

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

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## Is it real? (Heaven)



Is it real? This is a common question asked by skeptics, even if they're hopeful, the answer is yes. And when it comes to heaven, there are few questions in life that carry the weight of this question.

In this week's chapters from our companion book, *The First Phone Call From Heaven*, "Is it real?" is heavily debated, with most taking one side or the other. I'm betting that even the naysayers are hoping they're wrong. Who doesn't want heaven to be real? Page 2



HAPPY GROWING!

**DONATE**

## Go tell (Heaven)



When a stone hits calm water, ripples spread out from the center of impact, telling the further reaches of the lake what has happened. They say news, good or bad, travels fast. The news begins as a single source, but as the ripples spread further, the news is regenerated and energized to reach even greater heights.

Americans value free speech. Well, we value free speech when we're the ones speaking. It's a little more challenging to value free speech when someone says something with which we disagree or that we think shouldn't be said. Page 13

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Last week's chapters ended with Amy Penn doing a short news report for Nine Action News of Alpena. Amy was hoping for a big break in her career. Working as a news reporter for a TV Station in Alpena, big stories didn't happen very often. Amy was skeptical when her boss told her to go to Coldwater to cover a story about a woman claiming to have received a phone call from her dead sister. Amy wasn't thinking that this story could be her big break.

After returning from Coldwater, Amy's news story was posted on the Nine Action News website, as was the usual practice of the station. Ordinarily, a story might receive a dozen to a few hundred comments from viewers. But Amy's story had thousands of comments. Her boss sent Amy back to Coldwater for more coverage.

Back in Coldwater, Amy does another on-camera interview with Katherine. "What do you talk about? Amy asks. "She tells me about heaven, Katherine replies. "What does she say?" Katherine answers, "She says everyone you lose here, you find again there."

Crowds gathered in front of Katherine's home, hoping that these miracles were real and perhaps wishing that they too would hear from someone in heaven. Is

this really Amy's big break, or is Katherine's miracle call just a scam? Is it genuine?

The Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania operates a website, [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org). The staff that maintains the content for this website must be busier than ever, given the preponderance of conspiracy theories based on lies circulating. To make matters worse, our current president is fond of promoting theories that serve his position regardless of whether there is any factual content to support his assertions.

Definitions of "conspiracy theories" vary in their emphasis on whether they necessarily involve harmful or tragic events and influential organizations. But they all agree that they generally offer explanations that require improbable conspiracies in place of likely causation.

The European Commission identifies six key characteristics of conspiracy theories and provides guidance on evaluating the reliability of such claims. Conspiracy theories typically include: 1) An alleged, secret plot. 2) A group of conspirators. 3) "Evidence" that seems to support the conspiracy theory. 4) They falsely suggest that nothing

is as it appears, and everything is connected. 5) They divide the world into good or bad. 6) They scapegoat people and groups.

They suggest that the story is unlikely to be a conspiracy theory if it comes from someone with recognized qualifications and credentials on the subject, and provides verifiable facts and evidence from scientific or academic research.

On the other hand, conspiracy theories often originate from self-proclaimed experts and are not affiliated with a reputable organization or institution.

Katherine was not the only one receiving calls from heaven, but not everyone wanted others to know about their calls. Amy befriended Katherine, offering her exclusive access to any new developments. As news about the miracles in Coldwater grew, so did Katherine's popularity.

Another breakthrough. Amy is at Katherine's house on a Friday when the phone rings. She quickly grabs her camera but runs into a chair as it slips from her grasp. Amy managed to capture only part of the call, and what she did record was shaky, which seemed to lend authenticity to it. Her unedited video went viral. Suddenly, searches for Coldwater, Michigan, topped the list of the most searched words.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger  
Sylvia Pittman  
Mirium Watson

Fred Hans  
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

### JUNE 23—29

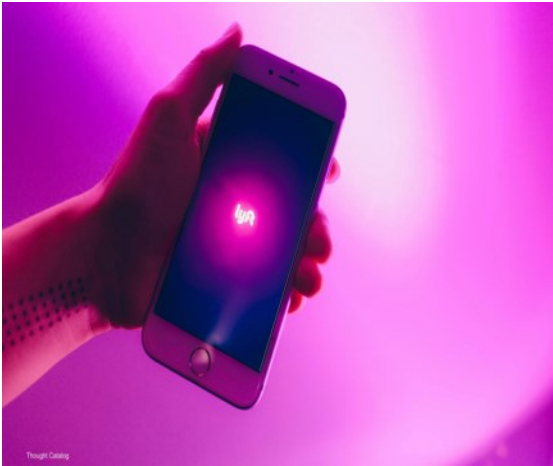
June 23	Mon		
June 24	Tue	9am-until gone	Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice
		3:00pm	CDC Board Meeting
June 25	Wed	11am-1pm	Angel Closet (see flyer pg 15)
June 26	Thu		
June 27	Fri		
June 28	Sat		
June 29	Sun	10:30am	New Beginnings Contemporary Worship



