

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 2 Issue 10

April 10, 2022

Soup (The better choice)



Most mornings, my breakfast includes two pieces of veggie bacon. Ordinarily, I avoid foods created in a laboratory rather than grown in their natural habitat. However, in this case, there is the slightest hint of a taste that offers fond, albeit redacted, memories.

Grace and Eggs (Divine paradox)



Each year on the Sunday before Easter, we celebrate the time that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. It's a rather strange custom from a distance. At Asbury, along with other churches, we place orders for loads of palm branches that we use for decorations and hand out to everyone who shows up.

Clean bacon.

When I first decided to give up meat I missed BLT's and bacon with my eggs tremendously. It helped somewhat when I remembered that two of the world religions that originated with Abraham abstain from eating bacon. For the Jewish faith, this directive comes from our common scripture found in Leviticus. There is little ambiguity in Leviticus 11:7 which reads, "Do not eat pigs. They must be considered unclean."

Do we not eat pork because pigs are unclean, or is there more to this weird and demanding directive? Can't we just

Page 6

We call the week that follows Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Thursday of that week is called Holy Thursday. This year we're joining other Flint churches at Hope Church for what can feel like a form of vigil. We recall the evening that Jesus had supper with His closest friends, sometimes ending the service by removing the items that adorn the altar. A show of solidarity with Jesus, who was arrested later that evening and afterward stripped and beaten.

Page 2



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.

DONATE

Inside this issue:

Soup	1
Grace and Eggs	1
In Our Prayers/Coming up this Week	3
Asbury Worship Series – Masterpiece	4
Pastor's Book Club—Try Softer	4
Leadership in Worship & Service	4
Asbury Worship Series—Masterpiece	5
Soup	6
Grace and Eggs	7
Small Group Questions & Notes	8
Feed Flint	9
Feed Flint	10
SFSK April Dates	11
Asbury Veggie Boxes	12
Soup	13



The next day is called Good Friday. Another odd reason to gather as we remember the day that Jesus was executed. The Gospel of John equates this event with the customary killing of the sacrificial lamb for the Jewish Festival of Passover.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves and focus our attention this week on the week before.

A humble entry.

Jesus had a reputation for drawing crowds. By the time He arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus had a following of people as large and diverse as any rock star has gathered since. However, He wasn't after the glitz and glitter ordinarily associated with famous public figures.

Instead, Jesus sends a couple of friends ahead to reserve a donkey for him to ride. The perfect combination of humility and sarcasm. A statement against money, power, prestige, greed, and retaliation. A donkey symbolized God's love and preference for the humble. And a donkey also fulfilled an ancient prophecy about a future king like none other.

The people cheered His arrival, and churchgoers today wave palm branches in memory. The commotion drew the attention of the self-proclaimed peacekeepers. The community leaders who cooperated with the occupying force of the Roman Empire kept the peace in exchange for their own benefit and well-being.

"You better tell the crowds to keep it down!" they warned Jesus. "I can," Jesus responded, "But then the stones will shout!" (Luke 19:39-40). His divinely appointed place in history couldn't be kept a secret even if He wanted it.

Again, let's not get ahead of ourselves. We need to take a look at what happened a day earlier.

Self-justification.

But first, a little about a strange and familiar subject.

Social psychologist Elliot Aronson is a Professor Emeritus at the University of California. In 2007 he co-authored a book, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)*. According to the book, our brains are hardwired to make us think we are doing the right thing, even in the face of sometimes overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

We often call this self-justification. The problem stems from our inability to see the contrarian evidence. Instead, we interpret events and information through tunnel vision.

The authors share a story about a young social psychologist named Leon Festinger in their book. Festinger and two associates joined a group of people who believed the world would end on a specific date in December 1954. The group's leader prophesied that all who remained faithful would get picked up by a flying saucer and taken to safety.

The goal of this band of researchers was simple. To observe what happens next when nothing happens?

The group leader they joined had organized a strong following of faithful believers. Many sold their homes and emptied their bank accounts. Some stayed in their homes, wondering if life for them was ending as their leader predicted. What happened next to many, if not most, of the believers offered further evidence of a human condition that Professor Festinger observed earlier in his career and named cognitive dissonance.

