



336 South Halifax Drive
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JANUARY 2024



Ash Wednesday is February 14. This begins the sacred journey of Lent. Lent is a season of reflection, sacrifice, and spiritual renewal. This period of 40 days leading up to Easter is a time for us to draw closer to God, examine our lives, and grow in our faith. This year, I want us to dig into the profound meaning of Lent and explore the powerful concept of giving up something to grow.

In the sermon series for Lent 2024, we will delve into the theme of "No Pain, No Gain." This series will explore the idea that, just as Jesus was a suffering servant, we can also experience growth, transformation, and deeper spiritual connection through our own experiences of suffering and sacrifice. We will challenge ourselves to give up something, make a sacrifice, and join together in the suffering as Jesus goes to the cross.

The phrase "No Pain, No Gain" is often associated with physical exercise, but it also holds a deep spiritual truth. Lent is an opportunity for us to experience a form of spiritual discipline that involves giving up certain comforts or habits to focus on our relationship with God. We willingly embrace the discomfort and open ourselves to profound growth and transformation.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness, fasting and praying, facing temptations from the adversary. This period of testing prepared Him for His earthly ministry. Similarly, Lent provides us with an intentional space to confront our struggles, temptations, and distractions. We create room for God to work in our lives through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Giving up something during Lent is not about self-deprivation for its own sake; instead, it is a purposeful act of surrender. Whether it's a favorite indulgence, a habit that distracts us, or a worldly comfort, the act of giving it up allows us to refocus our attention on God. It's

an acknowledgment that our ultimate fulfillment comes from our relationship with the Divine.

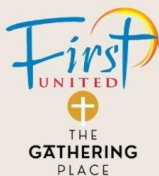
The journey of Lent is not solely about sacrifice but also about gain—spiritual gain. As we deny ourselves certain things, we create space for God to fill our hearts and minds with His grace, love, and wisdom. It's a time of deepening our prayer life, studying the Scriptures, and seeking God's guidance for our lives.

Let us use this season of Lent to examine our hearts, discern areas for growth, and willingly embrace the discomfort that leads to spiritual gain. In doing so, we follow the example of Jesus, who endured the cross for the joy set before Him. I invite you to consider what you might give up, let go of, and sacrifice so that you can put God first this season. May our sacrifices during Lent testify to our desire for a deeper, more meaningful connection with God.

Grace and Peace,
Scott



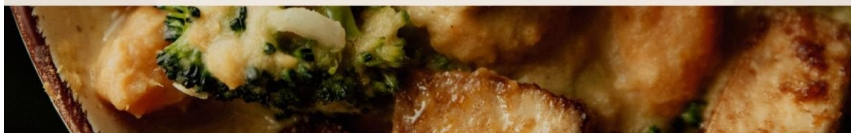
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11
 8:30AM – DEVOTIONAL
 9AM–NOON – SERVICE PROJECTS
 WE HAVE PROJECTS FOR ALL AGES/ABILITIES
 COME BE THE HANDS & FEET OF GOD



Lenten Dinner Groups

SIGN UP AT
FIRSTUNITED.ORG/DINNER-CHURCH

Meet Your Group at our
 Soup Supper Service on Ash Wednesday – February 14 at 6pm



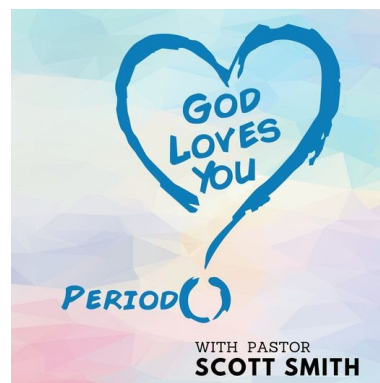
Again this year, we will be having Lenten Dinner Groups. This is a chance to deepen your faith during this Lenten season! Contact Terri Lynch tlynch@firstunited.org. to sign up.

Then, you can meet your group at our Soup Supper Service on Ash Wednesday!, February 14th.



Weekly Podcasts on Mondays

Have you “tuned in” to one of the weekly podcasts from the church? Pastor Scott is the host of this podcast and usually has Pastor Amy, Terri (Lynch) Kraft and Jason Giraulo joining him for a casual conversation about everyday events and how they might impact the church. Just go to the church website and look under the Worship tab. You can even hear older podcasts from this tab.



Ash Wednesday marks the first day, or the start of the season of Lent, which begins 40 days prior to Easter. (Technically 46 days as Sundays are not included in the count.) Officially named "Day of Ashes."



