



February 2021 Singing Tower

The Newsletter of the West Branch United Methodist Church



"Where You Belong"

- ◆ Prayers
- ◆ Gifts
- ◆ Presence
- ◆ Service
- ◆ Witness

God's Love

God's love for you is intense... it is everlasting, it is intense
For each soul, God does cherish, God would have not one to perish.
God's love for you is unconditional...it is by design divinely integral.
For in the womb, God knew your name, and in God's book God wrote your name.
God's love for you, is fiercely extreme...for your very soul Jesus came to redeem!

Deborah Ann Belka

February is a time of showing and expressing our love and appreciation for others, and to God.

God loves you and I love you and keep you in my prayers! My nxl nl l lz

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Romans 12:10

“And now these three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

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Bishop Laurie Haller had directed all UM churches in Iowa to stay closed until at least January 10th. Our Re-Entry Task Force met Jan. 11 and decided to go to in-person worship Jan. 17, but...four days later, Covid threatened West Branch, and the BB teams and coaches were sent home, and they and their families had to quarantine and be tested for Covid...so we are unable to be in-person yet. We will re-evaluate Feb. 1st. We are praying for ALL of you!

ANNOUNCEMENT from SPRC: We have hired a new Secretary Treasurer! Her name is Ashley Kaalberg and she began training Jan.12. Welcome to our church and welcome aboard our staff!

Hello everyone! My name is **Ashley Kaalberg** and I'm happy to be a part of the WBUMC team!

A little about me; I graduated from West Branch 20 years ago and now live in West Liberty with my husband and our five children. Our children attend/ed West Branch Schools and I own a small business on Main Street West Branch. Additionally, I am serving my 8th year on the park and recreation board in West Liberty. I really enjoy the diversity of being part of both communities! While I will be working primarily from home, I am available via email and am happy to meet at the church during the week or via zoom if you have any questions for me or would like to chat! Westbranchumc@gmail.com is the best way to reach me.

I look forward to meeting you all!

Ash Wednesday Services

We will have an Ash Wednesday service on our church YouTube channel for you and your family to enjoy anytime on Ash Wednesday. You can use the worship link on the “Worship Preview” email to locate this special service.

Communion and the imposition of ashes is traditionally part of our Ash Wednesday Service. This year we're going to do things a little differently. We are offering DRIVE BY COMMUNION and a new take on the imposition of ashes (an ash cross on a piece of burlap) to pick up on February 17th from 12pm-2pm or 5-6pm. (ALL servers will be wearing masks and gloves and you won't have to leave the safety of your car) You can partake in the elements right there in your car, wait until you watch the Ash Wednesday service, or take them home to celebrate communion as a family. During these pickup times you will also receive a “Lent in a Bag”. In this you will find items to help you and your family focus on the journey of Lent, that leads us to Easter. Please join in this new way to connect to your church family. If you are unable to leave your house, please contact the church. We have volunteers ready to do non-contact drop off to those who need it.

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Lent is 40 days from Ash Wednesday through Easter Saturday, not counting Sundays.

Easter is April 4.

Our theme for Lent is “HOLY VESSELS” which is a meaningful and memorable spiritual journey for us! Designer Marcia McFee says: “Each of us is created a precious and holy vessel of embodying love. We have been through a harrowing time since last Lent that has shattered our sense of wholeness-, body, mind and spirit-like a glass vessel fractured into pieces. In this Lenten season of reconciliation we will explore the healing narratives of Jesus that tell us of divine solidarity with human suffering and remind us we can begin a journey toward making something beautiful from that which is seemingly broken.”

“Vision 2032:s Conversations on Local Church and Conference Finances”

As a follow-up to Bishop Laurie’s Epiphany Address, there will be Conversations on Local Church and Conference Finances. Bishop Laurie has prepared an opening devotion, “Sowing Seeds of Generosity” in which she describes her personal journey of faith relating to financial stewardship. Conference Treasurer Maggie Biggs and the Conference Council on Finance and Administration Chairperson Norlan Hinke will also present reports on the status of the giving of our local churches to Apportionments. There will be a time for conversation, questions, and answers from participants. This will include the witness of several pastors and local churches in regard to their faith journeys around local church finances and their “why and how” of Apportionment giving. Send questions and comments to, vision2032@iaumc.org.

