

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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MAY 4, 2025

Strangers (Lifeboat)



The world is mourning and saying goodbye to Jorge Mario Bergoglio, better known as Pope Francis. Known as the “people’s Pope,” he was chosen in 2013 to lead the Catholic Church. His leadership was different from what most anticipated. Not long after taking office, the Pope’s answer

when asked about gay priests is often repeated and a part of his legacy: “Who am I to judge?”

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Faith (Lifeboat)



As hard as I try not to worry, it’s getting harder as prices rise and the rest of the world organizes in opposition to the trade war initiated by our current president. The lies attempting to cover up the incompetence and chaos are maddening. Worse of all, the cruelty with which efforts

to deport large numbers of persons with little or no evidence and no due process are sickening.

I’ve been told that worry indicates a lack of faith. Perhaps.

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EVERYONE HAVE A
WONDERFUL WEEK!!



DONATE

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In a recent New York Times article, Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham described the response of both Catholics and non-Catholics as “a collective gasp.” The Pope’s remarks, nevertheless, signaled his vision of a brave new world that focused on taking care of the most vulnerable among us.

Pope Francis chose his papal name to honor St. Francis of Assisi, a saint best known for emphasizing caring for animals and the environment. Concerns over climate change were at the top of the Pope’s list of priorities for the world to address, as was caring for refugees and the poor. Income inequality was also at the top of the Pope’s list for world leaders to resolve.

Pope Francis envisioned a church “with doors always wide open, ” a church that welcomed the stranger without prejudging their worthiness for God’s grace. He was undoubtedly the people’s Pope.

Meanwhile, U.S. policy and practices toward refugees are shameful. Our current administration has chosen to take us

all down a path involving cruelty and inhumane treatment. Our nation is on a path leading us further away from Christian values.

As I reflected on Pope Francis’s life, along with most of the world, I remembered a 1977 movie titled *Oh God*. George Burns played God in the film, who chose a young grocery store manager, played by John Denver, to be a spokesperson for God. The religious leaders think that the God Denver’s character speaks about is fake. God just couldn’t be that down-to-earth.

But what if God is just that down-to-earth? What if God is the “People’s God,” and Pope Francis had unique insights into God’s character?

As we begin our first episode of our Lifeboat series, we’re introduced to the survivors of the Galaxy, which sank off the coast of West Africa. They’re a mixed bag of folks. Some were wealthy, and others were part of the crew, underpaid and overworked. But they were in the lifeboat together, clinging to life and hoping to be saved.

The survivors spotted a stranger in the water three days after the Galaxy sank. They helped him into the lifeboat, baffled by where the young man came from and how he survived without a life jacket or anything to help him stay afloat. And clearly a long way from where the boat sank, they were on.

When Nina, one of the survivors, said to the stranger, “Well, thank the Lord we found you.” The stranger responded, “I am the Lord.” The survivors were in disbelief, although each showed it differently. “If you’re really the Lord, save us,” sums up their collective response. Things didn’t add up.

Benjamin, or Benji as he’s known, writes in the notebook he keeps, “When we pulled him from the water, he didn’t have a scratch on him ... he was unmarked with smooth almond skin and thick dark hair matted by seawater.” The consensus among the survivors was that the stranger just seemed too human to be who he claimed to be.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger

Sylvia Pittman

Mirium Watson

Jonathon Misner

Terrance Williams

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE
HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux

Norma Buzzard

Nancy Elston

**COMING UP THIS WEEK****MAY 5—11**

May 5	Mon		
May 6	Tue	10am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
May 7	Wed		
May 8	Thu	1:00pm	United Women in Faith
May 9	Fri		
May 10	Sat		
May 11	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

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

Upcoming Worship Series "Lifeboat"



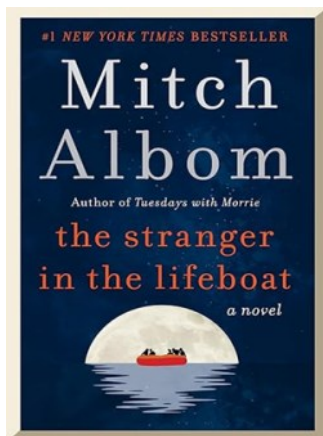
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In our worship series, *Lifeboat*, we learn about a group of people desperately clinging to life after the yacht they were on sank. Three days after the accident, after drifting a considerable distance from where the boat went down, they pull a stranger into the lifeboat. The stranger claimed to be the Lord.

