ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 2 Issue 13

February 13, 2022

Daniel (The heat is on)



While reading parts of the *Book of Daniel*, I couldn't help but take a side trip to explore the song's background with the same name. The song *Daniel* was written by Bernie Taupin and put to music, and recorded by Elton John. The

common name is apparently a coincidence. However, I can't help but wonder whether the writer was familiar with the biblical character from Sunday School. I read where Bernie grew up in the catholic faith in rural Lincolnshire, England.

The Book of Daniel is not all that popular for most bible readers. Nevertheless, the stories are told in Sunday School-appropriate vignettes that illustrate the importance of just saying no to temptation. Unfortunately, this book

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Please continue to wear your masks when in the building. If you don't have one, let us know we will provide one for you.



Jesus Movement (Power in Weakness)



This past week I attended a tribute to a friend and colleague, the later Rev. Alonzo Vincent. Born in Chicago in the 1940s, Rev. Vincent experienced life as a prophetic voice commissioned by God and

as a black man. Speaker after speaker shared stories of admiration for my friend's character. Words like humility, hardworking, wise, caring, and love appeared in every testimony.

My own testimony centered on the way that Rev. Vincent helped me navigate the pitfalls of serving as a pastor in the City of Flint. We met regularly, and he shared his insights with me. Along our way, he also shared how he and other African-American pastors were harshly treated by the church they loved and served. I was amazed at how his indictment delivered the facts of history

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Jesus Movement (Power in Weakness)cont from page 1

while void of resentment. My friend spent a lifetime advocating for the equality of all persons by simply pointing to the life and way of Jesus.

Welcome to our celebration of Black History Month at Asbury Church. It is a great blessing to celebrate the contributions made by African-Americans to our mutual well-being. And to look forward to a time when we live into the vision so eloquently articulated by the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in a famous speech. He said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Rev. King's dream was firmly based on the good news of the gospel that continues to be a work in progress hampered, in no small part, by persons also claiming to live the Way taught by Jesus.

Measha Ferguson-Smith, in an essay published by *The Stanford Freedom Project*, writes that "Countless Black preachers claimed that the Bible, especially the Gospels, called Christians to work for the betterment of African Americans. They preached that true Christianity demanded attention to and effort toward the liberation of oppressed peoples and the recognition of our innate equality in God's eyes, as beings created in his image." ¹

Unique by comparison to the insurrection consisting of predominantly white protestors storming the U.S. Capital a year ago, the civil rights movement was predominately non-violent. An approach consistent with the character and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Brian Zahnd, in *Postcards from Babylon*, makes a startling claim that "God's power is weakness!" His book lays out a solid argument for his assertion, beginning with the crucifix, a traditional Christian symbol. In particular, Zahnd distinguishes between the Catholic crucifix, on which an image of Jesus is found, and the Protestant cross. ²

The preference for an empty cross reveals more about us than it does about God. Winning is everything for enough of us that a symbol that reminds us that Jesus was arrested, tortured, and executed seems to dwell on the wrong thing. After all, Jesus was victorious in the end as God exerted divine power over death.

Our interpretation of this victory over death influenced our celebration of my friend's life after the sad news of his death. Our claim was that death is never the end. Instead, God invites us to live in a place that Jesus called the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the Kingdom that Jesus Christ told His accusers that He presided over. At funerals we prefer to refer to this place as heaven.

However, the words from scripture that I shared at my friend's celebration, spoken by Jesus centuries before me, describe a Kingdom of the living. More precisely, a Kingdom for persons left out and left behind by the very systems that crucified Jesus for leading a revolution. His Way challenged the notion that life is all about winning by grabbing and holding onto whatever power it takes to win.

God anointed me to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed.

Luke 4:18-19

Jesus said that He was anointed to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). However, the Way to accomplish such lofty goals was not through the power of might. But instead, through the humility of weakness.