With the additional responsibilities Bishop Laurie has with the Dakotas Conference we’ve adjusted the way these events are presented, and the content of questions and conversations will be shared with Bishop Laurie.

These conversations will be held at four different times on Saturday, January 23rd and 30th. Please choose the time and date that works best for your attendance:

Saturday, January 23 at 9:00 - 10:15 a.m. - Livestream

Saturday, January 23 at 10:30 - 11:45 a.m. - Livestream

Saturday, January 30 at 9:00 - 10:15 a.m. - Livestream

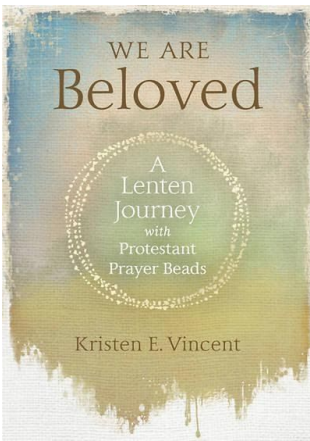
Saturday, January 30 at 10:30 - 11:45 a.m. - Livestream

These conversations are for all local church pastors and lay members of local churches, especially for lay members who are key leaders in their churches.

The health of our local churches is directly related to the financial health of the members and friends of our congregations. In the same way, the health of the Iowa Conference’s financial ministry is directly related to the financial health of local churches. When it comes to the ministry of Jesus Christ, we are all in it together.

All of these upcoming events will also be Livestreamed to the Iowa UM Church Facebook page and will be recorded and posted to www.iaumc.org.

**Join us for 6 Wednesdays beginning on February 24th at 8pm for the book study
We Are Beloved.**



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As part of the Confirmation process the young disciples were asked to design a ministry. JaLynn Falco, MadeLynn Falco, and Jordan Waters (8th & 9th grades) would like YOU to prayerfully consider joining them in → Zjub`) MiXy® meant to connect teens to adults via Zoom (for now) in order to share faith story “testimonies”, support each other, share wisdom of lessons learned, use the Bible better, and grow in faith together. They spoke so passionately about learning from each other and helping one another! They spoke of recognizing we are all learning, struggling, and growing in our Christian life no matter our age. They recognized older adults may have wisdom to give and receive. This will hopefully result in ongoing connections and small group(s) to continue friendships, encouragement, and wisdom in a multigenerational way. An imperfect quote: “You have to allow yourself to be willing to open up... This would be a “safe” place to talk... Nobody is ‘perfect’, we are all learning.”

Please prayerfully consider being part of this intergenerational ministry initiated by teens! The **FIRST** meeting time is Saturday February 6 at 10:00 am via Zoom. (watch for link). This first meeting will have a brief devotion based on the teens favorite Scriptures, will be moderated by JaLynn, and then get to know each other better and see what can evolve with this valuable ministry. **Delight in, and pray for,** this movement of the Holy Spirit!
Contact: Pastor Connie Markle, Katie Sabourin, or Ruth Blayer

Another new ministry from the Confirmation class is called "**K & C Ministries.**" We want to help people in need in West Branch or in the area. Some things we want to do are to volunteer at the ' nnX<M{xt'MIX' nnX'Ax| V MIXt xn,, XZXt jnyZ{ in the spring, and to help Missions with the Spring Garage Sale. Katey Noble and Claire Jarrett

Another new ministry from the Confirmation class is called "**Quarantine Care Team**" to help people with things like XZjgZxb` ` xnVZxZy{n'tn| xXnnxy{ZuSyanfZjb` yl n,, Snx,, aMl' tn| k M'l ZZX'aZju,, k&a X| xb` {aby{lk Z^ Please call Pastor Connie with a need you have and she will let us know. Thank you! Cooper Burger and Alex Heithoff

Recently our Confirmands were asked to design a ministry. Nate Hills and Trenton Shutte came up with "**The Givers**", which is a group that is interested in collecting and donating to those in our community in need. As their 1st project, Nate and Trenton are organizing 6-weeks of giving for Lent! There will be a **donation box** in the church entryway to collect items for a different organization each week in Lent. More specifics about each organization and their needs will be shared as we get closer to Ash Wednesday. Please prayerfully consider helping these young gentlemen kick off this new ministry!

