

# Dranesville UMC Newsletter

April 2026

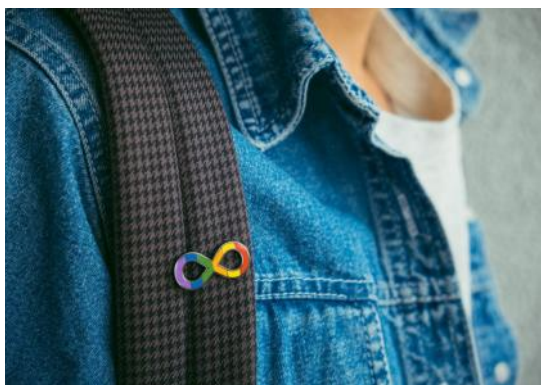
## *World Autism Awareness Day*

April 2nd is World Autism Awareness day. On February 8th, Karen Rizzo invited one of her students, Nisa Ahmed, to speak about mental health issues. Nisa helped us understand autism in more personal and encouraging ways. I am personally grateful to Karen for inviting Nisa and also to Nisa for her poised and courageous presentation. We were truly blessed.

After some more research I found out that Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder, is a natural variation in how the human brain is wired rather than a "broken" way of being. As a neurodivergent condition, it means the brain processes sensory information, social cues, and language differently than what society considers typical. This can lead to intense focus on specific interests, a deep need for routine, or a different way of communicating that is more direct and literal. While some things like loud noises or unwritten social rules can feel overwhelming, being autistic also often comes with unique strengths in pattern recognition, honesty, and deep empathy for things others might overlook.

I also found out that if you want to support a friend or neighbor who is autistic, the best thing you can do is lead with patience and drop the expectations of how they "should" act. Instead of relying on social expectations, meet them where they are and value their way of connecting.

This might mean giving them extra time to process a question before they answer or being okay with hanging out in "parallel play," where you both do your own thing in the same room. Being a safe person



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**Come worship with us  
on Sundays at 10:30 a.m.**

**In the Sanctuary  
or virtually via Zoom**

**Coffee hour following  
worship via Zoom or live**

**Adult Sunday School  
at 9:00 a.m.**

*If you would like to join,  
please contact us at  
[office@dranesvilleumc.org](mailto:office@dranesvilleumc.org).*

## World Autism Awareness Day

means listening when they explain their needs and not taking it personally if they need to step away to recharge when things get too bright or noisy.

One of the patterns I recognized is “stimming.” It refers to repetitive physical movements, sounds, or words that help a person manage their emotions or process the world around them. While everyone does it to some degree, like tapping a pencil during a long meeting or pacing while on a phone call, it is much more common and essential for people who are neurodivergent.

For someone with autism, stimming acts as a natural tool for self-regulation. It can be a way to let out extra energy when they are excited, a way to soothe themselves when they feel anxious, or even a way to focus when there is too much noise or light in the room. Common examples include rocking back and forth, flapping hands, repeating certain phrases, or spinning objects. Instead of being something that needs to be “fixed,” stimming is usually a helpful sign that a person is simply taking care of their own sensory needs in the moment.

As a church we’re always looking to be more inclusive to move beyond just being friendly and start being accessible. We’ve been a family to those with this condition. And I am blessed that this ministry has been going on way before I came to this church. Please continue our patient, loving and caring ways to be a compassionate and welcoming community of faith to everyone.

Pastor Keith

## Bible Study

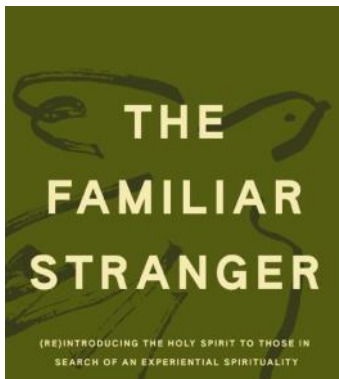
### Tuesday and Thursday Bible Study

[Dranesvilleumc.org/connect](https://dranesvilleumc.org/connect)

Tuesday Evening: 7pm OR Thursday Morning: 10am

*Resumes April 21st and 23rd*

The story of **Jonah** has great theological import. It concerns a disobedient prophet who rejected his divine commission, was cast overboard in a storm and swallowed by a great fish, rescued in a marvelous manner, and returned to his starting point. Now he obeys and goes to Nineveh, the capital of Israel’s ancient enemy.



## Adult Sunday School

### *The Familiar Stranger* by Tyler Staton

In *The Familiar Stranger*, Tyler Staton reintroduces this oft-neglected Person of the Trinity, tracing the story of the Holy Spirit as it unfolds throughout the Bible, and inviting believers to close the gap between what Scripture reveals about the Holy Spirit and their lived experience.