In his best-selling novel, *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*, Mitch Albom lays out the beginning of the mystery. "When we pulled him from the water, he didn't have a scratch on him ... he was unmarked, with smooth almond skin and thick dark hair matted by seawater ... He wore no life jacket, nor was he holding on to anything when we spotted him bobbing in the waves."

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Book Club News



Beginning the first Sunday after Easter, we're embarking on a new series titled *Lifeboat*. This series is inspired by Mitch Albom's

novel *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*.

Mitch Albom is the founder of SAY Detroit, a nonprofit that provides pathways to success for Detroiters in need through major health, housing, and education initiatives. The nonprofit is funded in part by profits coming from a dessert shop and a gourmet popcorn line. He and his wife Janine also operate Have Faith Haiti, a home and school for impoverished children and orphans in Port-au-Prince.

As an author, Mitch Albom has written eight #1 New York Times bestsellers, Emmy Award-winning TV films, stage plays, screenplays, a nationally syndicated newspaper column, and a musical. As a result of his work at the Detroit Free Press, Albom was inducted into both the National Sports Media Association and Michigan Sports Halls of Fame and received the Red Smith Award for lifetime achievement.

In his New York Times Bestseller, *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*, Albom ponders the question, "What would happen if we called on God for help and God actually appeared?" It is a story of hope and faith. Page 11

Asbury Staff

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Cyndi	Worship Leader
Anthony & Jim	Ushers
Jonathon & Terrance	Production Team
Yasheah & Mirium	Nursery
Christine	Cafe

Upcoming Worship Series — “Lifeboat”

The survivors were baffled by finding someone alive in the chilly waters. One survivor, Nina, said to the stranger, “Well, thank the Lord we found you.” The suspense went into hyperdrive when the stranger responded, “I am the Lord.”

They were in disbelief, although each showed it differently. “If you’re really the Lord, save us,” sums up their collective response. Things didn’t add up.

Fortunately, we’re not in a lifeboat clinging to life, but most of us wonder what will happen now. A lot is going on in the world. Many of us can feel a connection with the survivors in the lifeboat. We may feel like we’re clinging onto life in terms of the future.

But is Jesus really in the lifeboat with us? When we see the mess created by the current administration, we struggle to see the love that Jesus taught. Instead, we see hatefulness, cruelty, revenge, abuse of power, and lawlessness.

When we look at what is happening in our nation, we clearly don’t see Jesus. We worry that Jesus is dead, or at least that which Jesus teaches us is dead. Even if Jesus is among us, we either don’t recognize Him or don’t believe He’s around. Because, if he is here, why won’t He save us?

Save us, Lord!

We are about to die!

Matthew 8:25

There is a lot going on that we can’t control, and most of us did not vote for it. The world is a mess.

Unfortunately, God has a track record of allowing us to suffer the consequences of our collective decisions. And we’re all suffering from the mistakes made during the last election, regardless of our role. This is the way lifeboats work. We have to work together to survive.


“Feed Flint”

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“Feed Flint”

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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**

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!' and it would obey you.

Luke 17:5-6

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

1. Read Luke 17:5-6. What is Jesus saying about faith? What does this mean for you?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Faith. In what ways is your faith strong? In what ways do you hope to have more faith? What does faith look like for you?
3. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.



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More Information :



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A diverse group of shipwrecked passengers pulls a strange man from the sea who claims to be “the Lord.” The group challenges the man’s assertion. “If you’re really who you say you are, prove it! Save us!”

The Lord is willing, but there’s a catch. He can only save them if they all believe in Him.

I want to share more with you, but I don’t want to spoil any surprises. In his book, Albom keeps us guessing until the end. You, too, will be anxious to discover whether this strange man is really who he claims to be.

The novel is fast-paced and compelling and promises to cause you to ponder your deepest beliefs. Is it possible that the answers to our prayers may be found where we least expect them?