What happened next was nothing for those outside the group. But for insiders, nothing happening became further evidence that their faithfulness was rewarded by nothing happening.

The idea is mysteriously complex. Cognitive dissonance occurs when we attempt to hold two competing thoughts in mind simultaneously. A tension is created that insists on resolution. "If we are right," the insider reasons, "the world would no longer be. But the world continues, so are we wrong in our belief, or is there another explanation that justifies what we want to be true?" Which is it? Both can't be true at the same time.

Salvation has come to this house today... The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:9-10

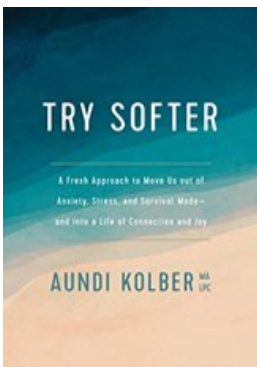




In Psalm 13 we find questions that everyone feels at times. "How much longer will you forget me, Lord? Forever? How much longer will you hide yourself from me? How long must I endure trouble? How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night? How long will my enemies triumph over me?" (Psalm 13:1-2).

Page 5

Book Club News



We began reading and discussing *Praying with the Church* by Scot McKnight as the Season of Lent started in March. We

plan to finish our study next week and turn our attention to Easter. ¹

We chose this book as a study during the Season of Lent because of the importance of Prayer in the

lives of nearly every person on the planet. Even persons who don't believe in a God may turn to whatever power that may be greater than their circumstances in search of comfort, protection, and forgiveness.

On the Wednesday after Easter we start a new adventure into the slow but rewarding process of self-discovery.

In parallel to a new worship series, *Masterpiece*, our Book Club digs deeper into the process of self-discovery. But not as a burden to be endured. Rather, as an exciting exploration of who we are behind our layers of protection. Let's call it our un-doctored selfie.

We're in search of that divine image that reflects our Creator. We know it's there beneath the layers

of past disappointments, hurts, and abandonments.

Whether you're a regular on Sunday mornings, only attend on an occasional holiday, or don't cross the threshold of a church building without coercion, there is something for everyone in this conversation.

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

In a world that preaches a "try harder" gospel—just keep going, keep hustling, keep pretending we're all fine—we're left exhausted, overwhelmed, and so numb to our lives. If we're honest, we have been

Leadership in Worship & Service

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Tony, Mirium | Welcome Team |
| Anthony, Jim | Ushers |
| Jonathon, Terrance | Production Team |
| Miriam | Children |
| Cyndi | Worship Leader |
| Christine & Norma | Cafe |

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“Masterpiece”... Asbury Worship Series ...cont from pg 4

More often than not, we feint humility to cover up our feelings of despair. We wonder if God made some sort of horrible mistake while creating us. Perhaps a part was left out or a piece cross-threaded during our assembly.

Other times, we hypothesize that it isn't God's fault. It was our parents or caregivers that dropped the ball. Maybe it was that horrible thing that happened. That thing that we don't want to talk about lest we condemn ourselves by our own testimony.

The most damning theory of all is that we're somehow irreversibly flawed. It all started with a wrong decision that we can never take back. And no matter how hard we tried, we never really recovered. For years, denial worked best and would still work if it weren't for those voices that won't stop reminding us. "You know what you are!" they shout.

Welcome to our new series, *Masterpiece*. A series about you and your struggle for loving yourself as much as God loves you. Not just through rational logic or because the Bible says so, but because you actually believe you are a masterpiece.

Masterpiece is conceived as a trilogy. The first two parts are based on a book by Aundi Kolber. A licensed therapist who shared her own struggles and dedicated her life to helping others deal with their own brokenness. Her book is titled *Try Softer*.

John Li joins our series design team as a content expert. With advanced degrees in Psychology and Sociology, John brings academic rigor to this intersection between faith and science.

As Psalm 13 continues we read a recognition of God's saving grace at work. The Psalmist sings out to God "I rely on your constant love; I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O Lord, because You have been good to me (Psalm 13:5-6).

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

² Aundi Kolber. *Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode--and into a Life of Connection and Joy*. Carol Street, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020.