Join us in the library or on Zoom at 9:00 for this six-week series starting Sunday April 12, 2026.

# Fellowship

## Lunch with the Evergreen Group:



**April 12th at 12:00 pm in Sterling**  
at The Bungalow Lakehouse Restaurant.

Please see Pete Hause for details and  
to RSVP or call 703-430-7166.

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## Join the Mowing Team

Spring is around the corner, and we are looking for volunteers to help with the mowing of our church grounds. DUMC has all the equipment needed, a riding mower, small mower (like you have at home), string trimmer, and edger. By having volunteers taking care of the church grounds, DUMC is saving over \$30,000 (estimate from a landscaping company several years ago). We really need volunteers for the small mower, string trimmer and edger. In the past we have had 3 mowing teams, so everyone mows every third week.



If you are interested, please contact V.J. Meleski at [vjmeleski2@gmail.com](mailto:vjmeleski2@gmail.com). Give him your name, email address, phone number, and what pieces of equipment you are willing to work with.

# *Amy Grant and Mental Health Challenges*

By Rev. Keith Lee

Amy Grant has long been known for her warm voice and steady presence in Christian music. She is one of my favorite Christian musicians. In recent years, she has also become quietly open about something many people in the church wrestle with but do not always name out loud— mental and emotional struggles.

Her experience did not come out of nowhere. It was tied to real life events that shook her sense of stability. In 2020, she went through open heart surgery for a rare condition. Not long after, in 2022, she was in a serious bicycle accident that resulted in a brain injury. The recovery was slow and uncertain. She shared that one of the hardest parts was not just the physical healing, but the mental impact. She found herself dealing with depression in a way she had not before.

For someone who had always relied on a sharp mind and strong memory, this was deeply unsettling. She described moments where she felt present in conversations, but could not respond the way she used to. That gap between who she had been and who she felt she was becoming created frustration and sadness. There were days when she pulled back from normal life and stayed home, trying to make sense of it all.

Her struggle also included anxiety and stress that built over time. A long public career, combined with health challenges, created a kind of quiet pressure. Nothing dramatic on the surface, but enough to weigh on her. It is the kind of experience many people understand. Life shifts, health changes, and suddenly the ground feels less steady.

What stands out is how she has chosen to cope.

First, she has been honest about her emotions. She has talked about letting herself cry and not pretending everything is fine. That kind of honesty can be difficult, especially in faith communities where sometimes it's not discussed much.

Second, she has learned to be patient with herself. Recovery has not been quick. She has had to accept that healing takes time, both mentally and physically. Instead of forcing herself back to where she was, she adjusted to where she is.

Third, she has made practical changes. She writes things down to help with memory. She pays closer attention to her habits and overall health. These are simple steps, but they help her regain a sense of control and stability.

She also leans on the people around her. Her husband and close relationships have been an important part of her support system. She does not carry the weight alone. She has a community of friends and church members to help.

Perhaps most importantly, she has reframed how she sees her experience. She has spoken about finding small gifts even in difficult seasons. Not in a way that ignores pain, but in a way that looks for meaning within it.

I'm so glad I ran across her story. I was encouraged that her situation is not about having everything figured out. It is about walking through a hard season with honesty, patience, and support. Her story reminds us that struggle does not mean failure. She has given us a wonderful and applicable Christian perspective to mental health well-being challenges.



Even though the plates have been cleared  
and the Palm Sunday brunch is behind us,  
the spirit of giving continues!

If you were moved by the fellowship last Sunday and would like to further support the vital work we do, you can still contribute to the **various missions of Dranesville UMC**. Your generosity fuels our community outreach and helps us be a light for those in need, both locally and globally.

#### HOW TO GIVE

- Online:** Visit our website's giving portal and select "Missions" from the drop-down menu.
- By Mail:** Send a check to the church office with "Missions" written in the memo line.
- In Person:** Drop your donation in the offering plate during this Sunday's service.

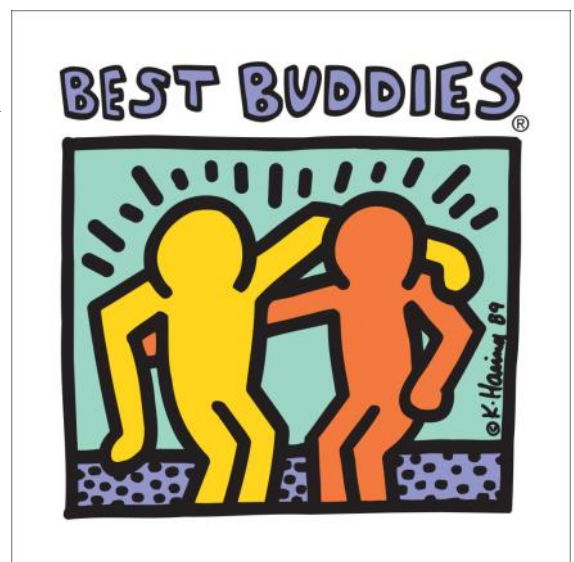
Thank you for your continued heart for service and for making our Palm Sunday celebration so meaningful!



