking at these encounters with new eyes, first, by considering what they say to us about our concepts of God. The people in the stories are a leper, a Centurion, and Peter's mother-in-law. The leper is the one who is being consumed by his disease, cut off from the community, and unfit to be in the presence of God. The Centurion is the oppressor, the enemy, the foreigner, not one of the chosen of God; he is despised by the community. It is the Centurion's servant who is ill; he doesn't appear in the story, but he suffers from a painful paralysis. Peter's mother-in-law is a female; not considered to be the same importance as a man, she is lying sick with fever and suffers in silence.

Jesus does not hesitate to engage each one of these people. The leper asks for healing for himself, the Centurion asks for his servant, and the woman does not ask. Jesus touches the leper, He talks at length with the Centurion who himself becomes the healer, and He seeks out the woman.

Wow! I am struck by how different this picture is than what we usually think about God. When we take these three stories together, what emerges is an image of God as unbounded by humans' rules. That which is untouchable is not untouched by God. The one whom I hate for his/her difference is honored by God. The one who is withdrawn and not seeking God is sought out by God. This picture is the upside-down one that Jesus has just described in the Beatitudes. It is a picture of a God so open and accepting that our human notions just can't grasp it.

We think that Jesus was teaching the Jews about their wrong notions about God, and that we have the right notions. We need to look at that belief with new eyes. If a truth is not applicable in all times, in all places, and for all people, it is not an eternal truth. We, like the Jews of Jesus' time, need to consider where we hold on to our notions about God that are just not what Jesus shows us God is like. Many times we hear an encouragement to hate that is very subtle, covered with a cloak of righteousness, just as it was for the Jewish community.

These stories show me that my task is to dare to examine my notions about God. If I cling to what I believe in and am not open to expand my concepts, I will be unavailable to hear anything new and live paralyzed as the Centurion's servant is paralyzed. I will miss the richness of the journey that Jesus is calling me to embark upon. The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes. —Marcel Proust

You may ask, "How can I expand my concepts or let go of limiting notions?" I think the answer is to practice just Being. Spend some time outside. If possible, walk around and just observe. The trees, plants, birds and animals connect us to the natural world. It is here we can feel ourselves part of the whole creation that reveals to us the fullness of God. Fr. Richard Rohr says that nature is the first Bible — it is in nature we can step out of our notions and concepts and enter into just Being.

These three healing stories have more to teach us. There are lessons here about healing for our individual lives and healing for our relations with others. We will look at these teachings next time.

## Getting to Know Our Church Family



Spotlight on

### Bonnie Vaughan



Bonnie and her brother, Joe

My first memories are going with my mother to revival services at Sparta Methodist Church on summer evenings. I also remember being a part of a Sunday school class taught by a loving teacher, Mrs. Cora Doughton Carson. She would bring a pretty little gift box full of her homemade "pulled" mints for a treat! I still have some Sunday school leaflets from the 1930's.

I joined Sparta Methodist Church at age 12 in 1942. Rev. CR Allison was our pastor at that time.

Besides Sunday School, Vacation Bible school and Epworth League were also a great part of growing up in our Sparta Methodist Church. Epworth league was later changed to MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship). After college I was the leader of MYF until Robert and I were married in our new Sparta Methodist Church in December 1951.

Methodist Women have been a guiding force in my life since a Girls Guild in the 1940's. I have served in all offices from president to Spiritual Life Leader. I've been blessed to be active in Methodist churches all my life - small village church, big city church, small city church.

I'm still enjoying my 60th year as a Sunday school teacher at my beloved Sparta United Methodist Church. I so well remember my first Sunday school class to teach two-year-olds in a big city church - North Hill Methodist in Akron Ohio.

When we moved to the small village of Peninsula Ohio, I served as our Peninsula Methodist delegate to Southeast Ohio annual conference at Lakeside Ohio for many years. Always, my service to God has been first in my outreach.

While we raised our two sons, Joe and Rob, I was a busy Room Mother, Cub Scout Den mother, PTA officer and Booster Club member.