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In Our Prayers

Kevin Croom Sylvia Pittman Shirley Craig Richard Oram



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston Elaine Lamoreaux

Norma Buzzard Mary Nations

PASTOR BOOK CLUB NEWS:

Pastor Book Club is still meeting via Zoom. Please call the Church Office for more info 810-235-0016 as it changes.

Meanwhile, as a lot of you are already aware, sharp increases in new infections of COVID are pushing us back into isolation. While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated.

Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking. If you don't have a mask, we can provide one for you, just ask the office.



This months book series is called, "Postcards from Babylon" (The Church in American Exile).

Thank you and everyone stay safe!

COMING UP THIS WEEK

Feb 14 Mon 6:00pm Worship Team

Feb 15 Tues 10;00am-12:30pm

Food/Water Distribution

Feb 16 Wed 11.00-12 Noon Food Giveaway at

South Flint Soup Kitchen (No appointment necessary)

12 Noon Pastor Book Club

Feb 17 Thu

Feb 18 Fri

Feb 19 Sat 12 Noon Food Not Bombs

Feb 20 Sun 10:30am

New Beginnings

Contemporary Worship

(We are live on <u>Facebook</u> and our newly launched <u>YouTube channel</u>. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.)

Asbury Worship Series Wilderness Experience



Cyndi and I enjoy watching reality shows that feature individuals living in the Alaskan wilderness. Neither of us have a desire to live alone in the woods. Rather, we're fascinated by the creativity and grit that these rugged individuals discover within themselves to survive. And even more so by the few that seem

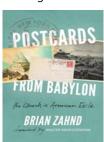
to thrive in the midst of so many obstacles.

A common theme heard among the Alaskan pioneers is a sense of belonging to the vast untamed and unforgiving wilderness. They share common bonds with the other creatures living

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Book Club News

We finished our discussions of Braving the Wilderness by Dr. Brené



Brown. So now we're ready for our February selection. The book that we're using as a key resource for our series, the Way, is sure to spark interesting, if not controversial, discussion. In his book, Postcards

from Babylon, Brian Zahnd critiques the state of the church by the standard offered to us by Jesus Christ. 1

The write-up found on Amazon has this to say about our next book:

The original gospel proclamation that the Lord of the nations was a crucified Galilean raised from the dead and that salvation was found in vowing allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth unleashed a shock wave that turned the Roman Empire upside down. Early Christianity was subverand dangerous sive dangerous for Christians and a threat to the keepers of the old order. Most of all Christianity was countercultural. But what about contemporary American Christianity? Is it the countercultural way of Jesus or merely religious endorsement of Americanism? In his provocative book, Postcards From Babylon, Brian Zahnd challenges the reader to see and embrace a daring Jesus-centered Christianity that can again turn the world upside down.

In what ways are the *Build Back Better Plan* or *Make America Great Again* representative of *the Way* that Jesus lived and taught? In what ways do either of these two political slogans represent the antithesis of the Way? Let's talk about it.

Increases in new infections and yet another variety of COVID pushed us back into isolation. While the latest surge is described as a pandemic of the unvaccinated, breakthrough infections are rising, putting us all at risk.

Chris Freeman South Campus Bldg Mgr Israel Unger Finance Director Kim Sims Connections Suprv Terrance Williams Arts Center Mgr Katelin Maylum Sr Mgr Local Food While our regular attenders are vaccinated, we realize that a large number of persons are not vaccinated. Therefore, we reinstated our policy to require masks in our building for all persons when not eating or drinking.

We strongly urge all persons to get vaccinated as soon as practical unless advised by your doctor. Avoid news sources and rumors that promote baseless claims and pay closer attention to the experts we depend on to keep us safe.

We each make our own arrangements for lunch at this point. However, we look forward to returning to pot-luck lunches when infection rates fall. We anticipate this happening as the number of vaccinations reaches herd immunity levels, and the CDC relaxes precautionary measures.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away I encourage you to join us online for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

We are a diverse group, and we are delighted when new persons join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.