If you choose to follow along, I suggest using the following schedule:

<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Pages</u>	<u>Parts</u>
April 27	v - 55	One & Two
May 4	56 - 97	Three & Four
May 11	98 - 144	Five & Six
May 18	145 - 191	Seven to Nine
May 25	192 - 228	Ten & Eleven
June 1	229 - 268	Twelve to Epilogue

We’ll have a few books available for purchase. New copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$10.86, and used copies in good condition are under \$7. This book may also be available at the local library.

Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week’s chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website’s homepage — FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

Mitch Albom. *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*. New York: HarperCollins, 2021.

Cash or checks can be sent to/dropped off at South Flint Soup Kitchen, 3410 Fenton Road, Flint, MI 48507. Please make checks out to South Flint Soup Kitchen!

Online at www.mightycause.com/feedflint

Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday 11am-12Noon. Calling ahead is not necessary, but our needs change frequently, so calling ahead of time is a good idea!

Give time! We need volunteers!!! Volunteers arrive at 9:30am and are done by 12:30pm. Tasks include handing out lunches, assisting in the Angel Closet, light cleaning, putting together items to pass out to clients, and more.

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Questions??? Call 810-239-3427
or email southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com

I'm hoping that those choosing to read our companion book, *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*, by Mitch Albom, are able to put themselves into the story.

More importantly, my prayer is that each of us will be able to move from the lifeboat to life itself, and consider whether we can meet Jesus in the strangers we encounter. Particularly, those who are refugees and find themselves the target of cruel and merciless policies that aim to send them back to the place from which they fled.

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was stranger and you received me into your homes, naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus once said that in the end, God will focus on how we treated strangers. Did we come to their aid if they were thirsty, hungry, needed clothes, or in peril?

According to scripture, this is the way of the Lord. What does this look like for you? What should this look like for our nation?

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage. [Click here to watch.](#) This button takes you to our [YouTube channel!](#) You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsburyChurch.org.

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email. Send a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

Pastor Tommy

Our series was inspired by Mitch Albom. *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*. New York: HarperCollins, 2021.
Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham. "Pope Francis' Legacy in the USA: More Open, and Then Divided, Church." © New York Times, April 21, 2025. Retrieved from: [link](#)

Marty LeFleur was the Chief Inspector on the island of Montserrat, where the lifeboat from the Galaxy washed up on shore. After his daughter, Lilly, died, he wanted nothing to do with God. She was only four years old when she drowned while her grandmother slept in her chair at the beach. Why didn't God wake her up in time to save his daughter?

Lilly's mother, Patrice, turned to her belief that their daughter was in heaven—a better place than here. On the other hand, Marty could not accept that a merciful God would let such a tragedy happen. For Marty, "The power of misery is its long shadow. It darkens everything within view." Our author suggests that Marty lost his faith while Patrice found hers.

Faith is a mystery. You cannot hold faith like you can hold someone's hand. You cannot taste faith the way you can a glass of water. Nor can you see faith with the naked eye.

The irony is that you must have faith to see faith.

In a New York Times opinion article, David Brooks writes, "The word 'faith' implies possession of something, whereas I

experience faith as a yearning for something beautiful that I can sense but not fully grasp. For me, faith is more about longing and thirsting than knowing and possessing."

In his gospel, Luke tells about a time when Jesus' followers asked Him to increase their faith. Rather than do as they requested, Jesus shared with them one of the most powerful mysteries of faith. "If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, He said, "you can tell a mulberry tree to pull itself up by the roots and plant itself in the sea, and it would do as you said."

The obvious interpretation here is that faith gives one great power in the physical world. Perhaps, but I'm thinking faith is even more powerful.

Meanwhile, water is scarce on the lifeboat. And with no rain in sight, the survivors' thirst is mounting. Nina pleads with the stranger to do something, "Don't you see how worried we are?"

"Worry is something you create," the stranger responds. "Why would we create worry?" Nina asked, puzzled. "To fill a void," replies the stranger. "A void of what?" asks Nina,

The stranger offers a one-word answer, "Faith."

Was the stranger, reminding Nina, that they must believe he is the Lord, as he said before, before he can save them? But is faith really about what we believe?

David Brooks writes, "When I was an agnostic, I thought faith was primarily about belief. Being religious was about having a settled conviction that God existed and knowing that the stories in the Bible were true."