After our two sons were in college I traveled between Akron and Cleveland, Ohio giving a variety of nature programs to area church women's groups, college classes, civic groups and garden clubs. Robert's career with managing properties for the Western Reserve led us to living in the gatehouse of 600 acre Camp Ledgewood. Walking, hiking, exploring nature, led me to race walking with the North Carolina Senior Games. I competed nationally in New York, Arizona, Florida and Louisiana. At age 85 Rob took me to Raleigh to compete in my latest race walk last fall. I won the gold medal in my age group.

I still enjoy volunteering at Genesis Healthcare weekly as well as Allegheny CARES weekly.

These are the highlights of a life dedicated to our Loving Living Lord.

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO...

Greyson Pipes	April 1	Smith Hart	April 29	Elane Elsheimer	May 21
Frances Cox	April 4	Robert Smith	April 30	Donny Lemmond	May 21
David Carpenter	April 5	Tim Myers	May 3	Donald Cobb	May 23
Pat Edwards	April 6	Debbie Edwards	May 4	Tom Atwood	May 24
Emily Hart	April 6	Tommy Thompson Jr	May 5	Betty Thompson	May 26
Maxwell Cox	April 16	Petie Bass	May 6	Loyal Pruitt	May 28
Holly Souther Bazemore	April 19	Linda Wishon	May 7	Alan Sears	May 28
Nancy Jones	April 19	Danny Boyer	May 12	Melinda Boyer	May 29
James Saintsing	April 20	Hannah Smith	May 14	Sarah Post	May 30
Wayne Miles	April 26	Harry Speeks	May 15	Scott Turnmyre	May 30
Wayna Wyatt	April 27	Ruby Calhoun	May 16	Marci Hart	May 31
Delta Peterson	April 28	Louise Blizzard	May 19		

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO...

Linda & Johnny Wishon	April 13	Ben & Kyla Gatton	May 14
Beverly & Loyal Pruitt	April 14	Don & Gayle Cobb	May 22
Brant & Libby Banks	April 17	Maxwell & Frances Cox	May 28
John & Elane Elsheimer	April 21	Tom & Rosalee Atwood	May 30
Everette & Rose Dukes	May 4		

### Thanks from the Sparta Lions Club



On behalf of the Sparta Lions Club we want to express appreciation to the Sparta United Methodist Church for the use of the facility for the Red Cross Bloodmobile every other month. The convenient location, the parking, and the air conditioning are all ideal.

We appreciate the cooperation of Donna Myers as well as our faithful Methodist donors.

The bloodmobile is truly a life-saving effort and this is just one of the ways our church serves our community - we are grateful.

Faye Reeves, Chairman

Gayle Cobb, Volunteer

Dear SUMC,

Thank you so much for the Christmas card and the gift card! It meant a lot to know you all thought of me. Things are great at Alabama. I'm looking forward to being back home soon and seeing all of you. Thanks again to everyone and especially to Beth and Pam who took the time to mail me your card. See you all soon.  
Smith Hart



### Have any extra fabric lying around?

The UMW Sewing Circle would greatly appreciate it for their ministry in making little dresses and school bags.

## UNITED METHODIST MEN HAPPENINGS

By Alan Sears

**U**  
**M**  
**M**

\* Please join us for good food and fellowship **April 17th at 8:00 AM**. The speaker will be own Hank Henry. You do not want to miss Hank's story of youth, survival, faith and love of country.

\* The Mission Meal schedule is out and we have the May meal. Due to the second Sunday being on Mother's Day, the meal is being moved to the first Sunday which is May 1st. Mark your calendars and be ready to assist with the prep and serving. We look forward to serving our Church family as well as outside guests. Proceeds from the meal will go towards the Youth Trip!

\* A district-wide United Methodist Men's Retreat opportunity will be held on April 30th in Statesville. Information can be found at the following web address [www.wnccumm.org](http://www.wnccumm.org) once there, click on the Rally Registration.

\* We have wrapped up the wood deliveries for this year. To those Wood Warriors that submitted a pledge, we should have the total number of loads delivered for you soon. To those individuals that have already been so generous with your support, thank you from the bottom of our hearts.



