

# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 5 Issue 30

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

## Hope (Artificial Beginnings)



Artificial things have been with us long before technology. Many of us remember the spray-on snow we used to decorate our windows at Christmas. We didn't buy those cans because we needed snow; we bought them because they promised a feeling—warmth, nostalgia, a sense of magic we wanted to recapture. After all, real snow melts as soon as you bring it in the house. But a few swirls of a can, and suddenly the living room looked like a holiday scene.

Page 2

## Love (Jesus was woke)



Across our communities, a profound ache has taken hold of daily life. People describe a fatigue they can't quite identify — the feeling that something valuable in our daily routines has been unraveling. Conversations seem more pointed. Neighbors feel more distant. Families are caught between anger and resignation.

It's as if we're watching the core of our shared moral compass shift gradually, one small degree at a time, and we worry about what the next degree might cost.

Page 15

WELCOME DECEMBER!!



**DONATE**

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Love	1
Hope	1
Hope	2
Coming up this week	3
In our prayers	3
Upcoming Worship/Book Club	4
Upcoming Worship Series	5
Feed Flint	6
Feed Flint	7
Life Group Questions	8
Support your Local Farm	9
Support your local farm	10
Book Club News	11
Agency	12
Ways to donate to SFSK	13
Hope	14
Love	15
Love	16
Hope	17



But the illusion broke the moment we touched it. The “snow” that sparkled from a distance crumbled into a chemical dust. It clung to our fingers, left a smell in the air, and never quite matched the expectation raised by the picture on the can. And its ingredients—propellants, plastics, residues—were far less harmless than we imagined.

We may not all describe it the same way, but we know the feeling: something essential is slipping from our grasp. We hunger for what is real.

Across our communities and towns—and increasingly across our nation—many people share a growing sense of disorientation. We live in an age where so much around us feels manufactured. Artificial images pass as photographs, political messages are crafted to manipulate rather than inform, and online interactions often substitute for real relationships. Even the news we consume is filtered through systems trained to hold our attention rather than tell the truth.

We begin this series with a simple but important word: artificial. By artificial, we mean what we create to imitate the real—functional, impressive, even beautiful at times—yet ultimately unable to give the truth, presence, or life that only the real can provide. Our world is filled

with such imitations. They surround us so completely that we often accept them without question, even when something in us still hungers for what is genuine.

And that hunger is everywhere. Many people describe a growing sense that modern life feels manufactured. We scroll past images engineered to influence us, hear news shaped for profit rather than truth, and engage in conversations that feel rehearsed rather than honest. Even our relationships can thin out when mediated entirely by screens. We are connected in ways unimaginable a generation ago, yet many feel strangely alone.

Spray-on snow was a small thing, but it teaches a larger truth. Artificial substitutes work just well enough to keep us from asking what we’re truly hungry for. They offer a moment of escape, a brief sense of comfort, a way to decorate the ache without addressing it. But like a body that keeps signaling hunger because its food lacks nutrients, our souls keep signaling hunger because the substitutes we grab for cannot nourish the places that hurt. The craving itself points beyond the artificial to something real—something we cannot manufacture.

And into this landscape, we now introduce another substitute that promises relief: artificial intelligence, better known as AI.

AI delivers on promises we’ve yet to imagine, yet AI can never deliver on the one promise we need to hear the most. Our souls keep whispering that something essential is still missing. Like a body signaling hunger because the nutrients are gone from our food, our spirits signal hunger because the artificial comforts we reach for cannot nourish the places that hurt.

And the more we try to fill ourselves with substitutes, the more we realize the substitute was never the point. The craving itself points to something deeper—something real—that we cannot manufacture. This is the quiet pain that runs beneath our towns and neighborhoods. We reach for things that promise relief but deliver only distraction. We settle for the artificial because we don’t know where else to turn.

And right here—into the small ache beneath our artificial comforts—God enters the artificial.