## Support the Best Buddies Friendship Walk April 25th:

Tom Hitchings will be participating in the Best Buddies one-mile Friendship Walk in Washington, DC on April 25th. The walk held on the iconic National Mall, highlights supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, through meaningful connections and friendships. Tom welcomes anyone interested in joining him in the walk or supporting him through love donations. Please write checks to DUMC with Best Buddies on the memo line.

The event is a flat walk route, starting at 7th and Madison Dr (on the mall between the Natural History Museum and National Gallery of Art). Opening ceremonies start at 9:00 am and the walk begins at 10:00am. Activities surrounding the walk will take place until 12:30pm. See Tom Hitchings, [thghitchings@gmail.com](mailto:thghitchings@gmail.com), or Beth Hitchings, [layleader@dranesvilleumc.org](mailto:layleader@dranesvilleumc.org), if you are interested.



# Community Pot Luck

March 18th "St Patrick's Day"



## THIS MONTH: April 15th DUMC Springtime Potluck

**42** SPRINGTIME  
**42** BASEBALL! APR 15  
**42** PARTY POTLUCK Wed 6pm  
141 HR  
761 RBI  
.313 BA  
BRING YOUR FAVORITE BALLPARK CUISINE  
Sign up in the Fellowship Hall



**THANK YOU DRANESVILLE CONGREGATION!**

**\$670 IN GIFT CARDS FOR MARCH LINK COLLECTION**

**EVEN 4 OTHERS COLLECTION**

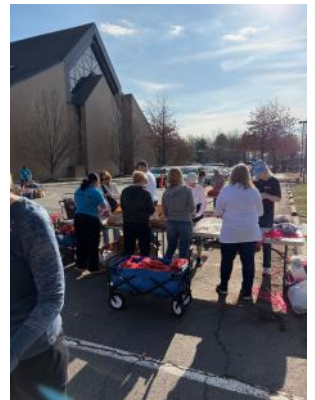
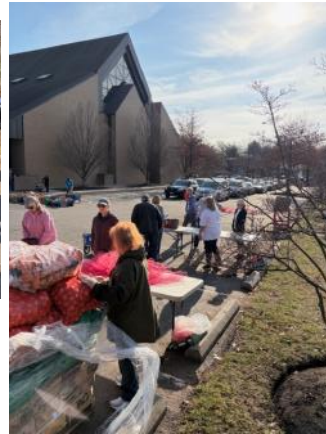
**ON APRIL 26TH!!**

We will again have our bi-monthly collection for LINK Against Hunger. Please leave donations in the big wooden box in front of the office before church on Sunday, April 23rd. They will be counted and transported to the LINK location after church.

Some of the top needs are Jelly, Dried beans, Canned fruit, Canned corn, peas, carrots, potatoes, Boxed potatoes, Toilet paper, Paper towels, Cleaning products, and personal Toiletry items.

# Mobile Food Pantry: Next: April 14th

Register online for the latest updates. Join us on the **2nd Tuesday of each month** (light rain or shine) from 9:30 am – 12 pm (or until the food runs out) in the rear parking lot at Christ the Redeemer Catholic Church. Join Team Dranesville and wear your Dranesville UMC T-shirts while packing food for those in need.





# College Connections



## Graduation Sunday is on June 7 or 14<sup>th</sup>

Calling all graduates! Graduation Sunday will be on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Let us know if you have a high school, college or grad-school graduate receiving their degree this spring. We will highlight them in our newsletter and in the bulletin that Sunday including a photo! Contact [Linda, strahans@cox.net](mailto:Linda_strahans@cox.net) or the [office](#) if you have any questions.

- Please confirm **ASAP** which of two possible dates a graduate might be able to attend our presentation and brunch. Options are **June 7<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>**.
- Please provide information (by the **end of April**) and a graduation photo (by the **end of May**) for the June Newsletter and Bulletin for the church service.

Congratulations on arriving at this joyful milestone! Dranesville is delighted to celebrate with you.