Soup (The better choice) *cont. from pg 1*

make sure the meat is handled safely and cooked sufficiently? And, by the way, this text had very little to do with my diet.

The terms clean and unclean transcend food and show up as distinctions better translated as holy and unholy. So what is clean is holy and what is unclean is unholy. Can you see where this is going?

Through the centuries, Christians dropped prohibitions on bacon but held tightly to the notions of holy and unholy. Instead, holy gets used as a yardstick for everything from how to dress for church to the genre of music expected during worship.

It's important to point out that this complex topic continues to be debated with tempers flaring and fists shaking. Which, by the way, are unholy gestures.

Mary and Martha.

Luke tells a story about two women sharing a household and hosting Jesus and a few of His followers.

A lot has been made of this story over the years. In particular, "Are you a Mary or a Martha?" Answering this question begins with a point of view about the two women that come out of our own imagination. Notice that Luke tells us very little about these two individuals. And the depiction of their gender identities as women leaves many of us out of this conversation. It's sometimes difficult for men to place themselves in roles occupied predominantly by women unless we're sufficiently secure in our own gender identity. Which most of us aren't.

The scene begins with Martha welcoming Jesus into her home. The possessive pronoun "her" places Martha in a role most often held by men when this story takes place. In 1st century Palestine, it was uncommon for women to own property. Nevertheless, scripture seems to prefer lifting up women to positions of power.

Luke offers few details but chooses to share Mary's place at the feet of Jesus and her decision to listen as Jesus shared His wisdom. We're told that other men were traveling with Jesus. And we presume they are in the room listening to Jesus. This scene, by itself, crosses cultural norms for the period. Mary's actions are trailblazing in their own right.

Anyone who has experience preparing meals realizes that a lot of effort is required, depending on the meal. This story takes place before processed food and pizza delivery. It's safe to assume that the meal Martha prepared was made from raw or preserved ingredients. Shortcuts and leftovers aside, Luke shares that Martha was upset over the amount of work she had to do. And to make matters worse, Mary wasn't helping.

This is where speculation gets interesting as we project our lives onto their story. Perhaps you've been there where Martha was, left to do the work by yourself. Maybe you've been there where Mary found herself. Perhaps you've had an opportunity of a lifetime while someone close to you tries to put a guilt trip on you because they value the situation differently.

Perhaps you've been there where Jesus was sitting. Two people who likely care a lot about each other squabbling like children on a playground. And asking you to take their side of the argument.

Or perhaps you've been there in the room watching the commotion unfold. You're there because you want to be there. But meanwhile, an argument interrupts the moment, and your joy is stolen. The moment is gone as the teacher gets dragged into a dispute. A dispute where there are no winners and everyone loses.

Sometimes the damage is minimized and other times something even better emerges. But Luke doesn't tell us what came next. What came next is left for us to imagine, debate, and use as a guide for our own lives. If nothing else, those of us who have been on the side of Martha can see ourselves in what appears to be a show of pettiness, all things considered. So now you know my bias.

We can imagine ourselves in the story as one character and then another, playacting in our mind's eye the ways we reacted in similar situations. Finally, we can choose to learn from our mistakes and join Mary and the other followers at the feet of Jesus.

Lest you think I'm condemning Martha's actions, I'm not. Martha had a valid complaint.

"It's obvious," the insiders reasoned, "our faithfulness was rewarded with an extension. The world was saved by our faithful devotion." So instead of disbanding, the insiders became more aggressive in recruiting others to believe what they chose to believe.

In the same way, the peacekeepers justified cooperating with Roman authorities despite overwhelming evidence that God was intervening in world history. Despite the tradition that featured stories and prophecies of the events unfolding before them, they held onto their convenient justification.

On the way.

But let's consider what happened a day earlier.

While Jesus and his followers were on their way to Jerusalem, we find another story that illustrates our struggle to hold competing ideas in tension.

Jesus was passing through the village of Jericho, and word went out ahead of him. Crowds gathered alongside the road awaiting his arrival. According to Luke, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was also anxious to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

One complicating factor for Zacchaeus was that the community despised him for his role in collecting taxes for Rome. Zacchaeus was seen as a sell-out to Roman occupiers benefitting financially at the community's expense. Even worse, he exploited the weaker and poorer for his own gain.