Advent begins here, in the honest recognition that we inhabit a world where appearance often matters more than substance and where artificiality has become normal. Yet Scripture insists that God meets us precisely in this place.



IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger  
 Sylvia Pittman  
 Mirium Watson  
 Brian DuFour

Fred Hahns  
 Jonathon Misner  
 Terrance Williams  
 Richard Oram

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE  
 HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux      Norma Buzzard  
 Nancy Elston

### COMING UP THIS WEEK:      NOVEMBER 30—DECEMBER 1

Dec 1      Mon      (We apologize for the convenience but Angel Closet at SFSK is closed at the present time. I will post when we reopen it back up.)

Dec 2      Tue      9am-until gone      Produce will be available each week, along with canned goods, until further notice

Dec 3      Wed

Dec 4      Thu

Dec 5      Fri

Dec 6      Sat

Dec 7      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 "Artificial Christmas"

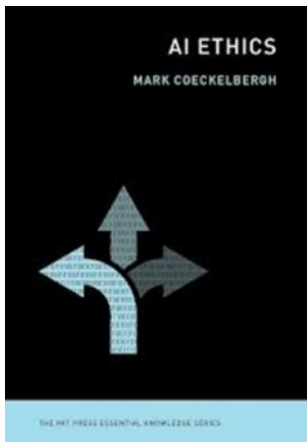


Christmas is supposed to feel real — filled with warmth, wonder, and worship. Yet for many, it doesn't. The decorations go up, the playlists return, and the obligations multiply, but something inside feels missing. Many of us go through the motions, trying to manufacture the Christmas spirit, and it all feels... artificial.

Over the past few years, the word "artificial" has taken on a greater meaning. Artificial intelligence has entered nearly every corner of our lives — the way we communicate, create, and even believe. It writes our words, shapes our opinions, curates our news, and sometimes replaces our work. For some, it's a marvel. For others, a menace. But for all of us, it raises deep spiritual questions:

Page 5

## Book Club News



This Advent, our series "Artificial Christmas" invites us to examine the incarnation — God made flesh — through the odd and probing light of our technological age. We're

surrounded by things that appear real but aren't: artificial intelligence, artificial relationships, artificial peace, and even artificial joy.

And yet, the story of Christmas reminds us that God's love is not artificial at all — it is embodied, relational, and redemptive.

So why talk about AI at Christmas? Because the incarnation is God's declaration that presence matters. In an age of digital substitutes,

artificial intelligence poses one of the most profound questions of faith: What does it mean to be truly human?

Advent prepares us for God-with-us — not God-as-code, or God-at-a-distance, but God entering real life, real struggle, and real love. Our series explores how that truth speaks to the world of algorithms and automation that increasingly shapes our daily lives.

## 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
	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

## Why AI Ethics Matters

We'll be reading *AI Ethics* by philosopher Mark Coeckelbergh as a companion book for this series. Coeckelbergh encourages us to look beyond headlines about artificial intelligence and explore the moral questions that define this technological era.

Page 11

## *Upcoming Worship Series — “Artificial Christmas”*

That’s what we’ll explore in our new Advent series, *Artificial Christmas*. In this series, we explore how humanity’s attempts to manufacture meaning, presence, and perfection through technology (especially AI) reveal our deep spiritual hunger for incarnation — for God with us.

Our series consists of six episodes over five weeks, beginning November 30. Together, we’ll follow the story of the incarnation through the lens of a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, technology, and pretense. And we’ll discover that the message of Christmas has never been more relevant: God doesn’t avoid what’s artificial — God enters it, redeems it, and makes it real again. Where our artificial creations offer simulation, God offers salvation. God redeems the artificial.

Why cover an artificial topic during the Season of Advent and Christmas? First, this series is for the curious. But this series is also for anyone who’s ever felt disconnected, disenchanted, or displaced by the pace of modern life. For those who scroll endlessly, hoping to feel something real again. For those who wonder if faith can still mean something in a digital age.

