



WESTWOOD

THE SPIRE
SPRING 2016



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Re-Lent-Less

I was more than ready to pack 2015 up and file it away for reasons too long to list. If I had to pick one thing that seemed pervasive, it was the way violence seemed so apparent around every corner. Whether it was gun violence, terrorist acts, abuse of the environment – we were reminded that it does not take much to “flip the switch” and the human family can become something that is most unpleasant.

Because of the way the Christian calendar works, Easter comes early this year, which means the season of Lent begins within the first 6 weeks of the New Year. Historically, this “season” has been a time of reflection for the faith community. Some use it as a time to focus on spiritual practices, prayer, meditation, fasting, and reading of Scripture. Others see it as a time to “give up something” operating from the assumption that “withholding things we enjoy in life” might bring us closer to Jesus and his journey to the cross.

Another idea often associated with Lent is confession. Leading any kind of a reflective life brings us to a place where we realize we fall short. Sometimes it is intentional, sometimes accidental. Regardless, it is a rare individual who does not need release and forgiveness. While it may seem cliché, it is good for the soul.

So, as a staff, we decided to challenge ourselves to a very serious topic for this season resulting in the theme Re-Lent-Less Violence.

I believe it is more critical than ever for followers of Jesus to provide an alternative to the path that devalues human life, making it possible for atrocity to become commonplace.

This issue of the Spire Magazine will provide an opportunity to consider this from multiple perspectives. The theme will be the focus of our worship in both the Loft and the Sanctuary during this season. May God’s peace and hope be with us as we hold up the mirror to ourselves, asking hard questions.

PASTOR JOHN WOODALL has been serving United Methodist Congregations for twenty-five years in a number of capacities; Youth Minister, Education Minister, Minister of Evangelism, and now Senior Pastor. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California and Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and his spouse, Linda, have three young adult children (Mark, Elizabeth, Peter). When not at church, you might find him working in the garden, trying out new recipes, attending concerts, reading a good book, working a crossword, or sitting at the piano.

FROM RUPTURED TO REDEEMED

The continued violence that marks the news headlines has left me with a heavy heart in desperate need of a real Easter. So much darkness seems to be engulfing us as name after name, place after place, and life after life are cut short by the way we hurt one another.

As Lent is upon us, the darkness looms. Names like Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Dante Parker, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray scroll like ticker tape across the bottom of the TV screen and sear like fire in the heart of the American conscience. Places like Sandy Hook, Roseburg, Charleston, San Bernardino, Ft. Hood, Isla Vista, Newtown, and Chattanooga add to the horrific list of towns hit by mass shootings. Approximately 22 locations annually are marked by gun violence killing four or more people. (Congressional Research Service, 2014)

Lent is the season of darkness. This 40-day period preceding Easter is often marked by Christians giving up some small pleasure or indulgence, offering that sacrifice to God. We acknowledge the ways we have turned away from light to darkness and focus on turning our hearts and minds back toward God.

However, as this Lent approaches, I confess I just feeling like giving up. Period. Is my little-over-a-month fast, giving up bread or meat or TV, going to make any difference in ending cycles of violence? Is there anything we could collectively sacrifice that has some iota of potential in curbing this pattern? What can we do to stem the violence against ourselves, with those we love, our co-workers, amongst neighbors, and between nations?

The violence seems relentless. We appear to have developed a value for violence in the American subconscious. Maybe it's our origin stories of the Wild West or a nation birthed in the American Revolution? Maybe, it's the fact that we haven't fought a war on our own soil in 150 years, and we now outsource our battles to other nations?

Maybe it's an adversarial political system where two parties fight from the fringes in a war of attrition for the center? Why does the violence and injustice persist? Maybe the most glaring answer is, "because it works." At least in the short term, it squashes opposition...but at what cost?

Whether in the story of global terrorism, the escalation of militarization of our local police forces, conflict within our homes, or struggle within our own psyche, violence always escalates. It is an ever-increasing perpetual motion machine gaining intensity with retaliation. The quick fix satisfaction of violent force coupled with our history of hurt in the human family continues to create a mythical value of violence.

Make no mistake, there is no such thing as redemptive violence. All violence is an oppression and counter to the nature of God. The long-term result of violence creates greater conflict, escalation of retaliation, and expansion of those involved.