But Zacchaeus is curious. What's he got to lose? After all, this teacher, preacher, and healer is a miracle worker. Many say He was sent by God to save the lost. Perhaps. But the crowds are a problem for Zacchaeus. He is a man accustomed to cheating people one at a time. So crowds are a risk for Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus needed a way to distance himself from the crowds while getting close enough to see Jesus. That's it! A tree offered a safe vantage point that kept him a safe distance from the public and from Jesus.

Luke doesn't tell us if Zacchaeus was spotted by his neighbors. Perhaps he went completely unnoticed in all the commotion. But what we do know is that Jesus saw him. And when He did, Jesus stopped, looked up at Zacchaeus, and invited Himself to supper.

The onlookers were stunned. How can this be? How can Jesus be holy and hang out with a person with such a reputation? Surely, both cannot be true at the same time? The tension of cognitive dissonance hung in the air like a bad joke during an otherwise brilliant performance.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in a sermon titled "Loving your enemies," offered this paradoxical divine insight: "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

His divine insight comes out of his willingness to hold onto the tension that comes out of divine paradox.

Jesus frequently spoke about a kingdom where the lowly are lifted up and the powerful set-aside. A realm where the broken are healed and the self-justified are silenced. Jesus sees us and invites us to supper with him. He sees past our brokenness, and he sees through whatever camouflage we hope will conceal our unworthiness.

What is your tree? What is your safe distance and vantage point? What is Your secret that causes you to despise yourself and keeps you from accepting His invitation? What is the constraint that causes you to feel too short?

Too challenged? Or too lacking to see and be seen?

Meals are a common medium for friends to come together. And Jesus used meals as an invitation and an illustration of inclusive hospitality.

Feeding people is holy and it's important to remember that feeding Flint is not a problem of enough. It's a problem of available healthy options and equitable access. To learn how you can help address food insecurity in our community go to FeedFlint.org.

I invite you to join us for worship during this season of Lent as we consider the ways that scripture addresses the subject of food. In addition, we'll continue to celebrate Black History 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.

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Pastor Tommy

¹ Elliot Aronson. "Why It's Hard to Admit to Being Wrong" © NPR Talk of the Nation, July 20, 2007. Retrieved from: [Link to Article](#)

² Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson. *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me)*. Harcourt, 2007.

Life Group Questions & Notes:

Salvation has come to this house today...The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:9-10

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS

1. Read Luke 19:9-10. This story may be familiar to most of us from a children song. Read is again as though it is your first time. What did you notice? Where are you in the story? Why? What did you see, hear, and smell?
2. Read this week's article titled *Grace and eggs*. I'm hoping that the connection to this week's title gets clarified for you. This is an article about a grace that knows no limits and our struggle to keep what this means in the forefront of our thinking. When have you experienced cognitive dissonance? In what ways have you justified a belief that later proved to be based on fiction? In what ways do we handle our addictions using self-justification?
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.

“Feed Flint”



“Feed Flint”

Page 10



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



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

But I've been Martha as well, where I didn't recognize the holiness of a particular moment and focused instead on the work at hand. Fortunately, I've also been a Mary, trying to shut out the condemnation of others who have differing ideas about my priorities.

Most of all, I've been asked to mediate disagreements of all kinds. Disputes that ended in self-destructive responses, often from both sides of the argument. Disagreements elevated to personal in short order, leaving collateral damage in its wake. And I've watched arguments unfold in the presence and midst of holiness. And I bet you have too.

Food is holy.

Our planned theme for the Season of Lent is food. We chose this story because it juxtaposes food preparations with reverence for the holy. And it allows us to wallow in self-justification for a while until we hear the voice of Jesus calling us to sit at His feet and listen.

Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me?

Luke 10:40

Food is holy. For the most part, plants and animals give their lives for us. We live because they died for us. I'm not sure there is any other ritual holier than this process of sacrifice for the life of another. Unfortunately, most of

us trivialize this notion of sacrifice and dismiss any suggestion that a carrot dies or that it matters that a lamb is slaughtered. I get it.