We’ll look deeper into how the Christmas story — the story of God becoming human — speaks into this moment. What happens to humanity in an age of machines? Can something artificial ever point us toward what’s real?

Advent is a season of anticipation — and this year, each week will draw us closer to the surprising ways God shows up where we least expect it. We start where creation and technology meet. Just as God breathed life into dust, humanity now breathes data into algorithms. But where is God in all this? We’ll uncover how even in artificial beginnings, divine intention still moves.

Artificial light brightens our homes, but cannot warm the soul. We’ll explore how the real Light still breaks through imitation — exposing truth in a world obsessed with image and illusion.

When everything feels manufactured — joy, peace, connection — how do we find authentic hope? In this series, we face our disillusionment and find that God’s hope doesn’t depend on perfect circumstances or unbroken faith.

At the heart of Advent is incarnation — the divine entering human form. But what happens when humanity builds new forms? We’ll ask how the Word made flesh still dwells among us, even in the circuitry of our modern lives.

On Christmas Eve is the night it all comes together — the mystery of God entering our world, born not into perfection but into the real and the artificial alike. God comes to redeem even the imitation, turning digital echoes into living voices of grace. We hope you’ll join us for a candlelight service starting at 6 pm.



## Upcoming Worship Series — “Artificial Christmas”

When Christmas ends, the lights come down — and we ask, Now what? What does it mean to live as people who believe that God rescues what’s artificial — not just once a year, but every day in an artificial world?

*For God so loved the world  
that God chose to live among  
us to save us all.*

John 3:16-17

Because the story of Christmas isn’t about escaping the artificial, it’s about a God who enters it. A God who brings light, love, and life to everything that has lost its way.

Join us in person or online for *Artificial Christmas: God Rescues the Artificial* — and rediscover the miracle of incarnation in a world that desperately needs something real. Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Theme &amp; Title</u>
One	Nov 30	Hope - Artificial beginnings
Two	Dec 7	Peace - Imitation light
Three	Dec 14	Joy - Synthetic hope
Four	Dec 21	Love - Incarnation in the machine
Five	Dec 24	With us - God redeems the artificial
Six	Dec 28	Love - After the upload

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

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. (ISBN 9780262538190).

## “Feed Flint”


Page 7





# “Feed Flint”

Page 8



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:**

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, and now light is shining on them. You have given them great joy.*

Isaiah 9:2-7

**NOTES FROM WORSHIP**

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**QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS:**

1. Read Isaiah 9:2-7 and the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Hope. Begin by naming the ache honestly—acknowledging the ways we've settled for artificial comforts instead of seeking the real presence of God.
2. This week, pay attention to recognizing when artificial solutions have numbed us rather than nourished us.
3. Reflect on this question: If God enters the artificial, where might He be entering our lives right now—and what real transformation might follow?
4. 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.



# Show Your Support For Your Local Farm

We need your help to purchase fencing to keep our furry friends from eating up all our crops and not sharing with us.

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- Text "FARMCDC"
- to 53-555
- Scan QR Code

### Donate Now



More Information :



(810) 235-0016



[funding@flintasbury.org](mailto:funding@flintasbury.org)

AI is no longer science fiction. It's writing our news, curating our social feeds, influencing our politics, and even shaping how we think about ourselves. We're told it will make our lives easier, but it also threatens to hollow out what makes us human — empathy, responsibility, relationships, and soul.

In his book, Coeckelbergh invites us to pause and ask:

What does it mean to act ethically in a world increasingly guided by machines?

How do we form moral communities when our technologies make decisions for us?

What happens to human dignity when we delegate our judgment to algorithms?

### Why This Author

Mark Coeckelbergh is not an alarmist. He's a philosopher who has spent years teaching ethics and technology at the University of Vienna, advising European policymakers, and engaging theologians, scientists, and artists alike. He approaches AI not as a problem to be solved, but as a mirror — one that reflects back our values, fears, and aspirations.