Rev. Willis Johnson is the senior pastor of Wellspring United Methodist Church in Ferguson, Missouri. His church is just a few blocks from where Michael Brown was shot and killed by police on August 9th, 2014. Westwood had the honor of hosting Rev. Johnson in early January as a featured speaker at LEAD UMC, a crowd-sourced church innovation conference. Before worship most Sundays, Rev. Johnson takes a little round-trip run of about 2 miles to the spot where Michael Brown lost his life. As his feet pound the pavement, Johnson prays. "I run to the place where a relationship was ruptured to be reminded that such relationships can be redeemed," the United Methodist pastor said. "I go to a place of pain and hurt to be reminded that is the point at which forgiveness is initiated. That is what happened at Calvary." What was ruptured can be redeemed.

Rev. Johnson told me he has a son, not much younger than Michael Brown, who travels those same streets. He has a father who has dealt with a lifetime of systemic racism and now fears for his child and grandchild daily. Yet, Rev. Johnson carries the palpable hope that there is a better way. God can and will heal. What became clear in our conversation is the profound significance of Calvary to, "redeem what was ruptured." This is the very point forgiveness is initiated.

Poet William Stafford wrote, "Violence is a failure of the imagination." It is the result of our unwillingness or laziness in finding a path of mutual fulfillment. The fallacy of might-makes-right perpetuates a myth that force equals agreement. Much like the ancient Roman armies that "made a desert and called it 'peace.'" I sense this truth of failed imagination when I use my size and position to overpower my children. When fatigue or schedule or frustration becomes a convenient excuse to neglect the hard work of creative parenting. I believe it when my gender or race or tax bracket affords me status at the expense of my neighbor. It can be challenging to imagine a new way of existing that makes room for everyone. I experience this imagination failure when my clergy brothers and sisters throw out Christians whose orientation differs from their own. It is easier to draw lines than imagine open possibilities.

Calvary is the ultimate confrontation with the values of violence. God refused to play our game of might makes right. It is counter to whom God is and the love that God shares. God is so committed to this way that is above our way, God will not raise a hand to even protect God's self. Violence breeds violence; God comes to bring peace. I believe we must reexamine the execution of Jesus. God, though able to retaliate, chose to refrain. The vicious cycle of violence ended, not because the strongest prevailed, but because one with great imagination determined a better way. Violence is the result of a pattern of scapegoating where the hurts and fears of one are laid on another. It is the escalation of egomaniacal finger pointing. Father forgive us for we know not what we do.

As the season approaches, may we consider giving up something different for Lent? The violence around us seems relentless, yes? Maybe we could relent from our participation in violence and work at imagining new ways forward? Maybe we could stop finger pointing and instead become catalysts for de-escalation? Maybe we should examine destructive thought patterns where we crush our very selves in the violence of self-deprecation? Can we imagine relenting from violence against self, those we love, our neighbor, and even our enemy? "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:31-32



PASTOR CHRIS SPEARMAN is Minister of Adult Programs at Westwood UMC where he facilitates educational environments, connection opportunities, and ways to unlock the life God dreams for us. He is a highly energetic, slightly disorganized, covertly competitive, and musical worshiper seeking to become all God has created him to be, and he loves the wildly unpredictable journey of pursuing God. Chris is a proud and growing husband to Paige, an exuberant father and jungle gym to sons Asher and Caleb and daughter Eden.

VIOLENCE & THE PRINCE OF PEACE

A CONVERSATION with ALEX SMITH

Originally from Louisiana, Alex Smith is a member of Westwood UMC and attends The Loft. He works for the financial firm PFC, and he is a filmmaker.



BO SANDERS: One of the advantages of being in a conversational church is that we get to cover topics that would be easier to sweep under the rug and not deal with, so I wanted to get some of your thoughts. In the church calendar as much we love the joy of Easter, we know that we have to pass through the darkness and violence of 'Good' Friday.

ALEX SMITH: I think some of it is because we have a narrative of how things are supposed to go and then we want to escape the responsibility that, as human beings, we sometimes are the cause of violence - not necessarily directly but indirectly like the quiet majority. You have to think about the people who believed in the things that Jesus was saying ... but when he was being crucified - it was as if they were the silent majority. They weren't the ones nailing (Jesus to the cross), but they can't escape responsibility. It's like the ones Dr. King called out during the civil rights movement - the moderate whites who believed in equality but yet would not do anything.

