October 2026

First United Methodist Church

The OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

News At First

Upcoming Events | Event Recaps | New Faces

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Revs. Justin & Melissa Lowe

Note FROM CO-LEAD PASTORS

The Silent Methodists

A month ago, Larry Brannock discovered an old bulletin while organizing our church archives. Inside was a small article titled, “The Silent Methodists,” honoring the many people who quietly serve First UMC week after week.

These are the people rocking babies in the nursery, preparing meals for grieving families, stuffing bulletins, greeting worshipers, washing dishes, writing cards, caring for our campus, packing backpacks of food for children, serving on youth trips, and teaching Sunday School and small groups. And the list could go on and on.

Much of what makes a church thrive happens quietly, often without recognition. Yet every act of service is an expression of love for God, for one another, and for the church we share.

To all of our Silent Methodists: thank you for the countless ways you help make the ministry of First UMC possible.

On October 18, 2026, we will celebrate Laity Sunday at First UMC! Join us for a special brunch at 9:30 a.m. in the Family Life Center, followed by one combined worship service at 10:30 a.m.

We are delighted to welcome Walt Mallonee as our Certified Lay Minister preaching that morning. In addition to, we will present the Lay Servant of the Year Award to recognize someone whose life reflects a deep commitment to serving God through First UMC. Be sure to submit your nomination!

Laity Sunday is also a time to celebrate all of you who serve First UMC in ways both seen and unseen. We may never know how many hours are given each week, but God knows, and, even more importantly, God knows the love behind every act of service.

Thank you for loving God, loving one another, and loving this church and its ministry in the world. We look forward to celebrating you on Laity Sunday!

Justin & Melissa

STAFF PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATES

Meet our newest staff members!
Maggie Cheyney - Director of Communications
Andy Cumbow - Director of Traditional Worship

Maggie Cheyney

01

Hi, everyone!
I'm Maggie Cheyney, and I'm excited to be part of the First UMC Gastonia family! I graduated from UNC Charlotte with a degree in Marketing and previously served as Social Media Manager for the Western North Carolina Conference. As a pastor's kid, the Methodist Church has always been a meaningful part of my life, and I'm grateful to bring my passion for communications and creativity to First UMC!

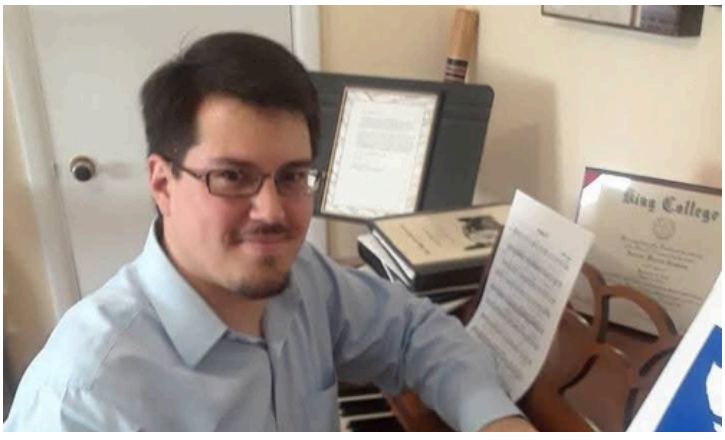


Outside of work, I love baking, spending time with family, and cheering on the Carolina Panthers! I'm also excited to become a first-time aunt. I'm grateful to be here and look forward to getting to know the First UMC family!

Andy Cumbow

02

Hello, everyone!
I'm Andy, the new Director of Traditional Music and Worship. I've spent nearly 20 years as a choral conductor, church musician, educator, composer, and singer, serving churches and schools across Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina. I earned my master's degree in Choral Conducting with an emphasis in Church Music from Mercer University, and I'm excited to begin this new chapter with First UMC!



I'm excited to connect with the many gifts and talents within our First UMC community and use them to create meaningful worship experiences. If you have a musical or worship-related gift you'd like to share, whether you've served before or are considering it for the first time, I'd love to hear from you!

PRESCHOOL

A Joyful Start to a New School Year! What a joy it has been to welcome our preschool children back for a new school year! Our hallways are once again filled with laughter, little voices, busy feet, and the excitement of children learning and growing. These first few weeks have been a special time of getting to know one another, forming new friendships, and becoming a part of our preschool family.