THE EIGHT DECADES CLUB

We are highlighting those wonderful seniors in our church that have reached that young age of 80 or over. Send them a card, or if you see them, wish them a Happy Birthday.

- Jan 26—Marilyn Sweet—142 River Beach Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176
- Jan 30—Jack Swarm—17 Koala Bear Path, Ormond Beach FL 32174-2958
- Feb 4—Donna Johnson—2545 S Atlantic Ave Apt 1406, Daytona Beach FL 32118-5542
- Feb 4—Betsy Skedgell—159 Ryan Nicholas Dr, Kingsland GA 31548
- Feb 6—Peg Stuckey—1003 Deer Run Rd, Centerville OH 45459-4923
- Feb 8—Martha Cook—2612 S Central Ave, Flagler Beach FL 32136

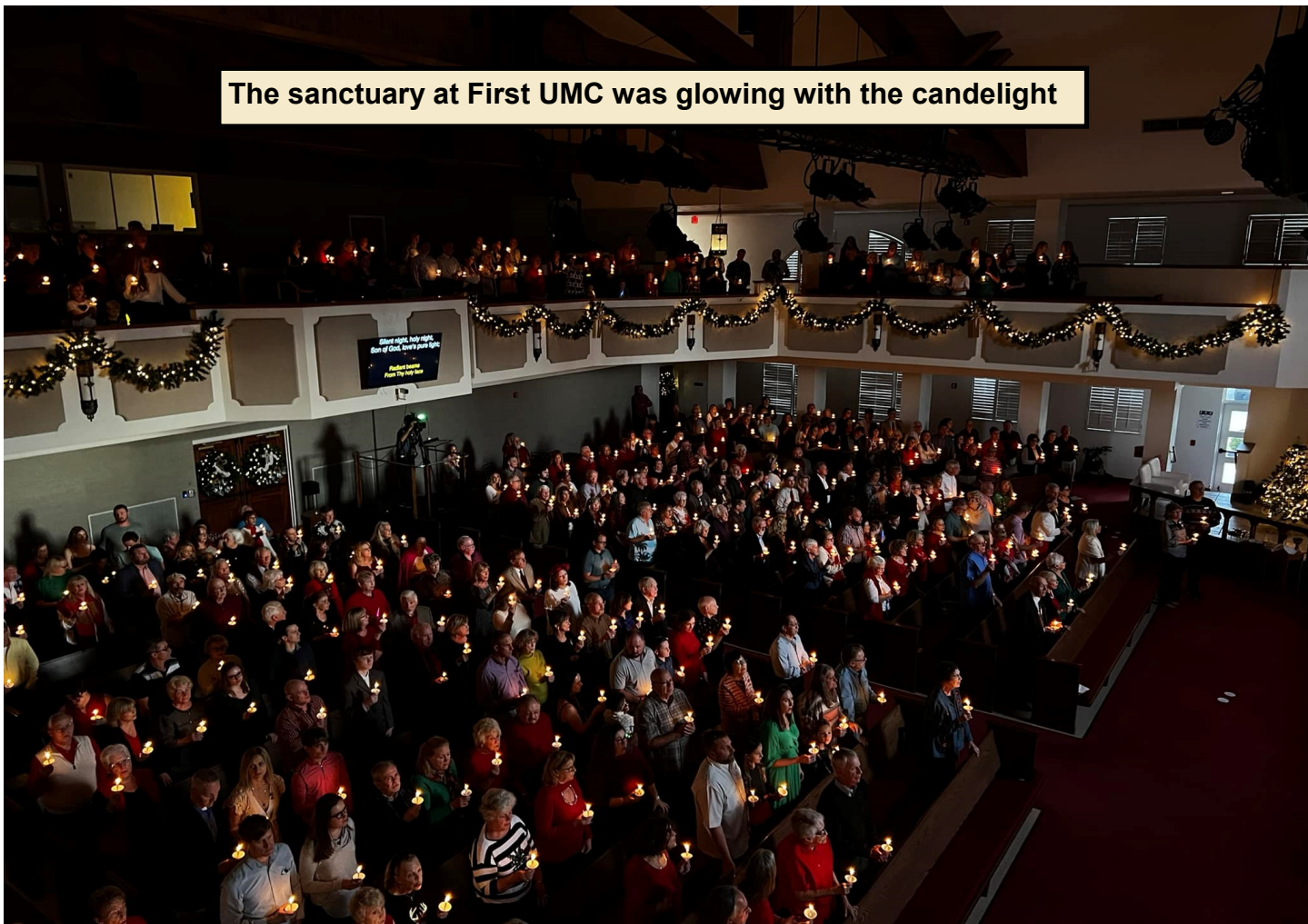
- Feb 11—Ruthie Wise—36 Azalea Dr, Ormond Beach FL 32176-3508
- Feb 15—Larry Clements—55 Greenwood Ave, Ormond Beach FL 32174
- Feb 20—Vondra Brookshire—340 Chelsea Place Ave, Ormond Beach FL 32174-0683
- Feb 21—Donna Hiatt—290 Morningside Ave, Daytona Beach FL 32118
- Feb 21—Carolyn Unger—6 Kingsley Cir, Ormond Beach FL 32174-9210
- Feb 22—Elizabeth Patterson—395 S Atlantic Ave, Apt 701, Ormond Beach FL 32176-8154
- Feb 22—Irene Sutton—1031 4th St Apt 225, Holly Hill 32117-4187
- Feb 23—Joan Howard—P O Box 15, Oxford NY 13830-0015