BO: That letter from Birmingham jail is just damning.

ALEX: It's worse too. It's worse for you to be a part of the silent majority than the minority doing it. We have a narrative of what the resurrection is, and we don't want to take time for the cross because that shows the ugly side of humanity.

BO: When Jesus was lifted up on that cross, it is as if God lifted up a mirror to humanity and said, "Do you see what you do? You do this...even to my child."

ALEX: I've always said that we are sometimes afraid to confront the things that we're most afraid about within ourselves and within our society, and so it is easier for us to have an alternative narrative of 'oh well he rose again let's figure out how to get there when Jesus was lifted up on the cross'. We want to feel good and nobody wants to be elected Johnny Raincloud saying: "well you know it mirrors society and it's terrible but we're better now and it benefits us to say that we have progressed over the years and so we're kind of above the type of brutality that was done to Jesus!" But, I mean, it is consistent throughout human history.

BO: That denial, in the end, reinforces the very system that Jesus came to unmask and destroy. I know that you look up to the Kennedy brothers alongside Dr. King...it is telling that their lives all ended violently.

ALEX: If you hear them talk about not being afraid and challenging the system... you have the majority in this country who did not want to share the vast wealth and resources with another group of people. I understand that that's human nature but when you start to upset that, you make yourself a target. Jesus, when he was really going after that temple structure, made himself a political target, and so when you do that, you learn that the powers that be will come after you, too. Jesus was a target, because he lifted the marginalized to the front and whenever you do that, the people who have the vast amount of resources and power will not be happy.

BO: I heard a scholar say that good Jewish boys don't get tacked up on crosses for telling people to be nice to each other.

ALEX: The dove, in my opinion, could have become the symbol of Christianity instead of the cross. When Jesus was baptized heaven opened up and the spirit of the Lord descended on him like a dove. That's the hope and inspiration! A cross is atonement and the ugly side of humanity. Those things matter and when we look at it this way, it changes the narrative of what the cross means and the guilt for what we have done to each other is seen in Jesus crying out to God.

BO: I never thought about the dove that way! It is so much better than the cross for a symbol of Christianity - not only because Pentecost was the event that creates the body of Christ in the people of God - but it would have said that we are people of the Prince of Peace! Would I be overstating it if I were to propose that God, in Christ, staged a cosmic drama to unmask the powers and expose the scapegoat mechanism and that we missed the point?

ALEX: It's like Jesus chose these guys but he kept saying you don't understand it. You don't get it because violence only creates bitterness from the victims and brutality from the perpetrators. That was part of Dr. King's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. We get nothing - we get only the momentary results but we scar ourselves for the long-term and I think that the people who crucified Jesus lived with scars for a long time.

BO: What do we do with the awareness that we might never escape this kind of tribal violence like in our own backyard of San Bernardino? How does the church have a conversation that accounts for violence so that we're not in denial about the nature of the world that we are called to love in Jesus' name?

ALEX: Yes, San Bernardino. That's the world in which we live...where you have people who are isolated, and other people have no idea they feel this way. They find solace in something they can be part of.

The Christian community has done a great job of excluding so many people in saying that you don't have a seat at God's table. I just don't think people like the comfort zone disturbed or for anything to shake that. It is problematic, but Jesus had two great commandments:

- 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength and mind.
- 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. That is where we should start as Christians - it's very counterintuitive.

BO: My only regret with Jesus is that I just wish someone at the time had asked him "Who is my neighbor?"

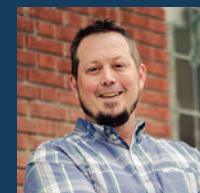
ALEX: [laughs] Marilynne Robinson writes Christian literature and President Obama interviewed her. She talked about how loving your neighbor is a very counterintuitive thing to do. It says that this person is deserving of as much love as I have for myself and if we just gloss over that and don't really let it set in, we can't move forward. Dr. King said that we have inherited a world, a home, this planet is our home - all of us - and we are Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, Hindus, all different races and everything. There are so many things that separate us, but we still have to find a way to live together!

BO: God's love for the whole world is a powerful idea.