Mission News

Lent Mission Project

The Missions Committee hopes to raise \$500. to purchase a heifer for Heifer International during Lent (Ash Wednesday Feb 17- Easter Apr 4).

A heifer can change lives, giving hope to families in even the most dire of circumstances. Heifers have many uses, and are capable of bringing stability to the lives of people struggling with hunger. This donation also funds training in the care of the heifer.

1. Provides milk and nourishment to hungry families
2. Boosts income through sales of extra milk
3. Encourages better crop yields by creating fertilizer
4. Enables entire communities to benefit through "Pass on the Gift" (the calf is given to another family in need).

Please mark your donation "Heifer Int." and watch 'our white cow' in the front entry transform into a 'brown cow' as donations are raised :-)

Missions Committee - Bob & Rosamond Cumings, Barb Wilcox, Connie Tisinger, Linda Albrecht, and Shirley Patrick PS. We would love to have more members, just contact us :-) ?/ {a LjMZs/nxb) Mlj nx'@bjZt' <MxM

GIVING STATEMENTS FOR END OF YEAR- Please contact us right away if your end of year statement seems incorrect. We will address it immediately! Westbranchumc@gmail.com

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Greetings Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5) This is the promise of Christmas we celebrate all year long. I have found myself repeating this verse often over this past year. Amidst everything we have been through, our hope for today, tomorrow and the days to come is the Light does indeed continue to shine!

As the acting Treasurer of the West Branch Area Religious Council (WBARC) I want to once again thank all of you for your faithful partnership and support of our shared ministry together. Through your faithful stewardship and monetary donations to our joint account we were able to continue our shared mission in assisting those in need in our community.

During 2020 WBARC received \$1,705 in monetary gifts. Thank you all so much! We had mission expenditures of \$1,641.33 as we assisted 13 individuals and/or families with needs such as lodging at Day's Inn, food vouchers to Jack and Jill, fuel assistance, medical expenses, auto repairs for a stranded motorist, clothing and utility assistance. WBARC continued its strong support of food assistance programs within the West Branch Community School District with a donation of \$300.

Additionally, shortly following the onset of COVID-19, we purchased \$100 worth of gift cards from each of the 5 local restaurants. These gift cards were then distributed to people in need. This was also a way to support our local restaurants amidst challenging times.

Once again, on behalf of my colleagues, let me express our gratitude and thankfulness for your commitment and faithfulness to our shared ministry. We do our best to faithfully steward these gifts and see they are making a difference and extending God's care and love to all. We look forward to 2021, our partnership together, and our joint efforts in doing God's work in our community.

In peace, Chad Whaley

Pastor, Bethany Lutheran Church, WBARC Treasurer

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Daily Devotionals:

The **Daily Devotional** videos using "Jesus Calling" by Sarah Young on Facebook group: **WBUMC-Where You Belong** are posted Mon-Sat and then you can watch anytime you wish. Please "comment" or "like" as it helps us know we are connecting you. If you need help: contact Ruth Blayer or Katie Sabourin.

Sunday "Fellowship time" 9:15 am:

Get ready for a virtual **Fellowship Time!** Get your own coffee and goodie and meet with others **Sundays at 9:15 am** (before the 10 am worship). This is a time to greet others, share news, chat and laugh together. The **Zoom link** can be found on the Worship preview or contact the office. Contact: Ruth Blayer

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J8:11 Please join us on Sundays at 7:30pm on Zoom for some time together and learning about our loving Father. The plan is to have a Bible study each week along with some time to check in with one another. Please come with a Bible, an open mind, & snacks. If you don't have access to a Bible please let Katie know. Send Katie an email (kjsabourin@gmail.com) to get the Zoom link. Can't wait to see you all there!!!

Adult SS Sunday Mornings:

You Are INVITED as a group gathers virtually on **Sunday mornings 11:15 am after the 10 am worship** to connect and discuss the sermon. (Yes, the decision has been made to continue the 11:15 am time.) This helps us grasp even more of the Lord's word for us. All are welcome! The "Sermon Notes" and the **Zoom link** comes each week in the worship preview or contact the office. Contact: Bev Spencer or Pastor Connie Markle.

CUPS meeting:

A small group called "C.U.P.S." began October 2013 in response to those seeking a daytime spiritual growth & fellowship opportunity. The participants over the years have varied and ALL ARE WELCOMED. More recently we have learned to enjoy CUPS via Zoom. The virtual gathering has allowed those out of state to participate.