In *AI Ethics*, Coeckelbergh avoids jargon and ideology. Instead, he asks deeply human questions about power, vulnerability, and moral imagination. His work helps us see that the "ethics of AI" isn't really about the machines — it's about us: what kind of people we are becoming, and how faith can anchor us amid rapid change.

### Why You'll Want to Read Along

Reading *AI Ethics* alongside our weekly messages will give you a vocabulary and vision for navigating this new world with faith, humility, and courage. It will challenge easy assumptions and help us discern what it means to be a community that values both innovation and integrity.

As we'll explore in worship, God's redemption extends even to the artificial — not by erasing technology, but by restoring the humanity within it. Coeckelbergh's insights equip us to be wise stewards in a digital age, shaping technology for love and justice instead of fear and profit.

Our vision at Asbury comes from how we collectively interpret scripture.

***We envision a church in love with God, one another, and our neighbors, evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood.***

This Advent, that transformation means asking how we might love in a world remade by machines — how we can stay human in an age that tempts us to settle for the artificial. If you choose to follow along, I suggest using the following schedule:

<u>Sunday's</u>	<u>Chapters</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Nov 30	Ch 1 - 2	Hope
Dec 7	Ch 3 - 4	Grace
Dec 14	Ch 5 - 6	Joy
Dec 21	Ch 7 - 8	Love
Dec 24	Ch 9 - 10	Incarnation
Dec 28	Ch 11 - 12	Renewal

I invite you to take your *Artificial Christmas* experience deeper with our weekly *Questions for Life Groups*. Each week pairs passages from our companion with Scripture, reflection questions, and prayer prompts. Our goal is to help you make each week's message a part of your reality. The guide can be used for personal study or small-group discussion.

We'll have a few new books available for purchase at \$11 each. Additional copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$11.18, and used copies in good condition start around \$8. 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](http://FlintAsburyChurch.org).

Pastor Tommy

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. (ISBN 9780262538190).



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)

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, and new light is shining on them. You have given them great joy.*

Isaiah 9:2-7

Isaiah speaks to a people who also felt surrounded by shadows: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.” Artificial light can brighten a room, but spiritual darkness remains unchanged until God speaks. Isaiah proclaims that the real Light—the Light that the artificial cannot imitate—comes from God alone. And this Light doesn’t wait for us to escape the artificial. Instead, it enters our world precisely as it is.

Here is the promise: God does not stand far off from our artificial world. God steps into it. Into our substitutes, our disappointments, our longing, our ache. The real enters the artificial so that the artificial no longer defines us.

John, the fourth Evangelist, takes Isaiah’s promise and directly connects it to Jesus, stating even more boldly: “The Word became a human being and lived among us,” while reminding us that the Word is God. Not artificial. Not imitation. Not symbolic. It’s real flesh. Real presence. Real love.

This is the hope we carry into Advent: God enters the artificial—so that we don’t have to stay there.

In a world full of illusions—ancient or modern—God’s answer is embodiment. God comes not as an idea or an image, but as a person with breath, heartbeat, and vulnerability. When everything feels unreal, the incarnation stands as God’s declaration that truth, presence, and humanity still matter.

Jesus is God’s answer to every artificial substitute we’ve used to silence our hunger. Where the artificial promises something it cannot deliver, Jesus delivers what the artificial cannot promise: life, fullness, peace, and presence.

What would our world look like if we took this seriously? One thing is sure: we would reclaim the depth that so easily slips from our grasp. Families might rediscover the value of presence that isn’t mediated by screens. Churches could become sanctuaries of honesty where people are genuinely seen rather than curated. Our civic life might resist the temptations of spectacle, choosing wisdom and integrity over whatever feeds outrage or fear.

Advent invites us to imagine—and practice—a more grounded way of living, one shaped by God’s insistence on the real.

