***From Our Conference Minister***

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***Love God. Love People!*** *(Isaiah 58:1-12)*

The prophet Isaiah said *“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet…”* (v.1)A trumpet is used to call people to war, a serious time. Lent, for Christians, is a serious and solemn time. It is an invitation to be changed from the inside out.

In response to Lent’s trumpet call, many of us will assemble today, February 14, to observe Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the 40 days of Lent. With ashes made from last year’s dried palms, the minister will inscribe a cross on our foreheads. As it is being inscribed on our forehead, may it also be inscribed on our hearts.

Jesus’ 40 days of testing in the wilderness was a significant time in his ministry. Our faith calls us to emulate Jesus’ ministry and his compassion toward people. Our faith calls us to love God and to love people.

*How might we embody this faith as we walk through Lent?*

As we seek to emulate Jesus, let us love and show compassion toward *all* people; paying close attention to those around us who are poor, homeless and hurting. To better understand a life lived in poverty, consider adding one or more of the following to your Lenten practice:

Spend $2 (or less) on a meager meal and pray for people around the world who live on $2 per day or less

Place a glass of water on a table to remember and then pray for the millions of people who suffer disease, poverty and conflict because they lack clean water to drink, or have a limited water supply

At the end of each day when you come to the door of your home and place the key in the lock, after stepping inside, pause to reflect and pray for people who are homeless

Along with prayer, do what you can to help people in need in your community and around the world.

Other common Lenten practices include abstinence from: chocolate, coffee, making hurtful remarks to others, or from thinking negative thoughts. Devotional Lenten practices might include:

Daily inspirational readings (e.g. 2018 UCC Stillspeaking Lent Devotional)

Frequent prayers (e.g. focus on prayers of gratitude)

Writing a letter each week to someone who feels lonely or isolated

Whatever you decide will be between you and God, so ensure that *“…your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret;* *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”* *(Matt. 6:18)*

As we move together into the season of Lent, may we find ways to **love God** and to **love people** with our whole lives. Amen.

*Lenten Blessings,*

*Monica*

Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith

Conference Minister and President

p.s. Thank you for submitting the 2018 Yearbook information and the 2018 OCWM pledge forms! If you have not yet submitted your church’s information, there is still time to do so.