CUPS stands for: **C**- Connecting (very Wesleyan) and **Coffee**. **U**- Understanding our Christian faith and the life of WBUMC. **P**- Pray for the prayer list and other requests (by name.) **S**- Sharing fellowship and each other's burdens.

Many of those participating over the years have spoken affirmatively of their enjoyment and growth in this small group setting. We pray, study, chat, and laugh. **Peg Anderson** enjoyed this group for several years and appreciated knowing she was prayed for when she was unable to attend. Upon Peg's recent death (12-31-2020) her family asked Pastor Connie more about CUPS and put their word in for affirming and inviting ALL to this time. You are invited to join us and attend when you can.

ALL WELCOME! The **C. U. P. S.** group meets via Zoom each **Tuesday morning at 9:30-11 am**. This time involves connection, prayer and Bible study related to the previous sermon. On occasion a prayer request comes just for CUPS and an email has gone out to the CUPS email list Ruth Blayer has. All welcome! If you need the **Zoom link** contact Ruth Blayer or the office. Contact: Ruth Blayer.

Thursday Bible Study (TBS):

All WELCOME! The Thursday **Bible Study** meets via Zoom **6-7:15 pm Thursdays**. We have been studying the book of Acts through Bible reading and discussion. We recommend you have a study Bible. We anticipate beginning **Revelation**, the last book of the New Testament. We read aloud, share study commentary, and discuss our reactions and application- so we progress as discussion warrants. All welcome! For the **Zoom link** contact the office or Ruth Blayer. Contact: Tom Bowie or Ruth Blayer.

***Other Small Groups/Fellowship:** Seriously, you pick the date(s) and topic(s).

We are ready to be creative and flexible in connecting our church family! We welcome **gatherings via Zoom** for a time to chat, to communicate, to pray together, and support each other etc. - one time, short-term or ongoing study. Use the Zoom Fellowship link (in Worship preview). If you have an idea or want to facilitate such a connection let's be creative and give it a try! Contact: Ruth Blayer (319-530-6648; pstrblayer@msn.com)

For You:

All are invited to **“Alone Together” Saturday February 13th at 10 am** (Fellowship link). **NOTE:** this Saturday time allows those working during the week to join us. Using Zoom we have had several virtual times to enjoy “seeing” one another. The title, “Alone Together”, came about as some live alone, and all our social lives are drastically altered- so, even when we may actually be alone, or feel alone, we are together as family at WBUMC, and we can connect! ALL are invited! Martha Luke will share from her reading of the book Home to Harmony by Phillip Gulley. The book relates small town living and a small church life. Martha finds it offers humor with inspiration. JOIN us for fellowship and inspiration.

(See also: “Helping Hands” confirmation ministry article re: Feb 6.)

Bed Mats Ministry continues:

The **Bed Mats Ministry group** continues putting faith into action. We create “mats” made from plastic shopping bags which can be used by those who find themselves sleeping on the ground (or in shelters) for protection from moisture, some cushion and warmth. **So... we need: 1) prepared bags and 2) bags for volunteers to prepare.** Contact Shirley Patrick for CUTTING INSTRUCTIONS she can send you. Shirley is our main “braider/weaver” and she needs more prepared bags to keep moving. Deliver bags (unprepared or precut) to the WBUMC entry.

Six (6) more “bed mats” were included in prayer time on January 24th. Thank you to everyone for the seventeen (17) completed/prayed for bed mats given to Willis Dady in Cedar Rapids. Last winter we gave fifteen (15) mats to Shelter House in Iowa City. (Additional information in past Newsletters.) To receive emails contact Ruth (pstrblayer@msn.com) Contact: Ruth Blayer, Shirley Patrick or Jodi Havill.

Council on Ministries (COM) Challenges and Inspires WBUMC with “Each One Reach Two”:

The WBUMC Council on Ministries (COM) continues to work toward:

- 1) Welcoming others to Christ and this church community;
- 2) Ways to grow Christian faith; and
- 3) Sending disciples out to continue the work of Christ.