Soon after, the stranger took a nap. As the stranger slept, rain clouds began to accumulate. It wasn't long before it started to rain. The survivors scrambled to collect as much water as possible. But Benji slipped and spilled most of what he collected just as the rain stopped.

"Keep it going?" Benji screamed. "So you believe I created that storm?" the stranger asked. Benji responds, "if you did, it wasn't enough."

Wasn't one raindrop enough to prove who I am?" the stranger replies.

So, what is the connection between worry and faith? If faith isn't about believing that God exists? Or, in the case of the Galaxy survivors, is the stranger the Lord?

Brooks describes coming to faith as "falling in love" rather than finding the answer to a difficult question. Faith seems to be a yearning that can't be satisfied by substitutes.

If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the seat," and it would obey you.

Luke 17:5-6

It seems to me that Jesus wasn't talking about landscaping without machinery or labor. Instead, Jesus offered a comparison for us to glimpse the power of faith.

Brooks turns to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's description of Moses receiving the Book of Law from God. He writes, Moses "received the Torah from Sinai not as a simple recipient

but as a creator of worlds, as a partner with the Almighty in the act of creation."

Our quest towards greater faith can be thought of as three movements, each taking us closer to God. Beginning with a desire to become a better person, we will eventually gain a better understanding of the world God created.

This improved version of ourselves then turns attention towards the world and the needs of others. For some, their mission is vast, and they help thousands, if not millions, of people. But most of us utilize the capacities and resources God makes available to us to help where and whom we can.

Finally, we experience a convergence whereby we pursue a greater and more intimate relationship with God, who is no longer a stranger but a trusted friend.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our [website's](#) homepage. [Click here to watch.](#) This button takes you to our [YouTube channel!](#) You can find more information about us on our website at FlintAsburyChurch.org.

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Send a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com or let us know when you send a message through our [website](#). We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose [Newsletters](#).

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Our series was inspired by Mitch Albom. *The Stranger in the Lifeboat*. New York: HarperCollins, 2021. David Brook. *"The Shock of Faith: It's Nothing Like I Thought It Would Be."* © New York Times, Dec. 19, 2024. Retrieved from: [link](#)

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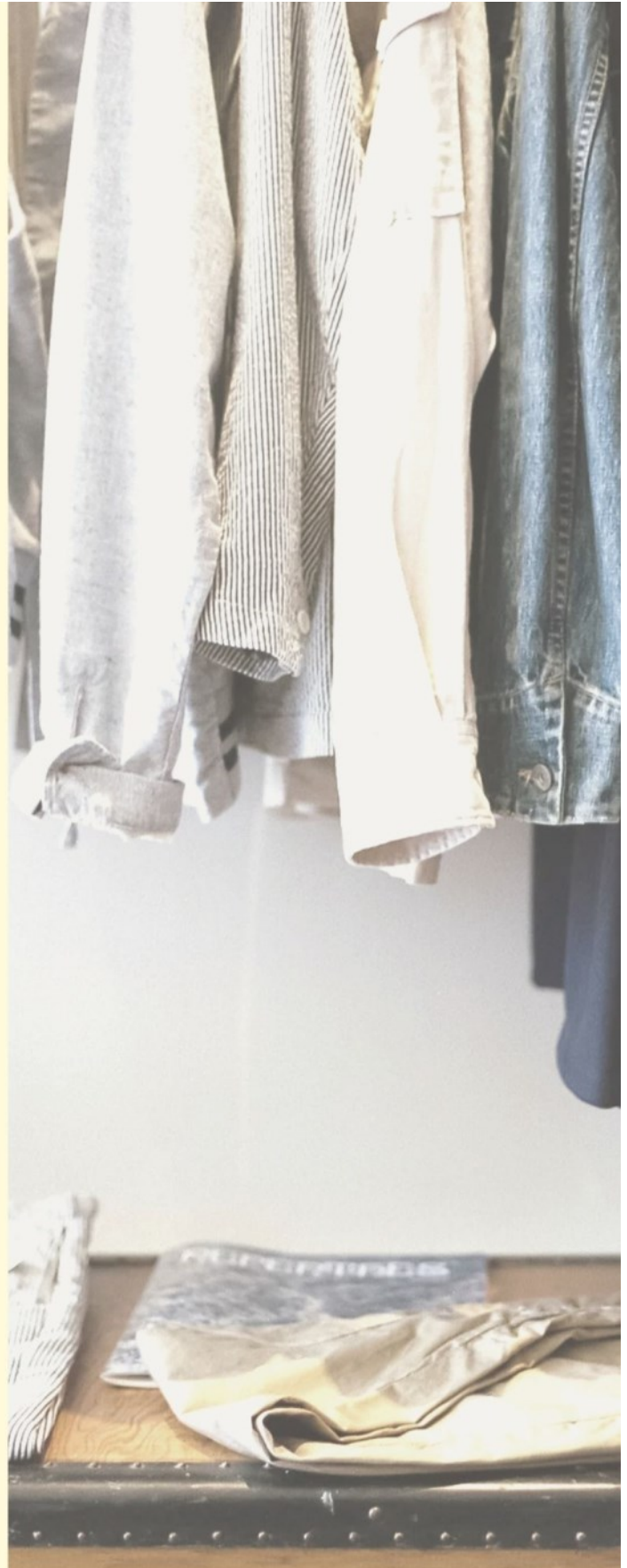
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Fortunately, God is more powerful than our problems. Fortunately, love always outlasts hate. And God promises us that if we do work together, we will not only survive, we will thrive.