ALEX: We have to get beyond our own self-interests, and people have to return to the teachings of Jesus. Ultimately as human beings, we are inherently selfish, and we don't see that if we have to share something with other people it makes things very problematic.

BO: The irony is that there is more than enough of God's love to go around. It's possible that we could live in such a way that people would say "that is good news."

ALEX: That's why I love talking to people about this stuff! It has to make a difference in the way that we live and how we go forward into the world! It's kind of the whole point of the story! We can't just continue to repeat the same patterns over and over.



BO SANDERS is Director of Children, Youth, & Families at Westwood UMC. He is in the process of completing a Ph.D. in Practical Theology at Claremont School of Theology with a passion for Sociology of Religion, Postcolonial Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Comparative Theology. He is a coffee shop theologian, tattoo evangelist, and soccer fan.



Between the Fall and Rise

Hardly a day passes when we don't hear of police violence or watch a video of a violent act in progress. In fact, when we think of filming and the police, we're more likely to conjure up grainy images captured by a squad car or surveillance camera than the vision of someone like **David Marroquin**.

For over eight years, David has served as a police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department as well as an attender at The Loft, and much of his time has been spent patrolling the eight-square-block area of Skid Row, which has inspired his work as a filmmaker when off-duty.

He is the co-writer and director of "Between the Fall and Rise," a forthcoming feature film about a young woman with a heroin addiction, living on the streets of Skid Row, who collides with a young police officer (played by David himself) who has disconnected from everyone around him and is all but ready to stop living. They embark on a journey of self-discovery, loss, and redemption between a single fall and rise of the sun. Through the process of filming, David asked several individuals who live in the area of his beat to participate in the film.

Meeting a Unique Character

In September of 2011, David was working as a patrol officer assigned to the Safer Cities Initiative Task Force, a unit created to deal with 'quality of life' issues on Skid Row, when he and his partner responded to a request for backup on San Julian Street, just south of 6th Street.

When they arrived, the requesting unit asked him to "stop that man" and pointed to an individual with whom David had no prior contact. He asked the male suspect to face the wall, spread his feet, and place his arms behind his back. As David handcuffed the individual, he learned that the man's name was Unique.

Unique stood approximately 6 feet 3 inches tall and displayed a chiseled body worthy of a fitness magazine cover. The tattoos that adorned his torso, including his name, told a distinct story of time spent in prison.

After taking it all in, David asked him, "Do you know what I see when I look at you?"

Unique rolled his eyes as if to say, "Here we go with the stereotypes," and replied, "What?"



David looked at him a bit more, wanting to choose his words carefully. He then said to Unique, "I see a leader. I see someone whom people look up to. Listen, if you think the police can fix the problem in Skid Row by ourselves, then you're wrong. If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem."

Suddenly, a tear streamed down Unique's face - a signal that David's message had gotten through.

David shared, "I like to think we all have good within us. It has been my experience that people, especially those who I have taken to jail, are completely surprised when they are treated with kindness and respect by a police officer. In that moment with Unique, I thought to myself, 'I can have an influence by the way that I speak to him.' My goal was to foster a connection with him on a basic human level. We all have the need to be treated with dignity, respect, and kindness."

Ultimately, the officers released Unique, but shortly thereafter, he violated his parole for a narcotics offense. David did not see him or know of his arrest until about 13 months later, when he saw him walking the streets of Skid Row once again. David immediately jumped out of the patrol car and greeted him on the sidewalk. He asked Unique where he had been, and Unique said that he had violated the terms of his parole and had been sent back to prison for a year.



David asked if he remembered him, and with a smile, Unique said, "Yes, sir. You said that you saw a leader in me and that if I wasn't part of the solution, I was part of the problem." They spoke for a few minutes, and David told Unique that he would be checking in on him from time to time to make sure he was on the right path. Over the course of the next few months, David saw Unique often and would stop and have conversations with him. One evening, he approached Unique and asked him if he would be interested in acting in a film that David was getting ready to direct. Unique was elated and, with excitement, he agreed.

In post-production and yet to be released, the film focuses on how beauty and redemption exist in places and in people that you'd least expect. Through this powerful story, David wants people to know that if you give someone just a little bit of love, they can change your life.

