

HIGHLIGHTS

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

LA GRANDE — Sunday, March 7, is Fast Sunday for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and all are encouraged to fast for two meals while sharing their testimonies during church meetings and in their homes, if so inspired. Sharing our testimony and donating the value of the meals for the less fortunate can bring special blessings, and feelings of comfort and joy into our lives.

The “Come, Follow Me” lesson for the week of March 15 is on Doctrine and Covenants 23-26, which recount revelations to several individuals, including Emma Smith, the wife of Joseph Smith. Sister Smith was described as “an elect lady” who endured great hardships as the prophet’s spouse. Learn more about her life as part of this lesson by watching the included

Submissions

Churches and faith-based groups are encouraged to submit Highlights for the Spiritual Life page by 4 p.m. Tuesday for publication Thursday. Submit by email to news@lagrandeobserver.com (with Highlights in the subject line).

video, reading “Revelations in Context” and reviewing the last section of the lesson material called “Voices of the Restoration.” All lesson materials are available by downloading the “Gospel Library” mobile app.

Faith Lutheran Church

LA GRANDE — The sermon at Faith Lutheran Church this Sunday, March 7, will focus on the Gospel of John 2:13-22. In this passage we witness Jesus addressing activities that were occurring and being omitted in the house of worship. He aggressively corrected the wrong and was challenged on his “zeal” for the house of God. Jesus

then gives his challengers an insight to what he would accomplish by destroying the temple of his human body), “and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). After the Divine Service will be an opportunity for fellowship followed by an elders’ meeting.

The Lenten service at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 10, will consider eyes that are on Jesus. For this service the message will be “Denying Eyes.”

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church

LA GRANDE — St. Peter’s Episcopal Church will not worship in person until at least mid-March due to COVID-19. A link

to a livestream of Zion Lutheran’s service will be posted to St. Peter’s Facebook page on Saturday, March 6.

On Wednesday, March 10, there will be a Zoom Lenten service at 6:30 p.m. The link for that service will be emailed on Tuesday.

Zion Lutheran Church

LA GRANDE — Zion Lutheran Church will resume in-person this Sunday, March 7, at 9 a.m. COVID-19 precautions will be in place, including masks, social distancing and no coffee hour. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to the office via email or phone by Saturday at noon. The worship service also will be livestreamed on Facebook (you don’t need an account to watch). A link for that stream will be emailed out and posted on Saturday.

On Wednesday, March 10, there will be a Zoom Lenten service at 6:30 p.m. The link for that service will be emailed on Tuesday.

Focusing on what Lent is all about

I am a chocoholic. And so was my mother and my grandfather. And so chocolate was something we all gave up for Lent every year. Unfortunately, I got too good at finding substitutes for chocolate, whether it was chocolate-like carob, or just finding other ways to satisfy my sweet tooth, like lemon bars or carrot cake. So I started giving up all sweets. But that led to an internal debate about artificial sweeteners. Did sugarless gum or diet pop count as a “sweet” for the purposes of Lenten fasting?

Of course, this is all a human-made conundrum. There’s nothing in the Bible that requires one to give up something for Lent (the Bible doesn’t even mention Lent). Rather it has become a tradition, sometimes within families, like mine, or within a particular congregation or denomination. This tradition has its roots in the early church when those wanting to become Christian would typically be baptized into membership at Easter, and so they spent the weeks beforehand preparing themselves, often with fasting of some kind.

Any more, at least in the congregations and denominations I’ve been part of, folks are baptized and brought into membership almost any time of the year, so giving up something for Lent has become a discipline unto itself. Many use their Lenten discipline as a reminder of the sacrifices Jesus made on our behalf. For others, it may be a way to jump-start a change that they hope will carry beyond Lent.

For me, I have sometimes gotten a bit smug about “successfully” giving up something (meaning I went through Lent without cheating). Other times I have struggled, and won-



ROBERTA SMYTHE
WALKING WITH THE SHEPHERD

dered if there was something wrong with me for failing my Lenten discipline. But neither of these is what Lent is really about. Lent isn’t about one’s success or failure at a Lenten discipline. Lent is about focusing on the sacrifices Jesus made, his journey to the cross, and the reason such a sacrifice was necessary: human sinfulness. Such sinfulness isn’t necessarily about being evil or bad.