Our series follows Mitch Albom's book but adds our own concerns and relevant stories from scripture. His book is inspirational and should cause us to reflect on our circumstances and faith.

The Book Club article in our weekly newsletter, the Circuit Rider, includes a reading schedule. All relevant articles and past issues of our newsletter are on our [website](#).

Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Episode</u>
April 27	Strangers
May 4	Faith
May 11	Identity
May 18	Children
May 25	Fabrication
June 1	Now what?

Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. We share our weekly episodes on [Facebook](#) and our [YouTube channel](#), and go live at 10:30 a.m. You can find these links and more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our [website](#), FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

Mitch Albom. The Stranger in the Lifeboat. New York: HarperCollins, 2021.



LANSING MI...Bishop David A. Bard announces to the Michigan Conference the appointment of the Reverend John Kasper as district superintendent of the East Winds District, effective July 1, 2025. Rev. Kasper is currently serving as the district superintendent of the Central Bay District. He will follow the Rev. Dr. Margie Crawford, who has been a district superintendent since 2018. Rev. Dr. Crawford has been appointed as pastor of Northville United Methodist Church, effective July 1.

With Rev. Kasper serving as superintendent of two districts, Bishop Bard also announces the appointment of the Rev. John Hice as half-time assistant to the East Winds District Superintendent, effective July 1. Rev. Hice is being appointed as a retired elder. Immediately preceding his retirement, Rev. Hice served as district superintendent for the East Winds District. It is expected that this appointment will continue through the end of 2025.

Bishop Bard is making these appointments in light of likely changes to the Michigan Conference budget. Bishop Bard: "Even though finances play a significant role in these decisions, I am pleased that our current cabinet is willing to think creatively about superintending moving into the future. We will continue to think and imagine new ways of fulfilling our Disciplinary responsibilities while helping the churches of our conference explore unique ways to grow in vital mission and ministry. I am very grateful to Rev. Kasper and Rev. Hice for their willingness to assume new responsibilities."

Bishop Bard said: "Making a new appointment to the cabinet is always a joy, and always also means a loss. The Rev. Dr. Margie Crawford has served as a district superintendent faithfully and well. Her ministry in both the Western Waters and East Winds districts has been deeply appreciated. She has served with her keen mind, out of her deep faith and love for the church. She has cared deeply about the congregations and clergy under her care. Her cabinet colleagues and I will miss her."

The 2026 budget proposal, if approved, will provide funds for five district superintendents for the Michigan Conference. Bishop Bard will work with the cabinet and other conference leaders on a plan for superintending and districts to be proposed to the 2026 annual conference session. "We will want to think in new and creative ways about how our annual conference provides support for and supervision of our clergy and how we can encourage and provide resources for local congregations and ministries as they seek to be vibrant places for the ministry of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."