Our companion book for this season, *AI Ethics*, opens with a reminder that technological power now outpaces our moral maturity. Artificial intelligence has become one of the primary ways many people encounter the world. These systems filter what we see, shape what we believe, and in subtle ways redefine what counts as real.

The author, Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, warns that when a society loses its shared sense of reality, it becomes vulnerable to manipulation, to confusion, and to fear. His observation is not meant to alarm us, but to awaken us to our calling. Christians cannot escape this artificial age, but we are invited to live wisely within it.

Coeckelbergh reminds us that AI systems don’t simply imitate human abilities—they also shape our behavior, our decisions, and even our sense of self. In subtle ways, AI can encourage us to accept imitation for reality. Convenience becomes a kind of comfort.

Much of our ache stems from witnessing cruelty take hold in public life. Our current administration has doubled down on policies that use suffering as a weapon — starving families by cutting SNAP benefits, stripping food support from children through limited school lunch programs, and forcing millions to choose food and shelter over healthcare, as once again, trying to dismantle the Affordable Care Act without a viable replacement.

Immigration enforcement not only regulates borders but also increases hardship for already desperate families. These choices do not reflect responsible governance or economic necessity. They are designed to use cruelty as a tool to make life harder for the vulnerable. And people see it. They feel it. Even those who supported this administration are unsettled by the direction it has taken.

Families in our churches and communities are asking the same questions: How did we get here? Why does cruelty feel normal? Why does no one in power seem moved by the suffering of ordinary people? These are not partisan questions. They are moral questions. And they reveal a deep spiritual crisis — a crisis created whenever love withdraws from the public square and leaves power unchecked.

Researchers warned us for years that something like this was coming. Brené Brown's work on shame, fear, and dehumanization anticipated the moment we live in now. She notes that when leaders model contempt, followers learn to mirror it. When public rhetoric frames entire groups of people as problems rather than neighbors, cruelty becomes an acceptable political strategy. Her research affirms what many feel in their bodies: this climate is not just stressful — it is spiritually exhausting.

People are not imagining the tension; they are responding to a documented pattern of social disconnection and moral injury.

Political scientists and ethicists echo this concern. Studies published over the past year show rising support for punitive policies even when they are ineffective; growing acceptance of violence as a political tool; and a measurable decline in empathy, especially in communities most immersed in the rhetoric of fear. These findings validate an essential truth: people are not alone in feeling that our public life is drifting toward something harsher, colder, less human.

When love refuses to act, cruelty fills the gap.

So many people today are longing for leaders who name the pain honestly and respond with moral clarity. They are longing for a love that doesn't excuse cruelty and doesn't just look away. We've come to realize that the truth is becoming impossible to ignore. But whenever love refuses to act, something else fills the space. And in our current moment, what fills that space is cruelty, and we all need a kind of love that doesn't retreat.

State Representative James Talaric, who plans to unseat Senator John Cornyn in Texas, articulated this truth in a recent interview on *Pod Save America*. He delivered his comments in a way that resonates deeply with our moment. He said, "Love is sometimes confrontational... It does whatever it takes to stand up for the vulnerable."

The Representative reminds us that Jesus did not stay silent when the powerful preyed on the weak. Jesus entered the seat of power and overturned the tables of injustice, not out of rage, but out of fierce, protective love. That is the kind of love Christians are called to embody: not passive, not polite, and willing to act courageously.

Love acts with courage.

This is why this message matters now, in this season, in this country. We cannot pretend that the consequences of political choices are abstract. Families are being harmed. Healthcare is being stripped. Groceries are rising. And compassion is being redefined as weakness. We are watching, in real time, what happens when leadership is shaped more by grievance and ego than by grace.

And yet — scripture, tradition, and the lived witness of Jesus tell us that another way is possible, by speaking with great clarity into this moment.

It's easy to forget that Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, often relegated to weddings, is much more than sentimental poetry. Paul wrote these truths to a fractured, angry, anxious church. It is a letter to a community that had begun to value power, winning arguments, and spiritual prestige more than mutual care.