Our teachers have been busy creating loving and welcoming classrooms where children can learn through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences. This month, we have been learning all about apples—exploring their colors, shapes, and tastes while enjoying a variety of fun apple-themed activities. Every day brings new opportunities for discovery and wonder! As a ministry of First United Methodist Church, we are especially grateful for the opportunity to share God's love with our youngest learners.

Through our classrooms, Chapel experiences, songs, prayers, and everyday interactions, we strive to help children see God's love in the world around them and in the people who care for them.



First UMC Preschool is here to see Christ in every person we encounter and demonstrate to them the love of God and the teachings of Jesus.

On September 30, we welcomed Overcash Studios to the preschool for our Fall Pictures. It was a wonderful opportunity to capture the sweet smiles and personalities of our children as we begin another year together. We are so thankful for our wonderful preschool families, dedicated teachers, and the continued love and support of our church family.

We ask that you continue to keep our children, teachers, and families in your prayers as we begin this new school year. We are excited to see how God will work through our preschool ministry and all that He has in store for this year!

CHILDREN'S Ministry

Margaret Smith



We are excited to host Fall Fest 2026 for our church family and surrounding community! Join us for a free evening of food, fun, faith, and fellowship for all ages.

There are many ways to help make this event a success! We need volunteers to help with setup, hosting games and activities, donating candy for game prizes, and cleanup.

Want to help? Let us know how you can serve!

Our FISH group - 4th and 5th graders - enjoyed a fantastic weekend at Camp Tekoa at the end of September.

Big fun was had and big faith was shared

"I am a child of God. . .
I am me. . .
I am called. . .
I am loved. . ."



Hollie Luther

YOUTH MINISTRY

Middle School Fall Retreat
October 23–25, 2026 | Camp Awanita

Middle School Youth are headed to Camp Awanita for their annual Fall Retreat! This year's theme is "Don't Stop Believing"even when the journey doesn't go as planned. We'll explore how God may lead us down unexpected paths, but He promises we never walk alone.

Proverbs 3:5–6

High School Fall Retreat
October 15–18 | Kure Beach

This year's theme is "Jesus Is Our Anchor," reminding us that the waves will come, but we know who holds us. Hebrews 6:19

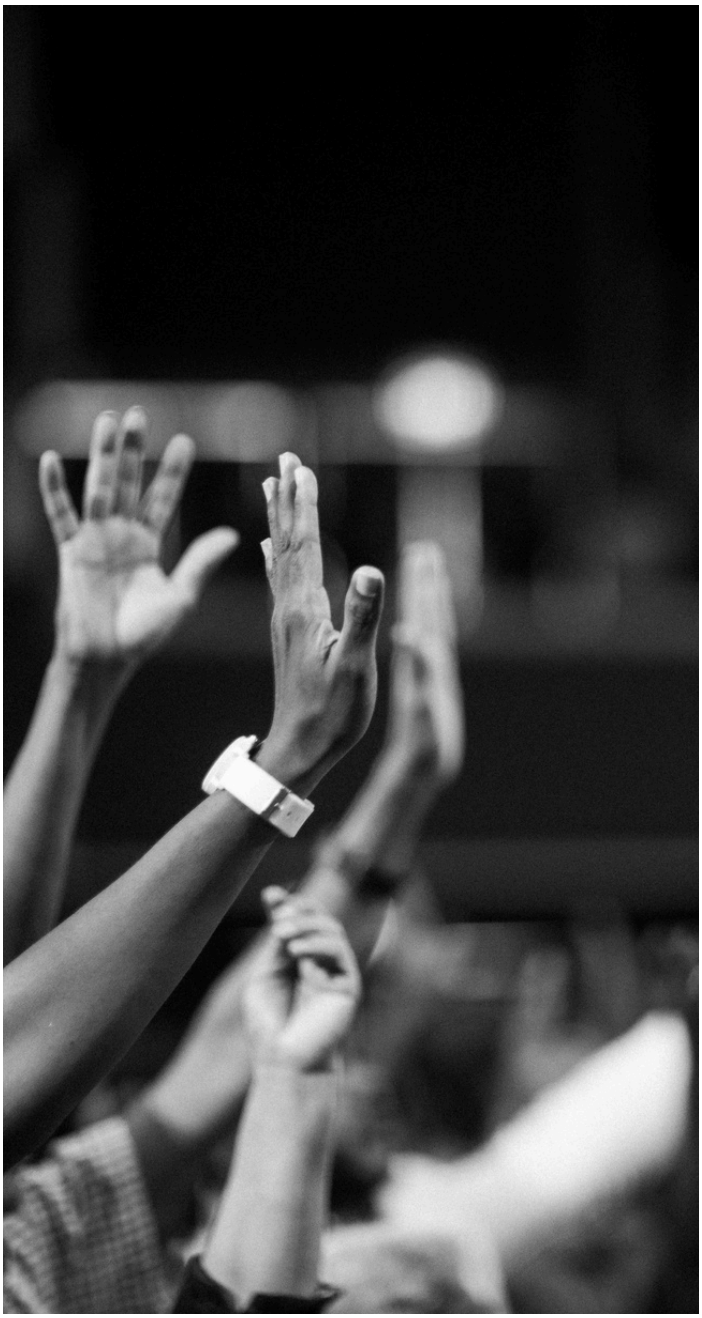
Want to support the retreat? You can sponsor a meal by providing a meal out or donating items like casseroles, sandwich fixings, cookies, or brownies.