¹ Brian Zahnd. Postcards from Babylon: The Church In American Exile. Spello Press, 2019.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium
Anthony, Jim
Jonathon, Terrance
Mirium
Cyndi
Christine & Norma

Welcome Team
Ushers
Production Team
Children
Worship Leader
Cafe

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor & Exec Dir Connie Portillo Office Manager Sylvia Pittman Empowerment Arts Jim Craig Board & Leadership Chair Kevin Croom Exec Chef & Dir Opers Matt DePalma Farms Manager

Wilderness Experience... Asbury Worship Series

around them, even those they hunt for food. All belong to a natural order that is much larger and beyond their grasp.

There are unseen dangers and yet to be discovered delights in the wilderness waiting for the brave ones willing to take the risk to venture into its uncertainty.

Our new series, *Wilderness experience*, explores the risks and rewards of braving the uncertain. And in exploring the uncertain we tackle the thorny question of "Do I belong?"

Brené Brown asserts that "belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us." Based on her research into one of life's most intimate questions Braving the Wilderness calls each of us to reclaim who we are by letting go of who we are not. ¹

But discovering who we are is only the beginning. Being who God created us to be is easily confused with fitting into a particular expectation. If we confuse fitting in with belonging we're disappointed and lacking. It's exhausting to be whatever persona others choose for us.

I wonder if choosing to be alone in the wilderness of Alaska takes less effort than fitting into a community as an imposter. On the other hand, in being who God created us to be may mean taking a stand where no one else is visible. We may find ourselves standing alone.

But what if this is true belonging?

Our series consists of five episodes that roughly maps to Dr. Brown's book. There are extra copies of her book in the Arts Center. Alternatively, her book can be found at libraries, bookstores or purchased online.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes on our **YouTube channel**. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our **website** at **FlintAsbury.org**.

Pastor Tommy

1 Brené Brown. *Braving the Wilderness* — *The Quest for True Belonging and the Quest to Stand Alone*. New York: Random House, 2019.

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Daniel (The heat is on) cont. from pg 1

loses some of its transformative power when it is stripped of its critique on living in a nation that is a world superpower.

The song *Daniel*, according to Taupin, is based on a story he read about a veteran of the Vietnam war returning home to his small town in Texas. The young man was anxious to return to the quiet life he left behind while serving overseas. But the townsfolk wanted more. They wanted him to play the part of a local hero. So the lyrics are from the perspective of a younger brother who misses him after he left home to travel to Spain.

The first half of the biblical Daniel is about life in exile for the Judean captives taken there after the fall of Jerusalem. This part of the book focuses on the challenges four young friends face to hold onto their allegiance to the God of their ancestors. To remain faithful to God despite intense pressure to shift their priorities. They're faced with whether they accept the benefits and trappings that come with sacrificing their faith in exchange for their patriotism.

The four young men were selected for high-ranking civil service positions in the royal administration of King Nebuchadnezzar. The first order of business was for their new boss to give them names more appropriate for their roles.

Hananiah, whose name means "Yahweh Is Gracious" in his native Hebrew, became Shadrach or "Friend of the King" in the Babylonian language. Mishael, whose name means "is like God," becomes

Meshach or "Guest of the King."
Azariah, whose name means
"Yahweh has helped," became
Abednego or "servant of NeboMishael." The name Daniel means "God
Is My Judge." But his new name,
Belteshazzar, had the Babylonian
meaning of "Bel's Prince."

The four young men were groomed to be civic leaders. This meant demonstrating allegiance to the nation of Babylon. In an autocratic government, unquestionable loyalty to the leader is expected.

You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other.

Matthew 6:24

Some writers call this the "way of empire." Other writers may call this the way it was under monarch rule. Still, others draw parallels to present-day dictatorships, such as the control Vladimir Putin has over the citizens of Russia.