Corinth was a booming port city. Wealthy, diverse, socially stratified, and deeply influenced by Roman patronage culture. The young Christian community reflected that complexity. They were gifted, enthusiastic, and sincere, yet deeply divided. Factions had formed around different leaders, and those divisions threatened to fracture the church.

Social status, spiritual competition, theological disagreements, and ethical confusion were all pulling them apart. The church was vibrant but chaotic. Full of potential, but on the verge of collapsing under its own dysfunction.

When love refuses to act, cruelty fills the gap.

But in his letter, Paul doesn't tell the people to "feel more love." That's too passive. Paul tells them to act with courageous love, in ways that protect their community from collapse. Biblical love is not sentiment. It is courageous. Biblical love chooses to resist cruelty with a different kind of power.

Paul's entire letter is a testimony to courageous love. A love that confronts division, protects the vulnerable, and insists on truth even when truth is costly. When love refuses to act, cruelty fills the gap. Therefore, we must pursue a love that acts with courage.

Those reading Gilead alongside this series encounter another model of courageous love—a love quieter than prophetic confrontation, but no less bold. Reverend John Ames, writing in the final years of his life, wrestles with what it means to love faithfully in a world marred by conflict, injustice, and

human frailty. His love is not naïve. It is a love shaped through loss, disappointment, and the painful awareness of his own limitations and mortality.

*Meanwhile, these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.*

1 Corinthians 13

But Ames refuses to let cynicism define his final word. Instead, he writes with a tenderness that holds truth and grace together. He blesses a world that has not always blessed him. He extends forgiveness where resentment would have been easier. He chooses compassion toward the prodigal Boughton son, even when his past raises every alarm in him. Ames does not mistake gentleness for weakness; he understands it as a form of strength that resists the easy temptation to withhold love from those who have wounded him.



Automation becomes a sort of trust. We slowly trade the unpredictable richness of real relationships for the smooth polish of artificial interaction.

And as our series unfolds, we will explore what it means to live as people of the Light in an age of imitation—how to use technology without being used by it; how to pursue truth in a world full of imitation; and how to find our grounding not in the artificial but in the God who became flesh for us.

Episode one is our starting point, but our journey continues as we ask together: If God enters the artificial, where might He be entering our lives right now—and what real transformation might follow?

So where do we begin? We begin by naming the ache honestly—acknowledging the ways we've settled for artificial comforts instead of seeking the real presence of God. We begin by paying attention—recognizing where artificial solutions have numbed us instead of nourishing us.

We begin by opening ourselves to Advent's promise: The Real has come. The Light has dawned. God enters the artificial.

Advent encourages us to begin with truthfulness about our own lives and to notice where artificial substitutes have replaced embodied presence or real connection. It invites us to small, intentional acts of grounding: a conversation without distractions, a shared meal, a moment of quiet reflection, or an act of care that cannot be automated or optimized. As artificial systems increasingly mediate our attention, Advent asks us to cultivate discernment—to verify before sharing, to pause before reacting, and to choose depth over speed.

This year, for Advent, we begin with a simple proclamation: we live in a world shaped by the artificial, but we worship a God who enters the real. The incarnation is God's response to our longing, reminding us that hope does not emerge from manufactured things.

Instead, hope was born in a manger—in the most uncrated way possible—and grows into a light the darkness cannot overcome. Advent invites us to follow that light, trusting that God rescues the artificial, not by avoiding it, but by transforming it with presence and truth.

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

Dr. Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020. (ISBN 9780262538190).

In the final chapters, as he blesses Jack Boughton on the street, Ames demonstrates what courageous love looks like in its most vulnerable form: a love that chooses mercy over fear, hope over suspicion, generosity over self-protection. He blesses Jack not because Jack deserves it, but because love demands it. In Ames, we see the kind of courage that doesn't always flip tables—but still changes lives.