Contact Hollie to help!





Becky Greene



ADULT *Discipleship* MINISTRY

"Ecclesiastes 3 has been called the theology of opposites"

It represents seasons of birth and death, decay and build, weep and laugh. It's a beautiful reminder that as a congregation, we don't have to be in the same season to walk faithfully together. Often our seasons of life can overlap. As Kate Bowler says – life is beautiful and terrible, all at the same time. Our WEF is an invitation to sit at dinner with someone whose story we don't know – a person grieving, quietly struggling or lonely.

A simple challenge to make room at the table and start a conversation. Our small groups provide an opportunity to live out your relationship with God and one another. Discipleship can also happen through ordinary things – a phone call, a pot of mums left on a doorstep or a shared prayer text. God's faithfulness extends through all seasons and from generation to generation. What small act of love might God be asking you to do this month?











WOMEN'S *Retreat* 2026

Walk Worthy Women's Retreat

Our women gathered at beautiful Lake Junaluska September 18–20 for a weekend filled with fellowship, laughter, worship, and meaningful time together.

Surrounded by the beauty of God's creation, the retreat offered a chance to step away from the busyness of everyday life and simply be present with one another.

From shared meals and conversations to moments of reflection and fun, the weekend was a wonderful reminder of the gift of Christian community.

We are grateful for the memories made, the friendships strengthened, and the opportunity to grow together in faith.

WOMEN'S *Retreat* REFLECTIONS

I have been to all five of the FUMC Women's Retreats. I love seeing the variety of ages, personalities, and experiences of the women in our church, It is gratifying to see the next generation building their foundation early. They are eager to learn and have so much energy when mine is dwindling. I watch and listen knowing and understanding what they will go through.

I am reminded over and over to keep using the gifts God has given you. As we grow older it is easy to think I've done that or I can't do that, and while your ability to give might look different, it is still possible. My feet move at a different pace now than they did years ago, so I encourage my younger friends not to wait for a "good time" to do the things you want to do, simply "do it now". There is never a "good time" because life is full of challenges, so find time to be where your feet are. Look down and realize you are always standing on Holy Ground. These weekends give me so much hope for the future in a world that desperately needs the voice of reassurance.

-Barbara Warlick

This year, I was fortunate to attend my first women's retreat at Lake Junaluska. One theme we returned to throughout the weekend was, "Be where your feet are."

That message resonated with me. My fiancé and I are in an exciting season—we bought a condo in Charlotte and are planning a wedding—but I often find myself thinking about what comes next instead of being present where I am. I'm thinking about the perfect honeymoon, future moves, my next career step, and when we might start a family.

The retreat reminded me that uncertainty is something we all experience, no matter our season of life. Being present doesn't mean we stop dreaming or planning; it means we trust God with where we are while remaining open to where He may lead us next.