Over time, humanity commoditized food, reducing what we eat to a simple formula of calories and nutrients. So I eat my carrots for better vision and my spinach for strength. I eat fish for the omega 3 oil it offers. And when I overindulge, my body efficiently stores the excess in places that can negatively affect my self-image.

I believe that what Martha was doing was holy. But was preparing food as sacred as listening to Jesus? Let's consider that Martha was preparing a meal for Jesus and likely focused on the best meal possible. Jesus reminds us elsewhere that we are preparing a meal for Him whenever we feed others. What's holier than that?

Perhaps the notion of varying degrees of holiness is elusive. I'm guessing that Jesus saw love and holiness in the actions of both Mary and Martha. Both were focused on what matters most.

But Jesus responds to Martha because she is the one who wants to drag Him into a petty argument that interfered with the holiness of the moment. Martha's charge was as crucial to her as Mary's participation.

Jesus responds with, "Mary's moment will not be taken away from her."

Regardless of our past hurts, biases, insecurities, or justifiable anger, when we infringe upon the holiness, we infringe on the One

who created and loves us. And regardless of whatever revenge we may believe is justifiable, any actions that interfere with another relationship with the holy are self-destructive.

Feeding people is holy and it's important to remember that feeding Flint is not a problem of enough. It's a problem of available healthy options and equitable access. To learn how you can help address food insecurity in our community go to FeedFlint.org.

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Pastor Tommy

over functioning for so long, we can't even imagine another way. How else will things get done? How else will we survive?

It does not have to be this way.

Aundi Kolber believes that we don't have to white-knuckle our way through life. In her debut book, *Try Softer*, she'll show us how God specifically designed our bodies and minds to work together to process our stories and work through obstacles. Through the latest psychology, practical clinical exercises, and her own personal story, Aundi equips and empowers us to connect us to our trust self and truly live. This is the "try softer" life.

According to her author biography, Aundi Kolber is a Licensed Professional Counselor (MA LPC), writer, and speaker in Castle Rock, Colorado. She specializes in trauma- and body-centered therapies and is passionate about the integration of faith and psychology.

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, delighted when new people 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 — FlintAsbury.org.

Pastor Tommy

¹ Scot McKnight. *Praying with the Church*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006.

² Aundi Kolber. *Try Softer: A Fresh Approach to Move Us out of Anxiety, Stress, and Survival Mode--and into a Life of Connection and Joy*. Carol Street, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020.



ASBURY UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH



United
Women
in Faith

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 UWF President Michele Weston at (810) 624-1184.



United
Women
in Faith

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN IS NOW UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH

We've taken a new name to better reflect how we answer our calling today. It's an exhilarating time, as we commit to even greater inclusivity, action, and impact in our mission to support women, children, and youth.

All Women of Asbury UMC are invited to join our monthly meetings on the 1st Thursday of the month at 1:00PM in the Library. Your friends and neighbor ladies are also invited, they don't have to be United Methodist any longer. Any questions, please call Michele Weston, our President, at 810-624-1184.



[Save The Date!!](#) Sunday, May 15, 2022 at Noon, after Morning Worship, The Asbury United Women In Faith will be having a Brunch to "Celebrate Spring" and to "Thank our Farm Workers" for all they are doing to get our Hoop Houses planted for this growing season for Asbury Farms.

Watch for a flyer coming soon to tell you more about it, the cost, the menu and reservations etc... The most exciting part of this event is to finally have an Asbury gathering and meal together since we stopped when the pandemic began.

Providing a HOT MEAL and/or local, organic
PRODUCE weekly.



SATURDAYS starting around 12NOON

Asbury United Methodist Church

1653 Davison Rd, Flint (810) 235-0016



Food Not Bombs is a loose-knit group of independent collectives, sharing free vegan and vegetarian food with others. **Flint Food Not Bombs** believes that access of food among other necessities of life-should be viewed as a right, not a privilege. Yet in a nation with a military budget many times that of other nations, people continue to go hungry. This is immoral and unjust.



JOIN THE CONVERSATION!

Facebook.com/flintfoodnotbombs

Twitter.com/flintfnb

Email: flintfnb@protonmail.com

Website: foodnotbombsflint.wordpress.com

We're currently looking for volunteers so we can expand. If interested,
send us a message! Solidarity!

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense
than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.—MLK