This, too, is courageous love: the kind that doesn't make headlines, but quietly heals what is broken. A love that acts with courage.

And this is where Gilead meets our own moment. The book invites us to imagine a faith that holds firm against cruelty—not by mirroring cruelty, but by embodying a deeper, steadier strength. Ames reminds us that courageous love is not always dramatic; sometimes it is a choice we make day after day, in the shadows of disappointment and uncertainty. It is a love rooted in God's faithfulness rather than our own control.

Courageous love is not only an ancient witness or a literary illustration—it is something we are seeing lived out in real time.

The survivors pressing for the release of the Epstein files have shown extraordinary

courage. They are demanding truth in the face of enormous pressure, cultural backlash, political obstruction, and in some cases, real personal danger. Many know that speaking publicly risks harassment, character attacks, and even threats from those determined to protect the powerful. Yet they continue.

One survivor captured the heart of this entire message when she said, "We are not here for revenge. We are here because telling the truth is an act of love—for ourselves, for the girls who were hurt, and for the girls who will come after us."

This is what courageous love looks like: Truth-telling as protection. Truth-telling as solidarity. Truth-telling as the refusal to let cruelty have the last word.

Their witness names the risk: whenever love retreats, cruelty advances. But their courage also shows what is possible when ordinary people refuse to remain silent. Their determination mirrors the very call Paul gives to the church in Corinth: pursue love—not a sentimental love, not a quietist love, but a protective, truth-aligned, justice-seeking love.

Their example is not about political speculation; it is about moral clarity. They show us what it looks like to resist cruelty

without dehumanizing those responsible—a line Paul insists the church must not cross, and Jesus himself modeled.

This week, we turn to the kind of love that does not shrink back: courageous love. Love that makes room for truth-telling. Love that defends the vulnerable. Love that stays grounded in compassion while refusing to tolerate cruelty. This is the path the early church walked. It is the path Jesus walked. And it is the path our communities need now.

In a season when cruelty too easily fills the space left by passive love, we are called back to the heart of our faith. The way of Jesus is not withdrawal or silence, but a courageous love that protects, tells the truth, and seeks the good of the vulnerable.

As we move toward Advent, may we become a community shaped by that love—steady, compassionate, grounded in truth, and unafraid to act. A love that does not retreat. A love that restores. A love that refuses to let cruelty have the final word.

Remember, Love acts with courage.

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 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 companion book for this series is Marilynne Robinson. Gilead. NY: Picador, 2004.

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## Important Updates:

Dear Friends of Asbury CDC,

As *Giving Tuesday* approaches, we are reminded of the incredible generosity that helps Asbury CDC continue its mission to serve our neighbors. But today, we are reaching out with an *urgent* need that simply cannot wait.

Due to the ongoing **Federal government shutdown**, many of our Flint residents are being hit hard. Some government employees have been **furloughed or are working without pay**, and **SNAP/EBT benefits have not been renewed** for numerous families. As a result, more households than ever are turning to us for help.

Through our **Help Center, Food Pantry, and Soup Kitchen**, Asbury CDC is working tirelessly to make sure no one in our community goes hungry. But the growing demand has placed a tremendous strain on our resources — and we need your help to keep up.

Your gift today will directly provide food, supplies, and hope for those facing uncertainty. While Giving Tuesday is around the corner, our neighbors need us *now*.

Please consider making a donation today so we can continue to stand in the gap for Flint families who need it most.

Thank you for your compassion and continued support. Together, we can ensure that no one in our community is left hungry or forgotten during this difficult time.

With gratitude,  
**Kimberly Sims**  
Finance Director  
Asbury Community Development Corporation

Our mailing address is:  
Asbury CDC  
1653 Davison Rd., Flint, MI. 48506

## GCORR Celebrates the Ratification of Constitutional Amendments Advancing Equity, Inclusion, and Racial Justice in The United Methodist Church

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

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November 5, 2025

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) celebrates the ratification of four constitutional amendments that mark a historic step forward in The United Methodist Church's ongoing journey toward inclusion, equity, and justice. These amendments reaffirm the denomination's commitment to becoming a truly worldwide and inclusive church—one that reflects the image of God in the rich diversity of its people and contexts.