I loved the simple joys of the weekend, singing hymns, walking around the lake, sharing fellowship, taking communion, and laughing together. Then, after I returned home, I noticed a book on my office shelf titled Be Where Your Feet Are. I had walked past it for months without noticing it. It felt like one of those small God moments and a reminder that this was something I needed to hear.

I'm grateful to everyone who helped create such a meaningful retreat and for the reminder to slow down, notice God's goodness, and be present in the season I'm living.
Look down and be where your feet are.

—Linnea Jurs

FRIENDS ON THE GO



Join us for a day trip to Black Mountain, NC! We'll visit the Chapel of the Prodigal Fresco, enjoy lunch in Black Mountain, make a stop for fresh apples, and then return to the church.

RSVP: Call the church, visit the church website, or email Stephanie at stephanie.s@fumcgastonia.org.

COMING EVENTS

Legacy Speaker Series - Every Wednesday at 6:30 PM
Laity Sunday - Sunday, October 18th, 9:30 AM





2026 Laity Sunday

Ministry Fair & Breakfast

Sunday, October 18 | 9:30–10:30 a.m.

Join us for breakfast and a chance to learn more about the many ways to get involved at FUMC! Ministry areas will have tables throughout the Family Life Center and Gym, featuring opportunities for mission, service, and volunteerism.

Come enjoy pancakes, pastries, sausage, orange juice, and coffee while discovering a place to share your time and gifts!

COMING EVENTS CONTINUES

United Methodist Men

01

Join the United Methodist Men for their monthly Hot Dog Lunch on Friday, November 6, at noon in the Family Life Center (FLC 1 & 2).

Come enjoy a hot dog, good food, and fellowship with friends from the church. All are welcome!



Reading Soul Mate

02

Reading Soul Mate (RSM) pairs caring adults with students to build confidence and a love of reading. Mentors spend just one hour each week reading one-on-one with two students, with training and materials provided.

Interested in making a difference? **Contact Merry Penegar Deely at 704-718-0705 or merrydeely@gmail.com**.



Seasonal Chancel Choir

03

Anyone who loves to sing is invited to join our Chancel Choir during the holidays!

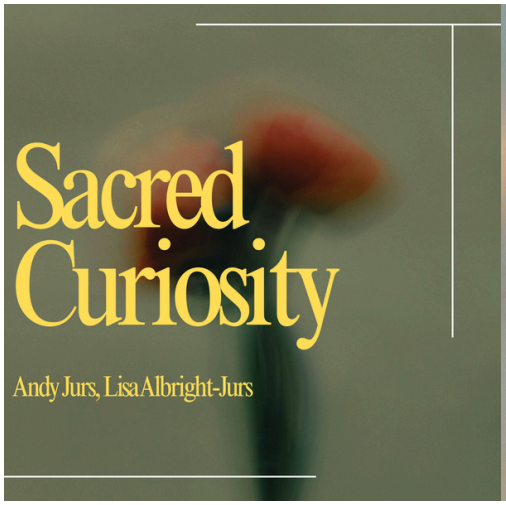
Youth and adults are welcome to sing with us from October 28 through December 16 as we prepare music for Advent and Christmas Eve.