Over the course of the production and many other interactions, David has seen more and more goodness in Unique's life - something he never would have seen if he wouldn't have invested the time to get to know him. David concludes, "It has been my experience in getting to know many homeless and addicted individuals that everyone has a story to tell and desperately wants to be loved, validated, and accepted."



BETTE CALDWELL recently retired from Los Angeles City Schools after 50+ years as a teacher, counselor, and administrator. She joined Westwood UMC in 1964 and has been active in numerous ways - Editor of the Spire, Youth Council member and chairman, Sunday School teacher, co-leader of the Confirmation Classes, member of Administrative Council, Stephen Minister and Leader, and Chancel Choir member. Bette enjoys photography, traveling, and spending time with her 4-legged friends: one dog and three cats.

UNLESS

Stacks of children's corpses fill the streets
With their stink.

Their blood has clotted at last.

We step gingerly around the bodies,
Making our usual, mindless rounds.

We hardly notice anymore, numbed as we are
To death and chaos in our own lives.

"Who, us?" we ask. "Kill children?"

Well, it happens now and then...

Have we turned hard? Calloused?

Well, sure, but it's a different world now.

Got to keep up with the times, and they aren't pretty.

Hey, I don't like it any more than you do."

Still, our own children, if they live through this horror, will look back and call us

Cold, and mean, and utterly depraved.

And to our everlasting shame, they'll be right.

Unless...

We know very well there's a way out. Listen:

Once, we aspired to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Once, we vowed to love God with all we have to give.

We promised to stand up for the needy, the sick, the seniors, and the babes in arms.

But now, we stand before our loving God, utterly empty of all but hope.

You alone are our strength, dear Lord.

Show us the way. Guide us. Transform us

Into the eager, caring people you made in your own beloved image.

Like the Magi of old, help us find the way back to our true home.



JAN GONDER retired from a career teaching English as a second language in Los Angeles Unified Schools. She also worked as a District-level advisor and school-level coordinator - all at the high school level. Now, she is preparing for a second career in selling hand-made jewelry. She has enjoyed many of Westwood UMC's opportunities - Chancel Choir, handbells, Stephen Ministry, United Methodist Women, and the classes offered after church and in the evenings.

LeARNING TO LOVE

Violence is "out there," in countries, in certain areas of our cities,
in particular neighborhoods, in some households.

However, may I suggest that it also exists within us towards ourselves? I am not referring to extremes such as suicide, self-mutilation, or self-flagellation. Even minus these extremes, this suggestion may shock or surprise you.

Maybe "violence" seems too strong a word, but let's let it stand.

I suggest that in our workaholic, addicted culture, we do "violence" to ourselves by pushing our bodies beyond their limit, denying and avoiding our feelings, ignoring the yearnings of our hearts, starving our souls, and allowing our minds to run rampant with self-criticism. Jesus said that we are to love the Lord God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as our self. We are to love ourselves!

During this season of Lent, take inventory of how you "do violence" to yourself. Pray for the desire and commitment to be kind to your body, to effectively process your feelings, attend to the deep yearnings of your heart, truly nourish your soul and deal with your critical mind.

Begin practicing loving kindness and acceptance toward yourself; offer yourself compassion as you would a hurting child or a beloved pet. Let go of any fear or guilt that by practicing self-compassion you will become self-indulgent, complacent, or never again change for the better.

Trust that you will, indeed, become a better lover - of God, of neighbor, and of self.



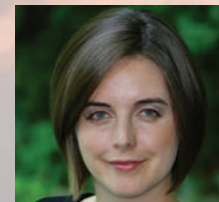
MARY GARBESI is Director of Congregational Care at Brentwood Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, where she both coordinates and is a member of the Pastoral Care Team. She holds a license in Marriage and Family Therapy, is a Certified Spiritual Director, Labyrinth Facilitator, and Grief Specialist, and she is a leader for the upcoming Westwood UMC women's retreat.

STOP THE VIOLENCE

As I stand poised to pounce on the giant cockroach scuttling across my kitchen counter, it occurs to me the ways in which this impending violence might have been avoided.

What if I ran the dishwasher a little more frequently or wiped down counters a little sooner or took out the trash a little more often? Would I be standing in the middle of the kitchen on a Sunday morning, shoe raised above my head, ready to kill?