**THANK YOU,  
CHOIR!**

*Thank you to the choir for their commitment to glorifying God through song, especially during Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter services. May God's Spirit continue to flow through us as we sing His praises. —*

*Jacqueline and Nancy—*

## UNITED METHODIST WOMEN HAPPENINGS

By Gayle Cobb, Jennifer Robinson & Pratt Davis

**U**  
**M**  
**W**

Since 1869 United Methodist Women have been dedicated to their mission work. Today Sparta UMW continues this legacy. Our UMW is blessed to have wonderful congregational support that enables us to support local missions. The recent bake sale helped raised approximately \$850 that will be used to fund local needs. We appreciate all that purchased baked goods and those that prepared the items.

Recently, the Western North Carolina Conference UMW received the following information. **The Western North Carolina UMW is #1 in Total Mission Giving in the nation.** Sparta UMW as a local unit shares in this good news. Being #1 means we have put our faith, hope and love into action both at home and around the world. This giving record is a blessing to so many and was made possible through God's grace.

Some time ago the UMW published a cookbook and began sales. Presently, 703 cookbooks have been sold for a total of \$5,861. Proceeds have been used for local missions. There are still some cookbooks available for sale @ two for \$10.00.

With the coming of spring the UMW would like to remind you to mark your calendars for our annual Mother's Day Tea. The tea will be May 7th in the Fellowship. Tickets are on sale now. Please watch the church bulletin for additional information regarding this special time of fun and fellowship in recognition of Mothers.

The Sewing Circle will meet on May 2nd at 10 am in the Fellowship Hall. Currently, the group is working to fill a large request for school bags. Also the circle completed 86 little dresses and 13 pairs of boys' shorts that were delivered to NC Moravians for their Kenya Mission Trip in April. As always, additional help with cutting fabric, pressing fabric seams, and sewing is needed and appreciated. Please consider donating your time and talents to this important mission.

The general UMW meeting will be Wednesday, April 13 at 6:30 in the Woodruff Classroom. The program presenters will be Rhonda Patrick and Yvette Brooks. They will share with us information about the Alleghany Pregnancy Care Center. Also please be reminded that our Spring Brunch will be April 16th at 10 am at Beverlee Scott's home.

The UMW extends an open invitation to all the women of our church to join us in our meetings, mission endeavors, and special events. Join us as we seek to put Faith, Hope and Love into Action.

**UMW Mother's Day Tea**  
**Saturday May 7**  
**Tickets on sale now for \$7!**  
**Contact Lucy Roe (372-4942)**  
**or Betty Latham (657-8495).**

### From the Treasurer: 2016

#### Income Budget

Budgeted Income	2016 Budget
Congregational Giving	\$226,410
Other Income	<u>\$5,114</u>
<b>Total Budget for Income</b>	<b>\$231,524</b>

#### Expenses Budget

Budgeted Expense	2016 Budget
Salaries	\$121,500
Benefits	\$27,413
Office Expenses	\$8,400
General Property	\$15,400
Utilities	\$18,600
Worship	\$1,200
Communications	\$2,500
Adult Christian Education	\$2,400
Children/Youth	\$7,150
Nurture	\$1,200
Outreach	\$3,600
Evangelism	\$100
Stewardship	\$1,000
Apportionments	\$20,811
Miscellaneous	<u>\$250</u>
<b>Total Budget for Expenses</b>	<b>\$231,524</b>

## Bible Study Opportunity

With

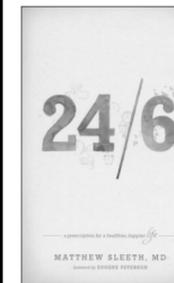
**Reverend Tom Miller**

**A Four Week Study**

**Mondays 7:00 pm**

**beginning**

**April 18**



It has been our life-long dream to return to Alleghany county ever since leaving back in 1979. Maureen and I have been very fortunate to have spent time in ministry in North Carolina.

Prior to attending Duke Seminary and entering full-time ministry, I held management positions in the poultry industry.

I look forward to beginning a four session Bible study on Monday evenings starting April 18th. We will meet at 7 pm and will use Dr. Matthew Sleeth's study entitled "24/6: A Prescription for a Healthy, Happier Life." Dr. Sleeth was an emergency room physician who now advocates the ministry of ways to keep a Sabbath in your busy life.

### JANUARY - MARCH 2016 STATS

Average Sunday School Attendance	71
Average monthly Worship Services	140
Budgeted Income needed through March	\$53,244
Actual Income received through March	\$49,415
Budgeted Expenditures through March	\$59,050
Actual Expenditures through March	\$55,010