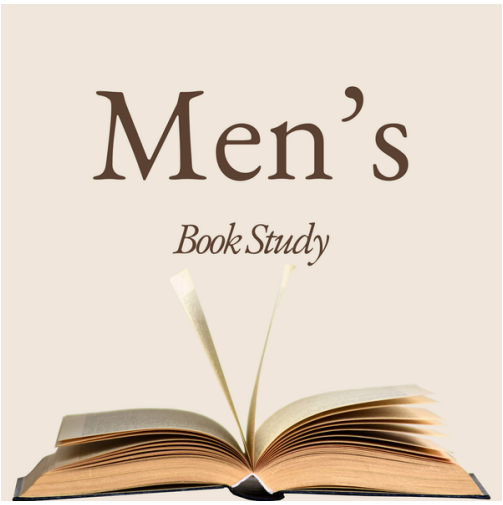










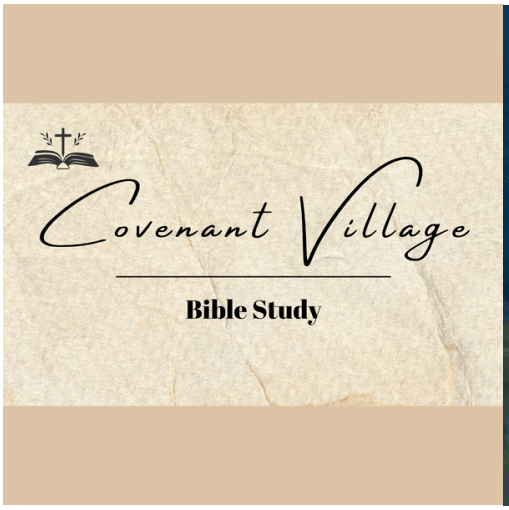


Wednesday Evening Fellowship & SMALL GROUPS

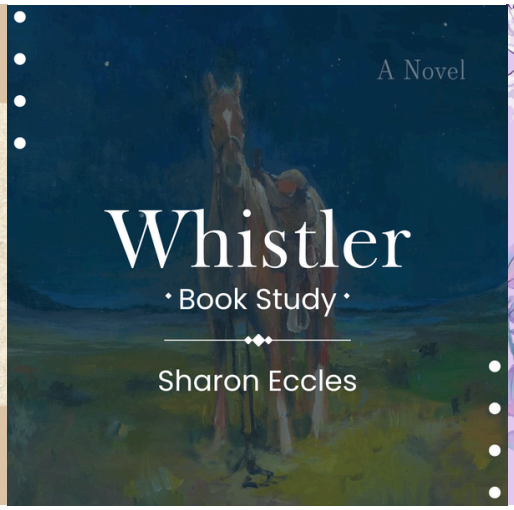
Join Us Every Wednesday for Dinner and Community

Wednesday Small Groups

Prayer Shawl: Room 218 | 3:30PM - 5:30PM
Prayer Pause: Room 312 | 6:30PM - 7:30PM
Sacred Curiosity: Room 218 | 6:30PM - 7:30PM
Sabbath: Parlor | 6:30PM - 7:30PM
Men's Book Study: Room 316 | 6:30PM - 7:30PM