(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 "Heaven"



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 this series, *Heaven*, we turn to another of Mitch Albom's best-selling novels, *The First Phone Call From Heaven*. In this mystery, Albom takes readers on a rollercoaster ride of mystery and hope.

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## Book Club News



We're using another novel written by Mitch Albom for our next series, *Heaven*, beginning the second Sunday of June. *The First*

*Phone Call from Heaven* is captivating as Albom takes us on a rollercoaster ride of hope-filled mystery.

The story begins one morning in the town of Coldwater, Michigan, when several phones start ringing. What makes the calls unusual is that the voices on the other end claim to be calling from heaven.

Is this the greatest miracle ever or a cruel hoax? Soon after, a reporter from Alpena arrives, thinking her boss has sent her on an insignificant news story, visitors suddenly overrun the small town.

Meanwhile, a disgraced pilot named Sully Harding

returns to Coldwater from prison only to discover his hometown gripped by "miracle fever." When his young son starts carrying a toy phone, hoping to hear from his mother in heaven, Sully has had enough.

As proof of an afterlife spreads, the town and the world start to transform. Church attendance increases as believers turn to the local pastors for confirmation. But Sully is convinced there is nothing beyond this sad life. So he digs deeper, determined to disprove these miracles for the sake of his child and his own broken heart.

## Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel	Pastor
Kevin Croom	Executive Director/CDC
Connie Portillo	Office Secretary
Kim Sims	Finance Director
Terry Kinze	Ops Manager/CDC
Sylvia Pittman	Empowerment Arts
Jim Craig	Board & Leadership Chair
Israel Unger (Izzy)	Business Service Mgr
Terrance Williams	Arts Center Mgr
Venus McBeth	South Flint Soup Kitchen

## Leadership in Worship & Service

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

Moving seamlessly between the invention of the telephone in 1876 and a world obsessed with the next level of communication, Mitch Albom takes readers on a breathtaking ride of frenzied hope.

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## Upcoming Worship Series — “Heaven”

“Miracles happen quietly every day,” writes Albom, but “They are rarely tallied. No one keeps score. Now and then, a miracle is declared to the world. And when that happens, things change.”

And the miracle Albom writes about is a phone call. Calls happen every day with little notice. But a call placed to a member of Harvest of Hope Baptist Church was different. And so were the other seven. In the case of Katherine Yellin, the call was from her dead sister, Diane. She said she was calling from heaven.

Were these miracles or the result of a cruel prank? Stay tuned, and we will uncover the truth together. Albom’s book offers a creative and thought-provoking illustration of the reality of heaven. However, we will turn to scripture as our primary source of truth, supplemented by tradition, logic, and our own experiences.

*The Lord builds his  
home in the heavens.*

**Amos 9:6**

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 beliefs about heaven and the afterlife.

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](#).

## “Feed Flint”


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# “Feed Flint”

Page 7



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](https://flintasbury.org/feed-flint-donate)**

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:

*Jonah, however, set out in the opposite direction in order to get away from the Lord.*

Jonah 1:3

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

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QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:

- 1 . Read Jonah 1:3. Is this a familiar story? Did you learn anything new when you read it this time? In what ways can you relate to Jonah?
2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Go tell. What is your favorite source for news? How reliable is this source for reporting the truth? In what ways are you telling others about God's love?
3. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for one another to be blessed by the Holy Spirit with greater courage.





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Album reminds us that while no one is certain who invented the telephone, the U.S. patent belongs to the Scottish-born Alexander Graham Bell.

Many believe he stole it away from an American inventor named Elisha Gray. Others maintain that an Italian named Manzetti or a Frenchman named Bourseul or a German named Reis or another Italian named Meucci deserves credit. What few dispute is that all these men, working in the mid-nineteenth century, explored the idea of transmitting vocal vibrations from one place to another. But the very first telephonic conversation, between Bell and Thomas Watson, standing in separate rooms, contained these words: Come here. I want to see you.