Roaches are unambiguously evil creatures,
and I know I'll be forgiven for this swift annihilation.
But this Lenten season I'm committing to all the minor,
trivial tasks in my life that stop the violence before it starts.



After graduating from Dartmouth this past June, **MADDIE ABBOTT** moved to Los Angeles in September and immediately found her home base in The Loft. She frequently attends a Westwood UMC small group and is currently a teaching assistant for 7th and 8th graders at a charter school in Boyle Heights.

SIX FILMS FOR LENTEN REFLECTION

My advisor for my PhD in Religion and the Arts frequently referred to film-watching as a diet. “Every now and then, a burger from In-N-Out is a wonderful thing, but, if that’s all you eat, watch out!” My film tastes are as diverse as anyone’s. I’ll watch anything—well, almost anything, as there’s a certain strand of horror films that I can’t wrap my head around—and my favorite films cover a wide array of genres.

As Lent approaches, I find myself thinking about how we might apply its lessons of mindfulness to our media consumption. Raised Baptist in the Deep South, I’ve never been great at giving things up, so the idea that Lent could also mean taking something on during this holy time is very appealing to me. Rather than suggesting that you don’t watch television or see films during this season, I’m offering some film suggestions, whose narratives run counter to what we often see at the movie theater or on television. These films, to varying degrees of success, use a violent moment as a springboard to explore not the well-worn theme of revenge, but rather themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The following films aren’t perfectly-defined roadmaps for us to follow, but I do believe they pose questions for us to consider. Use them as your personal Lenten film series. Of course, the film tastes of WUMC members are as diverse as any other community, so, while you might not like or enjoy every film, hopefully they will spark some lively conversations.

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada

When brash Texas border officer Mike Norton (Barry Pepper) wrongfully kills and buries the friend and ranch hand of Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones), the latter is reminded of a promise he made to bury his friend, Melquiades Estrada (Julio Cesar Cedillo), in his Mexican home town. He kidnaps Norton and exhumes Estrada’s corpse, and the odd caravan sets out on horseback for Mexico. As Estrada’s body begins to rot, Norton begins to unravel, but Perkins remains determined to honor his vow. One of my all-time favorite films, it asks us to consider the role of punishment in reconciliation. (Available to purchase or rent on iTunes.)



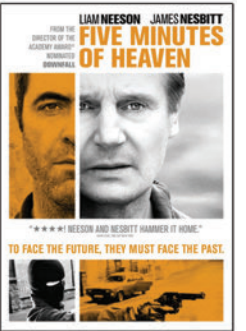
Troubled Water

After serving time in prison for the murder of a child, Jan Thomas (Pål Sverre Valheim Hagen) finds work as a church organist, where he wins the affections of Anna (Ellen Dorrit Petersen), a single mother and pastor. Having acquired the job under his middle name, Thomas, Jan conceals his past from Anna as their relationship progresses. However, he cannot maintain his secret when the mother of the murdered child (Trine Dyrholm) recognizes him at the church. The film invites us to consider how the church can be a facilitator of forgiveness and reconciliation. (Available to purchase or rent on iTunes.)



Five Minutes of Heaven

In 1970s Northern Ireland, young Joe Griffin watches in horror as the teenage leader of a UVF cell shoots Joe’s brother dead. Thirty years later, peace is at hand, and Joe (James Nesbitt) is to meet his brother’s killer, Alistair Little (Liam Neeson), on live TV. Unbeknownst to the TV crew, Joe is not there to reconcile with Alistair, but to kill him. I appreciate this film because it shows how film’s manipulation of time and story can strengthen the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation by revealing how difficult they can be to embody. (Streaming on Netflix and available to purchase or rent on iTunes.)



Joyeux Noel

With the advent of World War I, Europe is thrown into a brutal and vicious chaos as men are forced to kill or be killed. While blood soaks the battlefield as Christmas approaches, the men in the trenches of the Western Front face a transformation, however fleeting, toward peace and goodwill. Against all odds, four unlikely individuals from opposing sides (Diane Kruger, Benno Fürmann, Guillaume Canet, Gary Lewis) bond during this bloodless respite to experience the hope and goodness in humanity. Few films reveal the power of forgiveness and reconciliation to break the cycles of violence that plague us as beautifully as this one—and, unfortunately, how tenuous these moments of grace can be. (Available to purchase or rent on iTunes.)