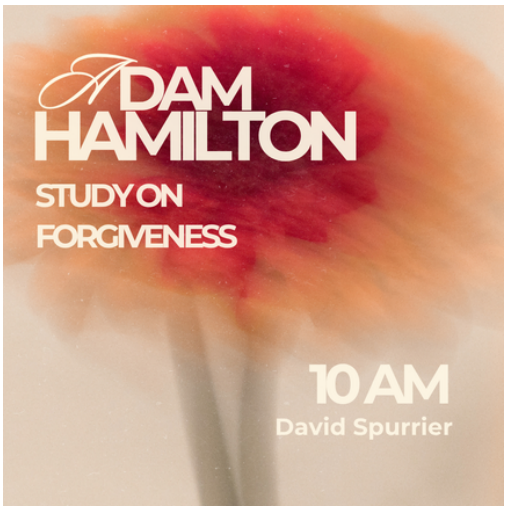
Monday
6:30 PM
Covenant Village



Tuesday
10 AM
Room 218



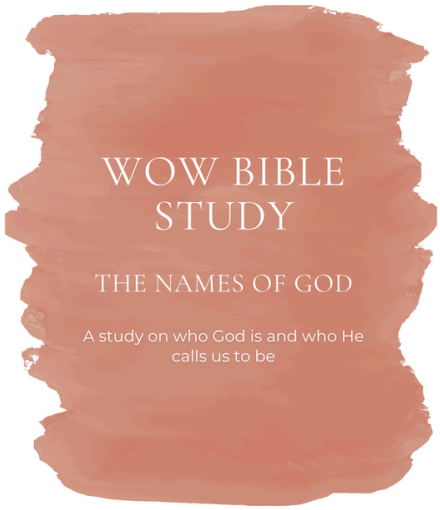
Tuesday | 10/27
4 PM
Room 218



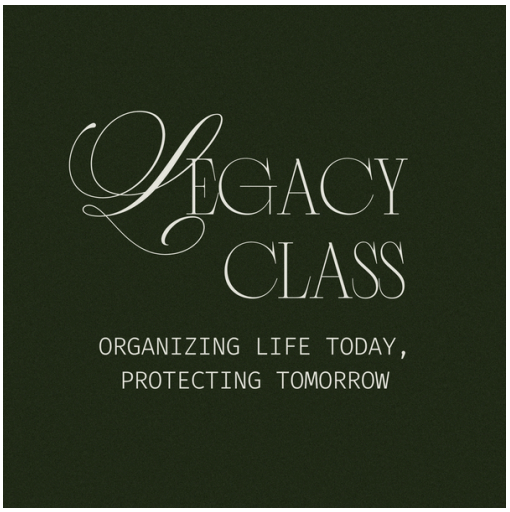
Wednesday | Oct. 21,28 | Nov. 4,11
10 AM
Room 315



Thursday | 10/8
6:30 PM
Keepsake Brewery



Thursday
9:30 AM
Zoom



Thursday | Oct. 8,15,22
6:30 PM
FLC



Tuesday | Oct. 13
6:30 PM
Marrelli's Italian Returant

WCF October Menu

Oct. 7th
Chicken Alfredo and Garlic Bread

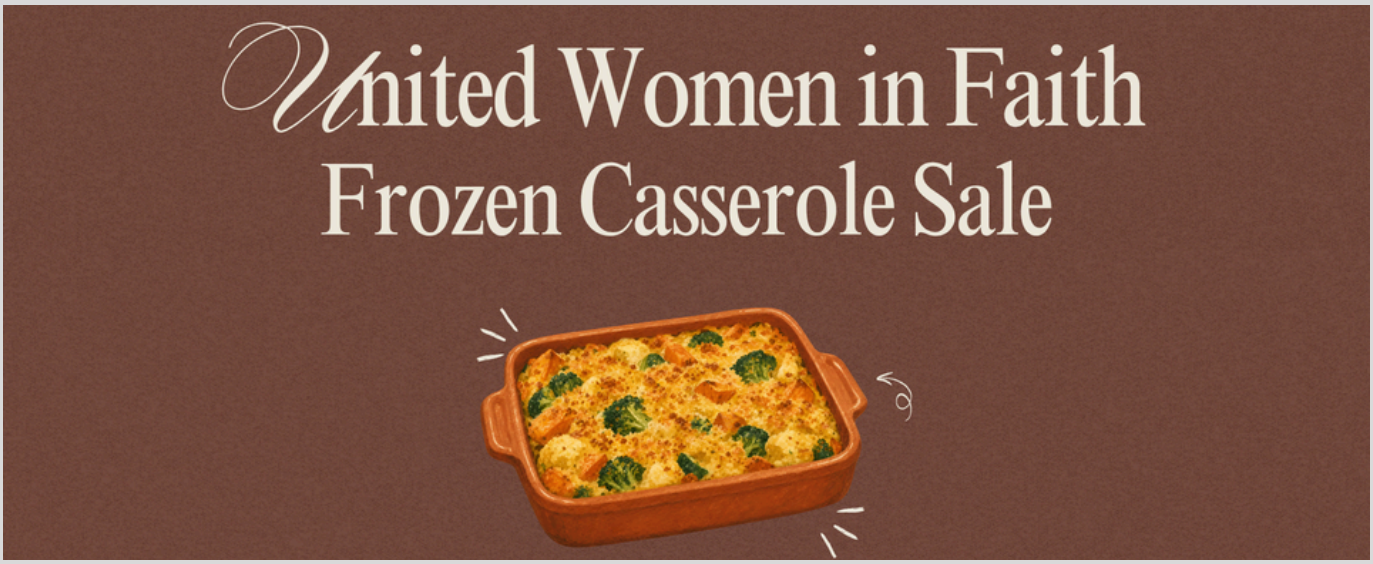
Oct. 14th
Meatloaf, Mashed Potatoes, Green Beans

Oct. 21st
Pulled Pork Sandwiches, sweet potato wedges, coleslaw, baked beans

Oct. 28th
Baked Potatoes and Trimmings, Soup

Fixed Menu Items
Salad, Fruit, and Dessert available each week.

UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH



UWF Frozen Casserole & Bake Sale

The UWF Frozen Casserole & Bake Sale is Saturday, November 7, in the FLC! Stock your freezer for the holidays with delicious homemade casseroles, and stop by the Bake Sale for sweet and savory treats.