"Come here, I want to see you." These words describe the familiar feelings of telephone conversations between two people who long to be together. Their sentiment also reflects the promise of an afterlife where we're once again reunited with lost loved ones.

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.

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

<u>Sunday's</u>	<u>Pages</u>	<u>Chapters (Weeks)</u>
June 8	1 - 59	Weeks 1 to 6
June 15	60 - 101	Weeks 7 to 9
June 22	102 - 143	Weeks 10 & 11
June 29	144 - 186	Weeks 12 to 14
July 6	187 - 238	Weeks 15 & 16
July 13	239 - 308	Broadcast Day to 2 Months Later

We'll have a few books available for purchase. New copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$10.10, and used copies in good condition are usually under \$7, including shipping. This book is likely to 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](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org).

Pastor Tommy

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](http://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.

Refer people!!

Questions??? Call 810-239-3427  
or email [southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com](mailto:southflintsoupkitchen@gmail.com)



Meanwhile, Father Carroll, Priest of the Catholic Church in Coldwater, discovers that Tess Rafferty also received a phone call from heaven. Her testimony was important, both because it corroborated the miracle, and her call came before Katherine's first call. After all, reasoned Father Carroll, if God chose to allow such a miracle, then it seemed only right that God would start with a Catholic.

Ironically, Tess stopped attending services once she graduated from high school. She cited the judgment of the other attendees toward her mother, Ruth, a single mom.

Of course, other networks competed for exclusive content, and there would be ample opportunity for new developments to be seen by the rest of the world, waiting anxiously for news from Coldwater.

But for everyone who believed, there were one or more skeptics. One expert, Daniel Fromman, a scientist with Responsible Scientists International in Washington DC, said in an interview, "The contact these people are suggesting is not only impossible, it's laughable. This just isn't something people should take seriously." The scientist emphasized that just

because a call from heaven would comfort a person grieving the loss of a loved one, it doesn't make it real.

But, is it real? After all, there are miracles reported in scripture that are just as profound.

Matthew tells us about a time when the disciples of Jesus were crossing the lake in a boat without Him. We're told that the wind picked up and the boat was tossed about by the waves. It was dark out, between three and six o'clock in the morning.

Suddenly, they saw someone who appeared to be walking on the water. "It's a ghost!" they screamed with terror and fear. The ghost they saw was Jesus, who shouted to them, "Courage! It is I. Don't be afraid!"

Peter, still uncertain if he was willing to believe what he heard, replied, "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you."

"Is it real?" the disciples wondered. "Is it real?" Peter asked out loud.

"Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter climbs out of the boat and starts walking towards Jesus. Peter was actually walking on the water, we're told. But this doesn't seem impossible.

*What little faith you have? Why did you doubt?*

**Matthew 14: 22-33**

Then, all of a sudden, reality sets in for Peter. It's dark and the wind is strong. And, by the way, people don't walk on water; they sink. Matthew tells us that fear took over, and Peter began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once, Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of Peter, saying, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

Matthew finished his story by telling us that after Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind died down. "Truly, you are the Son of God!" the disciples said to Jesus.

Now it's our turn. "Was it real?" After all, I can barely get on top of the water on skis. I've never managed to walk on water. I sink like a rock.

The First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution reads as follows: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

This short paragraph is packed full of freedoms that we often take for granted. An uptick in attacks on these rights has left the majority of Americans on edge.

The American Civil Liberties Union estimated that over 5 million people participated in protests this past Saturday. Named the “No Kings” protest, the event was the largest in history by some estimates, surpassing the 2017 Women’s March.

Millions of our neighbors chose to exercise their First Amendment rights, which allow each of us to freely express our opinions, peacefully assemble, and petition our government with our grievances. ABC 12 News estimated that close to one thousand protesters gathered in Flint Township.

News travels fast in our connected world.

Most of us count on journalists to report the news. Collectively known as “the media,” these

professionals count on both free speech and access to news sources to do their job. Like most other professions, journalists historically banded together to strengthen and increase the value of their profession. Often, this includes the establishment of standards of conduct intended to hold each other to ethical standards.

The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, in its Preamble, states, “public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair, and thorough.”

The New York Times maintains and makes public its ethical standards for journalists. Accuracy of information is also central to their standards, as is acknowledging bias and avoiding conflicts of interest. I’m a loyal reader as a result of this publication’s track record of professionalism.

The media plays a pivotal role in public opinion. It is essential to determine whether your news source prioritizes truth-telling over pandering to those in power. That is, if you’re interested in knowing the truth rather than reinforcing what you want to believe.