Some of us notice the alarming comparison to nationalism in any country. Even those nations claiming to be a democracy. One thing that is clear, however. Total allegiance to any power other than God is incompatible with the beliefs of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Brian Zahnd, in *Postcards from Babylon*, notes that "The selfidentity derived from a name... forms us in significant ways. This is why early Christian converts from paganism would be given a 'Christian name' at their baptism." ¹

Today in the ritual of baptism, particularly for younger children, clergy are careful to say the name that the individual will use in their identity as a Christian. There is power in the idea that God "knows our name" and "calls us by name." And thus, to give someone a name is to exert tremendous power over them.

The early chapters of Daniel focus on the struggle of these four young men to carry out the responsibilities of their positions while holding fast to the faith of their childhood. This won't be easy for them. Nationalism demands a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the nation. But, how much is sacrificed, and for whom is the sacrifice being made?

In the book named for the Prophet Jeremiah, we read that God was very much aware of the Judean exiles' struggles in Babylon. So at one point, God instructs Jeremiah to send a letter to those in exile. In the letter, we read that the exiles are to build houses and settle down in their new home. And they are to plant gardens, marry, and have children while living in exile.

In his book, Zahnd discloses pieces of his own journey as an anointed prophet. He was heavily influenced, he writes, by the Jesus Movement, which barely lasted a decade, according to Wikipedia. It was a movement organized by young Christians inspired by their interpretation of the good news symbolized by the cross and following the Ways and teachings of Jesus. ²

When the Apostle Paul appeared before the governor of the Judean Province, he admitted to being part of a group of misfits referred to as "The Way." The Way referred to faithful followers of Jesus. The Way was a countercultural approach to living. Rather than allegiance to Rome and its leadership, the followers of The Way were loyal to Jesus, who they believed was the only true Son of God.

Jesus was executed because he was found guilty of crimes against Rome. However, Jesus was not the leader of a violent revolution against those in power. And His only defense was that His Kingdom was nothing like the ways of this world. Instead, in the Kingdom of God, all persons are equally loved, and none are left behind or left out. And true power is found in weakness rather than domination.

We begin our new series, the Way, this Sunday. I hope you will join us as we celebrate Black History month by examining our role as followers of Christ in a world plagued by privilege and idolatry.

I invite you to worship with us on any given Sunday. We gather in the Asbury Arts Center in person and online on YouTube and Facebook. Video replays are available to watch later.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our <u>website</u> - <u>Click here to watch</u>. This button takes you to our <u>YouTube channel</u>. You can find more information about us on our website at <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.

A reminder that we publish this newsletter that we call the *Circuit Rider* each week. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to *connect@FlintAsbury.org* or let us know when you send a message through our *website*. We post an archive of past editions on our website under the tab, Connect - choose *Newsletters*.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Measha Ferguson-Smith. "A Christian Movement: Civil Rights in America." © The Stanford Freedom Project, 2015.

² Brian Zahnd. *Postcards from Babylon: The Church In American Exile*. Spello

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Life Groups Questions & Notes:
You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other; you will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
Matthew 6:24 (GNT)
NOTES FROM WORSHIP
QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS
1 Read Matthew 6:24. What does this observation made by Jesus mean to you? In what ways does this wisdom affect your daily decisions? How should these words affect how you spend
your time and resources?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider, <i>Daniel</i> . Are you familiar with the Book of Daniel?
This book can be thought of as two books with the first half a series of stories about four
young exiles. And the 2nd half an apocalyptic prophecy. What do the stores in the first half
relate to our theme scripture from Matthew? Do these stories inform your day-to-day decisions and even how you vote? How should these stories be interpreted as a resident of a
global superpower?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more
receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the
Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.





A meal goes a long way for a senior living alone, a family struggling to make ends meet, or a child fearful of empty shelves at home. But for the residents of Flint who carry the effects of lead-tainted water, nutrition is critical. Feed Flint provides locally grown, chemical-free, fresh produce to residents living in and around Flint. And we're hoping that you can help us provide 10,000 meals this summer.