Frozen Casseroles:
Orders open October 4 and are pre-order only. Order online through the church website or in person Sunday mornings in the Gathering Space and Wednesday evenings in the FLC.

Order deadline: Friday, October 23.
Early pickup is not available.



Calling All Bakers!
We're also looking for donations of your favorite homemade baked goods. **Please bring baked goods to the FLC on Friday, November 6, from 4–6 p.m.**

Questions? Call or text Cathryn Beasley at (704) 747-5418.

MEN'S BASE CAMP



Fall Men's Base Camp

Join us Thursday, October 29, at 6:30 p.m. for an evening of fellowship, conversation, and connection with other men from our church community. It's a great opportunity to take a break from the usual routine, enjoy good company, and build relationships.

We'll gather at the home of James Benfield, located at 2525 Sheffield Drive in Gastonia. We hope you'll join us for a relaxed evening together!

RSVP: Call the church, visit the church website, or email Stephanie at Stephanie.s@fumcgastonia.org.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS 2026 GALA

First UMC was honored with an award for our ongoing partnership with Gaston County Special Olympics supporting these inspiring athletes in our midst!







Featured in pictures:

Guest speaker Tywannia Horne-Christian

Rev. Melissa Lowe with the Beasley family





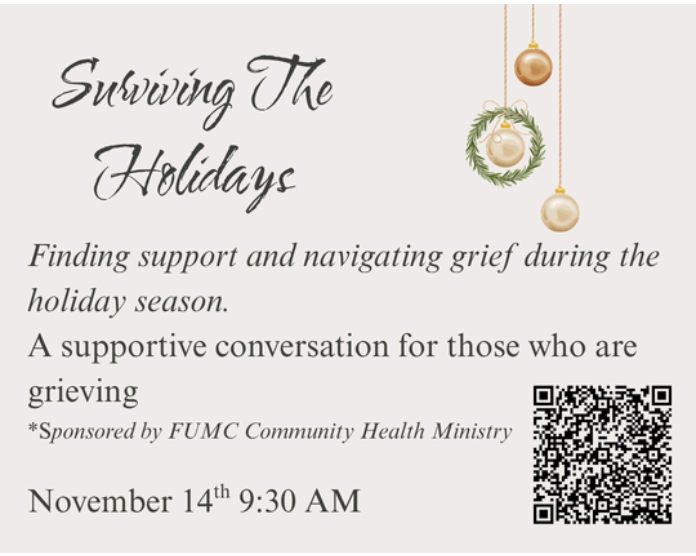
Hands & Feet MISSIONS

Church Greeters

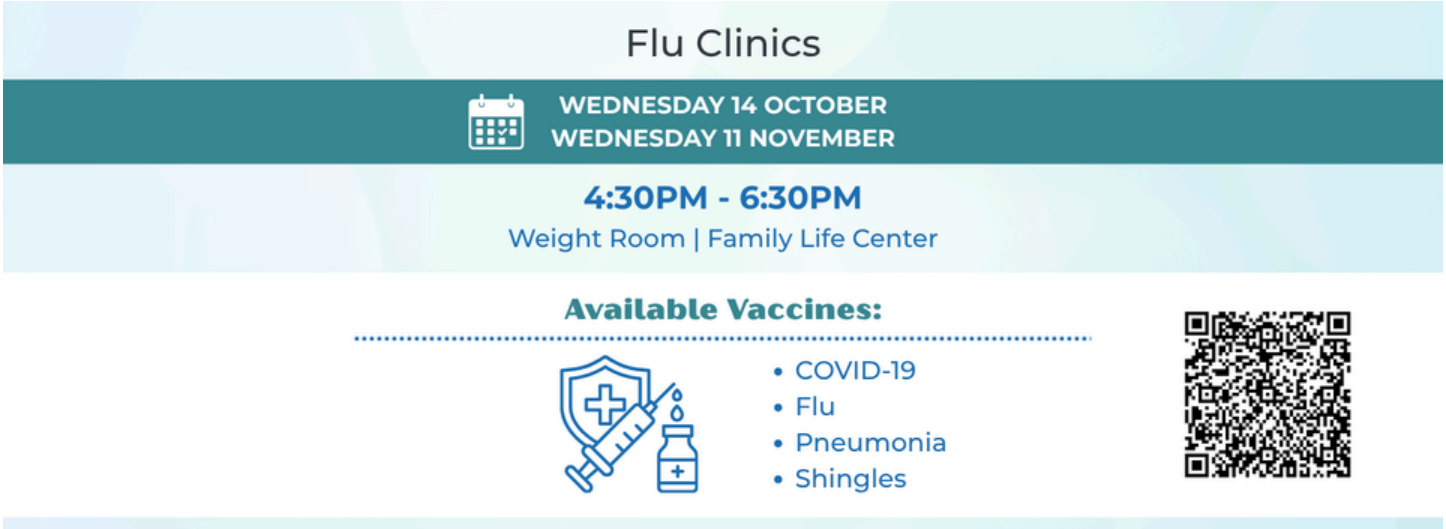
Help us create a warm and welcoming environment on Sunday mornings! Greeters are needed for Sunday services to welcome members and guests, offer assistance, and help people feel at home from the moment they arrive. If you'd like to serve as a greeter, **contact Leigh Smith at leigh.smith@fumcgastonia.org or call the church office at 704-864-4371.**