At a January meeting we committed to an action challenge we want to invite the entire congregation to participate in. *“Each One Reach Two”* means you will intentionally:

- 1) Invite someone to worship and participate in the life and ministries of WBUMC. Help them know how to connect and participate in our current “virtual” ministries. Invite them to “come and see” (as a recent 1-17 sermon shared the story of Phillip inviting his friend Nathanael to “come and see” Jesus. John 1:43-51)
- 2) Connect with someone less active recently to let them know they are important and missed and how they can connect at this time. *-H Z M Z {aZ Va| xVa {n` Z{aZx..” UMH 558*
- 3) Pray for someone (anyone) the Holy Spirit places on your heart for 30 days. Know God is at work.

How are we inviting others to know Christ? How are we welcoming? What activities are we doing that grow faith? How can we “send forth” Christians to be light to the world? **Council on Ministries (COM) will meet Tuesday February 16 at 6:30 pm.** We will continue our discussion and visioning surrounding ministries of WBUMC and the “Discipleship Pathway.”

The Council on Ministries (COM) team appreciates prayers, support, and constructive suggestions. 2020-2021 WBUMC “Council on Ministries (COM): Ruth Blayer (chair), Pastor Connie Markle (Pastor), Katie Sabourin, Barb Wilcox, Rosamond Cumings, Bob Cumings, Linda Stoolman, Jenni Herring, Troy Vincent, Jim Blayer, Bev Spencer, Jodi Havill, Tammy Oaks.

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Kids 4 Christ (K4C) is **back** and we’re learning that We Can Trust God! Trust God! The plan is to stay virtual until our church moves into the green light stage. So please come get your kits for our next K4C unit on February 1st at church 4:00pm-6:00pm. If you can’t make it on this night, just contact Katie and she’ll find another time to meet you. If you haven’t yet been participating but want to start, we are excited to have you. Make sure to let Katie know ASAP so she can have a kit ready for you! We’ll be beginning our new unit on Wednesday Feb. 3rd at 5:45pm on Zoom along with an opening video each week in our Facebook group.

If you have questions or are ready to volunteer, please **contact Katie.**

Help Wanted

We are looking for a flexible, fun person who loves kids and loves Jesus, to volunteer to lead our Preschool and Kindergarteners through K4C (Kids for Christ). This person would be responsible for being prepared to lead our students over Zoom through the provided curriculum. While it’s important for the students to learn the Bible story and main point of each lesson, there is much flexibility on what activities they use to do this. The curriculum has everything you need but if more or different activities are wanted they can be created and used. This is a MOST rewarding position and only takes an hour or two a week during the school year. Please contact Katie Sabourin with questions and inquiries: Kjsabourin@gmail.com.

Prayer list:

*...pray for one another, so that you may be healed.
The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.
James 5:16, NRSV*

We are called to pray for one another. WBUMC does keep a prayer list and in the past this was part of the Bulletin each Sunday. While times are different- we still are called to pray. How can we make this more an integral part of our Christian faith life? How can we make it spiritually effective for use by the staff and congregation?

Currently:

At times you may receive an email about a prayer request;

You may contact Pastor Connie with a prayer request (please have permission if not your own, can be general);

The actual "list" is accessed and updated by Pastor Connie, Ruth Blayer, Katie Sabourin, or Ashley Kaalberg;

CUPS uses the prayer list each week to pray for all concerns and joys By Name. CUPS sometimes has prayer requests not intended for the more public list. Also Ruth has sent out a CUPS prayer request group email;

Small groups may pray;

Phone calls among the congregation share a concern;

Newsletter publishes a recent list.

No "official" prayer chain, besides above, is currently in effect.

Other ideas? Would some be willing to be on a "prayer" team? This might be individuals who have agreed to pray regularly and thus would get an email of the updated prayer list more frequently. Other ideas the Holy Spirit is leading to? Please share your constructive "prayer ministry" ideas with Pastor Connie or Ruth Blayer.

Remember: you can help us all by contacting Pastor Connie for prayer requests, keeping them updated, and letting us know when a request can be removed. If privacy is needed- make a general request.

Ruth & Katie's Virtual Office Hours

Using the meeting IDs/links below you can talk with us. Let us keep in contact as well as prayer and life/church business discussions. If we are talking with someone when you try to sign in, you will be in a "waiting room" and we will get to you soon. It's possible to talk with you all together as well. We hope you will check-in and give us grace as we learn new technology.