Three Colors: Blue

Julie (Juliette Binoche) is haunted by her grief after living through a tragic auto wreck that claimed the life of her composer husband and young daughter. Her initial reaction is to withdraw from her relationships, lock herself in her apartment and suppress her pain. But avoiding human interactions on the bustling streets of Paris proves impossible, and she eventually meets up with Olivier (Benoît Régent), an old friend who harbors a secret love for her, and who could draw her back to reality. From one of the most spiritually profound filmmakers to ever work in the medium, this beautiful film asks, in part, if forgiveness is available beyond the grave and how it can pave a path to healing and overcoming grief. (Available to purchase or rent on iTunes.)



Day Break

In Iran, capital punishment is carried out according to Islamic law, which gives the family of the victim ownership of the offender’s life. Based on a compilation of true stories and shot inside Tehran’s century-old prison, the film revolves around the imminent execution of Mansour, a man found guilty of murder. When the family of the victim repeatedly fails to show up on the appointed day, Mansour’s execution is postponed again and again. Stuck inside the purgatory of his own mind, he waits as time passes on without him, caught between life and death, retribution and forgiveness. Facing the gallows every day, will he succeed in maintaining his sanity? A little harder to find, but worth the effort, this Iranian film explores the destructive power of forgiveness withheld and asks whether or not enduring that is a fate worse than death. (Available to purchase or stream through FilmMovement.com.)



J. RYAN PARKER is the creator of PopTheology.com. He is currently a member of the Act One Film Producers’ and Executives’ Program. He completed his PhD in Religion and the Arts at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, with a focus on film and religion, particularly the history of religious cinema and contemporary independent religious films. He holds a BA in English from Mississippi College and an MDiv from Wake Forest University Divinity School.

PALM PASSION SUNDAY

Sunday, March 20th

The Sanctuary - 10am

Join us as we begin the service with the traditional Procession of the Palms and surrounding fanfare. Sights will then turn towards Holy Week as the Chancel Choir and Chamber Orchestra present the “Requiem” by Gabriel Fauré.

The Loft - 10am

After beginning with a triumphal parade of palms from our children, we’ll end with an unconventional look at the political and religious contrast of this famous story. Music and media will punctuate the presentation and conversation elements.

Children’s Church - available for infant - 5th grade.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, March 24th

Fellowship Dinner - 6pm
Communion Service - 7:15pm

Once again, St. Alban’s Episcopal Church will be joining us for a joint dinner and service. Our communion service in the Sanctuary will commemorate the last night the disciples gathered with Jesus in the Upper Room.

Childcare - available for all ages.

GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, March 25th

St. Alban’s Episcopal Church - 12noon

Join us for a combined traditional service with the congregation of St. Alban’s located at 580 Hilgard Avenue in Los Angeles.

Westwood UMC - 7:30pm

Join us upstairs in The Loft for a theatrical presentation utilizing the classic themes of light and dark to engage the stations of the cross. This intense and reflective gathering ends as we observe the tradition of leaving in somber silence. ‘

Childcare - available for all ages.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, March 27th

The Sanctuary - 9am & 11am

Invite a friend to our traditional celebration of Easter with liturgy, an inspiring message, and resounding music including the Shaffer Organ.

The Loft - 9am & 11am

Invite a friend to this innovative celebration of Easter with spiritual conversation, creativity, coffee, and inspiring music.

Childcare - available for infant - 3 years old.

Easter Egg Hunt - 10am

Bring the kids to enjoy a bounce house and egg hunt with thousands of filled eggs. Feel free to bring your own basket, and we’ll have bags available as well.

who are you inviting?



Westwood United Methodist Church
10497 Wilshire Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90024

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WESTWOOD

DO JUSTICE • LOVE KINDNESS • WALK HUMBLLY

SUNDAYS at 10am

Two Unique Gatherings Where Everyone is Welcome



The SANCTUARY

A sacred gathering with traditional liturgy, a thoughtful message, and resounding organ.

INFO: WestwoodUMC.org



The LOFT

An innovative gathering with spiritual conversation, creativity, coffee, and music.

INFO: TheLoftLA.org