Front Desk Volunteers

Our Front Desk is looking for volunteers to help welcome and assist visitors during the week. Volunteers are especially needed from 3–5 p.m. on weekdays. If you enjoy meeting people and helping others feel welcome, this is a great opportunity to serve! **Contact Leigh Smith at 704-864-4371 to learn more.**







COMMUNITY HEALTH MINISTRY

Flu Clinics

- October 14th & November 11th
- 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- Advance registration is requested but walk-ins are welcome! Reserve your slot now! By scanning the QR Code or call (704) 864-4371

Surviving the Holidays

- November 14th
- 9:30 AM - 11 AM
- Fellowship Hall, FLC
- Scan the QR Code to Register or call (704) 864-4371

Veterans Luncheon

- November 9th
- 11:30 AM (Registration is at 11 AM)
- Join us as we honor Gaston County veterans.
- Speaker is SSgt Samantha Jo Anderson, BSN, RN, Staff Sergeant
- pinning ceremony, color guard, music and speaker
- FLC
- Scan the QR Code to Register or call (704) 864-4371

FINANCIAL REPORT

For the eight months ended August 2026, First United Methodist Church continues to see strong giving! Additionally, on the expense side of the equation, prudent spending and management have kept expenditures under budget.

Through August 2026, combined church operations, kitchen, and preschool:

- Year-to-Date Income equaled $1,319,049 ($5,143 below budget)
- Year-to-Date Expenses totaled $1,358,969 ($160,967 below budget)
- This results in a year-to-date total loss of $39,920, which is $160,967 better than budgeted.

Thank you all for your dedication to First United Methodist Church and its wonderful ministries!

Your Finance Committee







Explore First UMC

- **J**oin us October 11 at 10 a.m. to learn more about First UMC and find your place to belong. No RSVP needed!

2026 General Election

- **E**arly voting is October 15–31. Election Day is November 3.

Blessing of the Animals

- **B**ring your pets to our Blessing of the Animals on October 11 at 2 p.m. on the Front Lawn!

Take NOTE

Sunday Morning Views & Attendance

Date	8:45 AM In person	8:45 AM Online	9:00 AM In person	11:00 AM In person	11:00 AM Online	In Person Total
Sep. 6th	27	36	54	121	182	202
Sep. 13th	41	60	60	117	136	218
Sep. 20th	18	65	42	91	311	151
Sep. 27th	37	38	45	144	100	226

WANT YOUR EVENT IN THE NEWSLETTER?

Please submit your submissions by the 15th of the month at
https://fumcgastonia.org/resources/communications-promotions-request

CONNECT WITH US!

Website: https://fumcgastonia.org/home
Phone: (704) 864-4371

First United Methodist Church Gastonia

FUMCGastonia

Sign Up for E-Blasts

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First United Methodist Church
PO Box 218
Gastonia, NC 28053

Published Monthly at 190 East Franklin Blvd. Gastonia, NC
(USPS 198-720)

Periodicals postage paid at Gastonia, NC.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: News At First

First United Methodist Church
PO Box 218
Gastonia, NC 28053