Rather, as Martin Luther spoke of it, sin is the soul curved in on itself. Our personal Lenten disciplines are simply one way (though not the only way) to help us turn that curved-inward soul toward something outside ourselves, as a way of opening up ourselves to the gifts that were given in the resurrection of Jesus: eternal life and the forgiveness of sin.

Whether one is “successful” in a Lenten discipline doesn’t matter, because the truth is that we never will be completely successful, and our failures only mean we are human. God already knows that about us, and loves each of us anyway, and sent Jesus to die for us anyway.

The Rev. Roberta Smythe has been the pastor at Zion Lutheran and St. Peter’s Episcopal churches in La Grande since September 2019. She previously served churches in north-central and northwest Montana. She was raised in the Oregon City area and has degrees from the University of Oregon and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

United Methodist conservatives plan breakup

Differences over same-sex marriage, LGBTQ clergy at heart of debate

By **DAVID CRARY**
AP National Writer

Conservative leaders within the United Methodist Church unveiled plans Monday, March 1, to form a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church, with a doctrine that does not recognize same-sex marriage.

The move could hasten the long-expected breakup of the UMC over differing approaches to LGBTQ inclusion. For now, the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant church in the U.S. and second only to the Southern Baptist Convention, an evangelical denomination, among all U.S. Protestant churches.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the UMC’s General Conference — at which the schism would be debated — has been postponed for two consecutive years, and is now scheduled to take place in Minneapolis starting in late August 2022.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, a Methodist elder from Virginia who chairs the Global Methodist initiative, said he and his allies do not want to wait that long to formally leave the UMC. They have asked the topic of schism be added to the tightly limited agenda of a special one-day General Conference to be conducted online May 8.

However, Louisiana-based Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, who heads the UMC’s Council of Bishops, said debate over a schism would involve “delicate deliberations” and attempting to conduct them online in May



Charlie Riedel/Associated Press, File

A gay pride rainbow flag flies along with the U.S. flag in front of the Asbury United Methodist Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, in this April 19, 2019, file photo.

“does not seem wise or ethical.”

If the issue is not addressed on May 8, Boyette said he and his allies would be willing to delay until the 2022 General Conference, but only if UMC centrists and progressives remain committed to previous agreements about a breakup.

Differences over same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ clergy have simmered for years in the UMC, and came to a head in 2019 at a conference in St. Louis where delegates voted 438-384 to strengthen bans on LGBTQ-inclusive practices. Most U.S.-based delegates opposed that plan

and favored LGBTQ-friendly options; they were outvoted by U.S. conservatives teamed with most of the delegates from Methodist strongholds in Africa and the Philippines.

In the aftermath of that meeting, many moderate and liberal clergy made clear they would not abide by the bans, and various groups worked on proposals to let the UMC split along theological lines.

The most prominent plan, the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation, has some high-level support, including from the Council of Bishops and from the Global Methodist group. Under the protocol, conservative congregations and regional bodies would be allowed to separate from the UMC and form a new denomination. They would receive \$25 million in UMC funds and be able to keep their properties.

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Northeast Oregon Directory of Churches

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NORTH POWDER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
390 E. St., North Powder, OR

JOIN US... *Catch the Spirit!*

Worship: 9:00 a.m. Cove
Worship: 10:00 a.m. N. Powder

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901 Penn Avenue 963-2623
lgdisciples@gmail.com

Worship 10:00 a.m.

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grace.lutherancove@gmail.com

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Sunday Services

9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:00 a.m. Worship Service

Services This Week

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Sunday School & Adult Bible Classes 9:45AM
Children’s Church & Worship Service 11:00AM
Family Worship Service 6:00PM

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Zion Lutheran Church
(an ELCA church)

902 Fourth Street, La Grande, OR (541) 963-5998

9:00 am - Worship
10:00 am - Fellowship & Refreshments
10:30 am - Classes
Pastor: Roberta Smythe
www.zionlagrande.org

La Grande Seventh-day Adventist Church
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2702 Adams Avenue, La Grande 963-4018
lagrandeor.adventistchurch.org

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La Grande Adventist Christian School K-8th Grade 963-6203

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Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m.

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