Office Hours- Ruth Blayer- Care Ministries: Tuesdays 1-2 pm Thursdays 4-5

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/4855453331?pwd=clhJVnEzcDRoWWJOek1odS96QU9WQT09>

Meeting ID: 485 545 3331, Password: 9vRt7w

With Prior Arrangement, Ruth can meet via this Zoom link at a time other than the designated hours.

Katie Sabourin- Youth Ministries: Tuesdays 3-4 pm and Fridays 4 pm-5 pm

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/9255714286?pwd=aHZ0VFUzNzE4T0ZGaUs0NGNIZnNFQT09>

Meeting ID: 925 571 4286, Password: 307



Mobile giving while we wait to be together again!
West Branch UMC

(may prompt for a 4 digit code, choose
"pay without confirming" option)

@WBUMC

Prayer Requests



Thank you to those who have kept the church informed of prayer concerns and provided updates and kept us aware of hospitalizations. Please contact the church office with prayer requests or to join the prayer chain.

*Please know we would rather have three calls from family/caring friends than miss a need. 643-5489 or youbelong@westbranchumc.org

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JOY: Hired a new Administrative Assistant-Secretary/Treasurer! Ashley Kaalberg"
Jim Blayer's mother, Anna Rose (97+ yo), fell, is in the hospital & will need rehab care.
Maggie Mowery's Mom, Kay Grosvenor, fell face down on the ice and praises God for no broken bones! Maggie is so grateful!
Those dealing with health, fear, or isolation due to COVID 19. Those whose lives are affected daily by COVID 19 changes.
Our church family as we miss each other!
Thankful for Zoom and ways to keep in touch."
Lisa Corr's Uncle Gene, health issues "
Pastor Connie's Dad, Frank, Heart issues"
Lindsay Kula, Ruth Lathrop's granddaughter, in serious rec. vehicle accident, in trauma center"
Clarence and Maryann Crew, health issues & in the loss of their nephew, Brad Wargo."
Amy Vernon in the loss of her grandmother."
Myrt Sexton's daughter, Paula Parra, in the loss of her husband Charles, on Christmas Day, and for Paula's move to WB. "
Prayers for the family of Peg Anderson"
Barb Crew husband, Frank Stephen "
Ruth Blayer's friend, Linnell"
Jeanna Hills' family with death of her dad, Gary Blain. "
Chris & Karen Rushton"
Matt Hoskins, health issues."
Gary & Kathy Hoskins' granddaughter, Libby "
Family of Kay Kiler on the death of her mother"
Pastor Scot Patrick "
Family of Bob Kline"
Rena, a friend of Lisa and Andy Corr"
Laura Slach "
Colleen Varguson & family in the death of son-in-law, David Hosier"
Kris Perks' family in Houston, Texas, sister-in-law Deeanna"

Continued prayers for Jim Blayer as he recovers from complications from Oct surgery."
Linda Albrecht & family in the loss of her father, Don Campbell. "
Jodi Havill health issues as well as her dad and friend, John Roth"
Healing for Ron Cousins"
Janet Woody"
Kathy Woody"
Addy Langley- Friend of Gloria Scharnweber"
Our Pianist, Maggie Mowery"
Deb Belknap"
Angie Gretter- Jeanna Hills sister"
Skyler Moss, stage 4 cancer, a young father with children, a friend of Amy Vernon and the Blayers. Needs prayer! Critically ill!"
Todd Stoolman"
Ron Cousins' sister: Sharon Castelda awaiting a lung transplant"
Nathan Trent, Gloria Scharnweber's nephew."
Amanda Polson-Tinebra, Lynn and Shirley Patrick's granddaughter"
Madi Nargang, niece of Phil and Amanda Rushton"
John Wilcox"
Dakota, a friend/student of Andy Corr"
Brady Verlo and family"
Crestview: Ruby Franke, Joan Jamison, Audrey Kofoed, Nancy Vincent, Laura Slach & John Langenhan"
West Liberty Assisted Living: Darlene Lenz"
West Liberty Heath: Lucine Morrison"
Bridgewater: Phyllis Langenhan
Melrose Meadows: Janet Wolf"
Our church family: including staff, COM & Single Board as they vision WBUMC ministry now and into the future"
Those who are caregivers"