Feed Flint includes takeout meals, produce boxes with recipes, and home deliveries as part of our work to guide and support families in moving to sustainable abundance. The reality is that Michigan's food insecurity levels got worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this summer's recovery is leaving behind those at the most risk of having to miss meals.

Flint families continue to struggle with the ongoing effects of the water crisis.

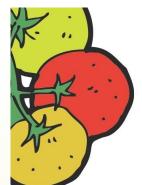
We're bringing together the resources of the Asbury Community Development Corporation. This includes Asbury Farms, the South Flint Soup Kitchen, the Asbury Community Help Center, multiple food pantries, and our Sizzling Culture Mobile Food Trailer. Our plan is to care for our neighbors when they need it most. We accept all people as they are, and our doors are always open to anyone.

Asbury Farms provides locally grown produce used to create fabulous and nutritious meals. Our seed-to-table approach is community-based. This not only helps families make it through emergencies and crises. We help move families towards sustainable abundance.

Our Sizzling Culture program provides jobs and new skills to our city's youth. This includes year-round employment. Our staff and most of our volunteers come from the neighborhoods we support. We call this sustainable abundance because families move from need-based on scarcity to enough based on community-generated abundance.

Our work is also about food and justice. Our vision is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into active citizens. And all residents can enjoy safety, good health, and a culture that fosters life-long learning and satisfying lives. This summer, help us address food insecurity and strengthen Flint's budding local food system by supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're doing and considering how you can help.

Donate to our Feed Flint Campaign by visiting: flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate





SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN
PRESENTS



FEBRUARY FOOD GIVEAWAYS & ANGEL CLOSET DATES

3410 Fenton Road (three blocks north of Atherton Road)

Flint, MI 48507

Call 810-239-3427 for appointments/questions or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

Food Giveaways: NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY! Feb. 2nd and 16th, 11am-noon

Angel Closet: APPOINTMENT REQUIRED Feb. 9th & 23rd, 10:30am-noon

MASK REQUIRED FOR ENTRY, ONE CLIENT AT A TIME
IN THE ANGEL CLOSET





ASBURY FARM FRESH

- TRY OUR WEEKLY VEGGIE BOX FOR \$10.00 -

SIGN UP FOR A FREE ASBURY FARMS ACCOUNT TODAY

AND

Receive a \$15 credit on your account for your first purchase

CREATE YOUR OWN VEGGIE BOX

Select what goes in your box from each week's harvest. Get \$5 off your next order when you fill your box with \$15 of produce.

WANT US TO DECIDE FOR YOU?

Choose Veggie Box Subscription and we will fill your order with a variety of each week's harvest. Pay when you pick up your box. A \$15 VALUE FOR \$10.

* CONVENIENT PICKUP AT ASBURY OR AT THE SOUTH FLINT SOUP KITCHEN *

FREE!
FAMILY FRIENDLY!
\$1 RAFFLE FOR ASBURY
CDC!

Asbury Church February Open Mic

1653 Davison Road Flint, MI 48506

> 02.25.2022 Show 7pm Doors open at 6:30pm ALL ARE

Questions??? Call Katelin at 810-239-3427 or email katelin@flintasbury.org

In other words, make yourself at home. And work for the good of the cities where you live. But never forget who put you there and to whom you owe your primary allegiance.

One of Daniel's superpowers was dream interpretation. When King Nebuchadnezzar hears about this, he calls on Daniel to interpret a disturbing dream. But the king is even more disturbed when Daniel tells the king that his dream suggests that Babylon's days are numbered.

A common observation of powerful persons is that whenever their power is challenged it's quite personal. Some also have thin skin and fragile egos. Humility is seldom a characteristic of powerful leaders with big egos and thin skin.