Grace to you,  
Linda Strahan College Connections

## DUMC Book Club—May 13th

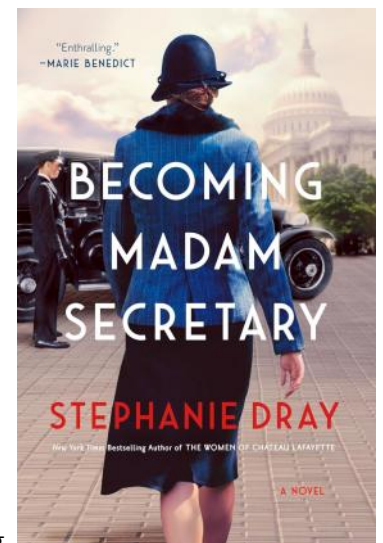
Dear Dranesville Book Group participants (and those who like to read along...):

A big thank you to those who could attend our last gathering and a special shout out to Tanya for the delicious cookies! We had a great discussion (in person and on Zoom) with the author Rebecca Druff, who gave us such charming and informative insights on her historical fiction account of Robert Smalls, a former slave who daringly escaped to freedom in *Trouble the Water*. We learned that Rebecca is an ordained United Methodist minister, which explained why grace was its own character in the book.

We plan to meet on May 13th at 7:00 pm (in the library and on Zoom). We will be reading *Becoming Madam Secretary* by Stephanie Dray (see below). We also plan to read *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi as soon as it becomes more accessible via the public library! Let Beth Hitchings know if you have any questions at [layleader@dranesvilleumc.org](mailto:layleader@dranesvilleumc.org)

### *Becoming Madam Secretary* by Stephanie Dray (Thanks for the recommendation, Jinny!)

The novel follows Frances Perkins from her early years in New York City's Hell's Kitchen to her pivotal role as the first female U.S. cabinet member, Secretary of Labor under Franklin D. Roosevelt. The story blends historical events with fictionalized personal interactions, offering a vivid portrayal of Perkins' determination, intelligence and resilience.





Below is an update on what Troop 1018 is doing this past month!

The scouts had a wonderful March month of events. We camped at Elizabeth Furnace out by Front Royal and did an 11 mile hike to the top of Signal Nob. This was a long and strenuous hike, but the scouts did a great job. We also welcomed 10 new Cub Scouts who crossed over to the troop in March. They bring a lot of energy and excitement about scouts. In April we are going to complete the Fishing Merit Badge and do a campout on private property with a great fishing lake.

**If you know a young person between the ages of 11 and 17 who would be interested in adventures, friendship, and learning leadership with the troop, they are welcome to join us each Monday night at the church. Our meetings are from 7:30pm to 9:00pm. Reach Bill below.**

Bill Malyszka  
Scoutmaster Troop 1018  
scoutmaster@troop1018.org  
(571) 241-1061



## SAVE THESE DATES

- **April 21st** – Volunteer Appreciation Event
- **July 18th** – Kids Day at The Closet (Lots of toys!)
- **September 5th** – Annual Fashion Show
- **October (Date TBD)** – Everything Christmas Sale
- **December 12th** – WINTER MARKT





# Dranesville

## United Methodist Church

*“Making disciples of Jesus Christ by feeding body, mind and soul.”*

### April

- 2 Maundy Thursday Service 7pm
- 3 Good Friday – 8am-6pm Open for Prayer
- 5 7 AM Easter Morning Service  
10:30 am Easter Traditional Service with Communion
- 11 I LOVE My Church Day 9-12pm
- 12 New Sunday School series begins  
Evergreen Lunch at 12:00 pm
- 14 Mobile Food Pantry
- 15 Wednesday Community Dinner 6pm
- 25 Best Buddies Friendship Walk
- 26 Even 4 Others Collection

GIVE Online!



### May

- 1 Holy Communion
- 10 Mother’s Day
- 12 Mobile Food Pantry
- 17 Evergreen Lunch at 12:00 pm
- 19 Wednesday Community Dinner 6pm
- 26 Grocery Card Collection for LINK

### Every Week Join Us In Study and Prayer:

[Dranesvilleumc.org/connect](http://Dranesvilleumc.org/connect)

- ◆ Sundays at 9:00 a.m. Adult Sunday School in person and via Zoom
- ◆ Tuesdays at 8:00 a.m. Prayer group is meeting virtually via Zoom
- ◆ Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. and Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. Bible Study is held via Zoom

To get connected to any of the virtual meetings, please contact the church office by e-mailing [office@dranesvilleumc.org](mailto:office@dranesvilleumc.org) or leave a message at 703-430-3137 anytime.

**Office hours: Tuesday—Friday 8:30 am—12:30 pm**