If you know of a name that should be on the list, or if a correction is needed, please let Frank Johnston know at :

fjohnston@firstunited.org

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

The sanctuary at First UMC was glowing with the candlelight



The Gathering Place celebrated the first time a baptism had taken place of a child of their new members.



The Listening Life by Adam S. McHugh

Having read numerous articles and sat through many seminars on improving my listening skills, I never considered the profound impact such techniques could have on my relationship with God. McHugh's book prompts readers to think about how our connections would transform if we approached every situation with the primary intention of listening.

The author challenges us to reconsider our relationship with God, urging

“...hearing without corresponding action amounts to not hearing at all.”

us to adopt the posture of attentive listeners. What if we extended this approach to our connection with nature? What if, in our interactions, we prioritized our ears over our mouths?

Reverend McHugh draws attention to the intriguing linguistic connection between "listen" and "obey," stating that both words share roots in Latin and Hebrew. In Latin, the concept of "obey" would not exist without the foundational concept of "listen." He says those who fail to act upon what they hear have not truly listened.

Quoting his seminary professor, Howard Hendricks, he emphasizes the biblical perspective that hearing without corresponding action amounts to not hearing at all.

The author draws parallels between common parental complaints about children's failure to listen and the underlying desire for obedience. The intertwining of "listen" and "obey" be-

comes evident once again.

McHugh explores various stimuli that capture our attention, from mundane sounds like airplanes and jackhammers to the captivating allure of a particular song that engrosses our thoughts. He likens dance to our obedience to music, highlighting the interconnectedness of listening and responding. It's difficult to not tap our toes when we hear certain songs.

Reflecting on biblical narratives, McHugh references Jesus calling the disciples to follow him. The immediate response of the early disciples, who dropped their nets and followed, exemplifies the essence of obedient listening.

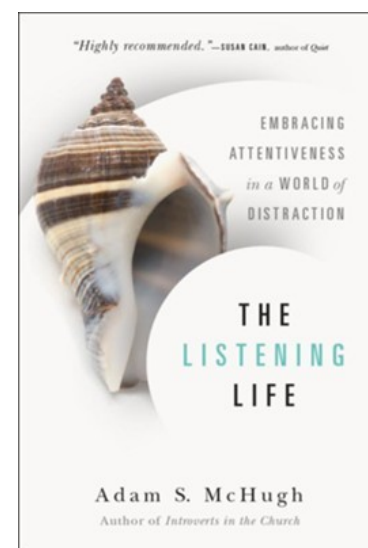
The author shares the story of Brother Lawrence from the Seventeenth Century, who, through the simple act of washing dishes, found a connection with the divine by actively listening.

“To listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.”
— Mark Nepo

This challenges the notion that one must be in a majestic cathedral to experience the divine presence.

The Listening Life might inspire you to improve your listening habits to improve your interpersonal relationships but also in the sacred realm and everyday moments.

In *The Listening Life*, Adam McHugh places listening at the heart of our spirituality, our relationships and our mission in the world. God himself is the God who hears, and we too can learn to hear what God may be saying through creation, through Scripture, through people. By cultivating a posture of listening, we become more attentive and engaged with those around us. Listening shapes us and equips us to be more attuned to people in pain and more able to minister to those in distress. Our lives are qualitatively different—indeed, better—when we become listeners. Heed the call to the listening life, and hear what God is doing in you and the world.



Scott Smith, Senior Pastor

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We need your help in providing suggestions for our newsletter. We will be publishing it each month and we need your help in writing articles and news stories. Contact Will McLaughlin, <willmcla@gmail.com>