The writer, at this point, shows their sense of humor as the king's reaction unfolds. First, the king orders the building of a giant statue. A structure made of gold that would last forever as a symbol that Babylon would likewise last forever. A sort of middle-finger expression to whosoever challenges his authority.

A ceremony was planned for the statue's commissioning. All residents were required to attend and bow down to the statue as representing the power of Babylon. Anything less would be treasonous and the perpetrators arrested and executed.

Wouldn't you know it? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were expected to be present and bow down to the statue. After all, they were given high-level positions, and the media would be paying close attention to them. The same was true for those who resented foreigners taking away choice jobs.

Instead, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah showed up that day. The men stayed faithful to the One God to whom each pledged their allegiance. While they would sing the Babylon National Anthem with pride and dance with their neighbors to celebrate the occasion, they worshiped only one God. And refused to worship human-made idols.

The story of the three men surviving a fiery furnace is classic. The storyteller uses a combination of humor and hyperbole to build suspense. The men lay faith on the line. If God sees fit to save them, they will be saved. If not, they will perish. Their fate is in the hands of the only God they trust and worship.

The parallels to our nation are condemning but enlightening. Daniel and his three friends were prepared for service to the empire. They were trained in Babylon's language, policies, practices, and beliefs. Trey learned their lessons well and rose quickly in the ranks. And a day of reckoning soon came.

We had hints of their struggle. They managed to forego the royal diet of excess. Somehow they recognized that holding onto their faith is difficult in exile. Losing our faith begins with seemingly innocent choices. What's a helping of pork chops gonna hurt? I had better take my share now since there isn't enough to go around.

The empire offers an impressive alternative to their faith. But, on the other hand, the trappings of the empire loom large. Will they bow down and worship the gods of security, militarism, and the economy? The

penalties are steep, and the heat is intense. So it's an easy choice for most. But the young men hold onto their belief that the one True God will save them. Otherwise, life doesn't really matter anyway.

I invite you to join us for worship as we study the Way that Jesus teaches us to live as followers. This month, in particular, we celebrate Black History month with celebrity guest interviews. We gather in the Asbury Arts Center in person and online on YouTube and Facebook. Video replays are available to watch later.

You can join us each Sunday online by going to the button on the homepage of our <u>website</u> - <u>Click</u> <u>here to watch</u>. This button takes you to our <u>YouTube channel</u>. You can find more information about us on our website at <u>FlintAsbury.ora</u>.

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Pastor Tommy

¹ Brian Zahnd. *Postcards from Babylon: The Church In American Exile*. Spello Press, 2019.



ASBURY UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Invite you to join us in a Special Lenten Project "FORTY DAYS ~ FORTY ITEMS"

Wednesday, March 2, 2022 is the first day of Lent. I have a challenge for you!

Each day of Lent, starting with Ash Wednesday, remove one item from your closet that you no longer wear or need (or doesn't fit) and put it into this trash bag*. At the end of the forty days, we will donate these items to The Angel Closet at our South Flint Soup Kitchen. This way you will be able to share them with someone who can really use them!!

So instead of "giving up" Chocolate or French Fries for Lent, please give from your heart so we can help with clothes for our neighbors at The Angel Closet. Plus you'll be getting a head start on your own spring cleaning!

*All items must be clean and not torn or ripped or stained. We are giving these items away to our clients and if you won't wear it, we don 't want to have them wear these items either.

If you have any questions, please call UMW President Michele Weston at (810) 624-1184.



\$1 raffle with proceeds going toward Asbury Empowerment Arts Center!

3rd Annual Asbury Flint Film Showcase

Join us for a night of popcorn, drinks & amazing local & independent flicks!



Friday, March 25th

Doors open at 6:30pm Event starts at 7pm Asbury Church
1653 Davison Road *
Flint, MI 48506



Questions or wish to submit a film? Call Katelin at 810-239-3427 or email katelin@flintasbury.org