In our companion book chapter for this week, the town of Coldwater is overrun with visitors, opportunity seekers, and the media.

Beginning with a single pebble, in this case, Katherine Yellin, who impacted those in immediate earshot, the congregation of Harvest of Hope Baptist Church, and was further energized by Elias Rowe.

However, it was Amy Penn of Nine Action News of Alpena who energized the ripples well beyond the town of Coldwater. When her follow-up story went viral, the world wanted to know more.

This past week, we learned a little more about Sullivan Harding, known by his friends as Sully. As the book begins, Sully is being released from prison. We learn that Sully was a Navy pilot who had to abandon his aircraft in an emergency just before landing at Coldwater Airport. Sully was good at what he did, but something went terribly wrong.

Recently, the news has been filled with stories of aerial mishaps. One in particular involved a mid-air collision between a commercial airliner and a military helicopter at Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C.

In Sully’s case, after being cleared for landing, his aircraft either hit or was struck by something, leaving the military jet unable to remain airborne. His only choice was to aim the aircraft away from any populated area and eject.

Sully wants to know the truth. His own life was turned upside down by a failure to discover the truth. News isn't news if the story is based on fiction.

Christians rely on the stories found in scripture as our primary source of truth about God. Most of us believe that God inspired scripture, and some of us claim God wrote what we read. Regardless of how we view each specific detail, our beliefs are informed mainly by how we interpret what we read or hear in scripture.

The Old Testament is primarily based on an oral tradition. It consists of stories passed down for generations before they could be written down and preserved. Moreover, we rely on experts who translate ancient manuscripts from their original language into a language we can understand. Along the way, decisions are made regarding what was intended by the original author.

None of this removes the truth of scripture. But it does make it more difficult to reach a consensus on details.

A prophet is a messenger or spokesperson for God. Like journalists, prophets report what God tells them. We're left to imagine whether their words are verbatim or retold as they heard them. Frankly, this is why I love reading scripture. There is so much humanity in the stories that I can personally relate to them, and I can try to imagine what it must have been like for the storyteller.

We sometimes learn the "call story" for the prophets themselves. In other words, how did they come to know that God chose them to speak on behalf of God? Scripture also includes interactions that offer insight into God, the prophets, and their relationship. This is often referred to as theology.

For example, a favorite often told to children is the story of Jonah. It's a wild story that includes Jonah being swallowed by a large fish. Perhaps a whale, but scripture isn't specific.

It all began when God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh to warn the people that they needed to make substantial changes in their standards of conduct. Jonah didn't want to do what God asked, so he went on a boat headed the other way.

The people of Nineveh were enemies of Jonah's people. And Jonah knew that if he could convince the people to change, God might forgive them. Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh rather than save it.

*Jonah, however, set out in the opposite direction in order to get away from the Lord.*

Jonah 1:3

I won't spoil the ending, although most of you already know how the story ends. Either way, I'm hoping you'll join us for episode three of our series, Heaven. This week, we're discussing why it's essential to share God's love and grace with others.

It's not just our First Amendment right, it's our sacred request from God to go tell others. And we do this every day in how we treat others. Occasionally, we may also use words.

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](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org).

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to [FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com](mailto: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 First Phone Call from Heaven*. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.

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Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Episode</u>
June 8	Heaven calling
June 15	Is this real?
June 22	Go tell
June 29	Validation
July 6	Manna
July 13	Busted?

The Prophet Amos tells us that the Lord builds his home in the heavens. And Jesus promised that He would prepare a place for each of us. Whether or not anyone has ever received a phone call from there, heaven is real.

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 First Phone Call from Heaven*. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.



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LET'S PLAY IT FORWARD—TOGETHER."

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Just like Peter, even the most faithful among us have doubts about one or more of the stories we're told or read. Sometimes it's healthy skepticism. Other times, unhelpful conspiracy theories crowd our minds.

Fortunately, Jesus is always with us, close enough to reach out and save us from sinking.

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.\*](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org)

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to [\*FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com,\*](mailto: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 First Phone Call from Heaven.* New York: HarperCollins, 2014.

Kate Yandell. *"RFK Jr. Denies Cuts to Scientific Research While Slashing Staff, Funding."* © Annenberg Public Policy Center, May 29, 2025. Retrieved from: [\*link\*](#)

*"Identifying conspiracy theories."* © European Commission, 2025. Retrieved from: [\*link\*](#)



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