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Rev. shares harmony of science and faith

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Pastor Mari Larson, right, preaches at the Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church in Clarkdale, which will be hosting a series of religion and science lectures. The lectures, now in their ninth year, are spearheaded by Ed Womack, who has organized four different lecturers, with the goal of showing that science and religion do not need to be enemies.

Finding common ground between faith and reason can be a tricky task, but Religion and Science Lecture Series co-organizer Ed Womack said he embraced realms of thought — even while serving as a Methodist pastor for 60 years.

“I’ve never felt a conflict between science and religion, so when I heard about the Clergy Letter Project — pastors, churches and scientists who see no necessary conflict between science and religion — I decided to support its cause,” Womack said. “I was teaching Bible study at Mountain View United Methodist Church [in Cottonwood] at the time, and the pastor and church council decided to sign on with the project.”

According to Womack, the project began humbly enough: With the help of Howie Usher, a member of the church and a teacher of biology at Mingus Union High School, Womack started hosting lectures on “Evolution Sunday” — that is, the Sunday closest to Charles Darwin’s birthday.

“Howie had a lecture on evolution and I had one on the creation stories in Genesis,” Womack said. “Both were well received, except that people complained because they couldn’t attend both lectures. A couple of years later, we decided to make the lectures more accessible by having lectures in the afternoon during each Sunday in February, as well as open to the public.”

The lectures, which are sponsored by Mountain View United and Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church in Clarkdale, are now celebrating their ninth year. Consciously, organizers have not emphasized evolution, opting instead to bring scientists from various fields to lecture. The majority of speakers use PowerPoint presentations and provide ample time for questions.

“The lectures have been held at Mountain View United Methodist Church for the past eight years,” Womack added. “But when Pastor Mari Larson and Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church signed on to the Clergy Letter Project in 2015, I asked if they would be interested in hosting the lectures

in 2016, and they agreed. Therefore, the lectures will be held at Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church this year.”

Womack stressed that neither he nor Larson gather information from the 35 to 45 participants who attend each lecture.

“The lectures have never been a tool to recruit new church members,” Womack said. “That’s why we do not keep a sign-in sheet or ask for contact information. By having science lectures in a church we hope that people will get the message that we see no necessary conflict between science and religion, and we hope that the church has helped them learn something new, whether it is religious or not.

“Hopefully, we are inviting speakers people may not hear in other places We are trying to present the church as a place where you can ask questions and learn new things.”

This Year’s Lectures

Where: Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, 330 Scenic Drive, Clarkdale

When: Sundays in February, from 2:30 to 4 p.m.

The public is invited to participate, free of charge.

Feb. 7: The Rev. Frederick Lampe, professor of anthropology at NAU and a retired Lutheran campus pastor at NAU, delivers “Living on the Edge: Faith, Climate and the Anthropocene.”

Feb. 14: Matt Percy, professor of chemistry and microbiology at Yavapai College, delivers “Genetically Modified Food: Facts and Fiction?”

Feb. 21: Dr. Bruce Peek, cardiologist and director of ICU at Verde Valley Medical Center, delivers “Antibiotics or Prayer: What is Healing?”

Feb. 28: Jeff Hall, director of Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, delivers “The Discovery Channel Telescope: Lowell Observatory’s Newest Eye on the Sky.”