Among the four newly ratified constitutional amendments is the complete revision of [Article V on Racial Justice](#), an amendment originally proposed by GCORR. This ratified Article V reaffirms The United Methodist Church's biblical and theological conviction that every person is created in the image of God and is of sacred worth. It names racism as sin—a direct contradiction of God's law of love—and calls the Church to embody a deeper commitment to justice, equity, and reconciliation.

Building on a global understanding of the harm caused by racism, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy, the amendment acknowledges the Church's own historical complicity and the ongoing impact of racial injustice across generations. "Article V moves beyond recognition to action. It commits the denomination to eradicate racism in all its forms, dismantle systems of privilege and oppression, and lead transformation within both the Church and society through education, advocacy, and accountability," said Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, General Secretary of GCORR. "It positions the Church to live out its mission as a diverse and inclusive body that reflects the kin-dom of God—a community where all people are valued, loved, and free to flourish."

The ratified amendments include:

1. **Regionalization:** Reorganizes the worldwide United Methodist Church into geographically based regional conferences, replacing the term "Central Conference" and affirming equality among regions across the global connection.
2. **Paragraph 4, Article IV – Inclusion in Membership:** Expands the Church's constitutional commitment to inclusivity by adding "gender" and "ability" to the list of characteristics that cannot be used to bar individuals from church membership.

3. **Paragraph 35, Article IV – Educational Requirements for Voting Rights:** Clarifies the educational requirements for clergy voting for delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences, ensuring fairness and consistency in representation.
4. **Article V – Racial Justice:** A comprehensive revision strengthening the denomination's constitutional stance on racial justice, originally proposed by GCORR, affirming that racism is incompatible with Christian teaching and that the Church must work toward equity and reconciliation in all its structures and relationships.

**The full text of Article V - Racial Justice reads:** "The United Methodist Church proclaims that from God's goodness and love, God created all persons as God's unique and beloved children. Racism opposes God's law, goodness and love and diminishes the image of God in each person. Fueled by white privilege, white supremacy and colonialism, the sin of racism has been a destructive scourge on global society and throughout the history of The United Methodist Church. It continues to destroy our communities, harm persons, obstruct unity and undermine God's work in this world. Racism must be eradicated. Therefore, The United Methodist Church commits to confronting and eliminating all forms of racism, racial inequity, colonialism, white privilege and white supremacy, in every facet of its life and in society at large."

The Disability Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church, under the care of GCORR, also celebrated the passage of Article IV on inclusion, emphasizing its impact on accessibility and belonging across the denomination:

"As co-chairs of the Disability Ministries Committee, we rejoice in the passage of Paragraph 4, Article IV, adding the words 'gender' and 'ability' to the Constitution of the UMC! This amendment will help ensure that people with disabilities are no longer excluded from the church. This amendment recognizes that disabled people belong as full members in the body of Christ. This is in keeping with the mission of the DMC to lead the denomination in creating a culture where people with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of worship, leadership, ministry, and mission through advocacy, education, and empowerment. We look forward to all the ways that God will continue to work in and through our UMC to bring about inclusion and true belonging for those with disabilities and those who accompany them!"

— *Rev. Melinda Baber and Rev. Mimi Luebbers, Co-Chairs, Disability Ministries Committee of The UMC*

As The United Methodist Church continues to live into these constitutional commitments, GCORR stands ready to equip, challenge, and support the Church in building a beloved community rooted in equity, dignity, and grace for all.

###

About GCORR

The General Commission on Religion and Race of the United Methodist church equips and empowers individuals and institution to engage in vital conversations, develop intercultural competency, and ensure institutional equity throughout the Church and society. Learn more at [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org)

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