



NEWS AT

*first*

Monthly  
Newsletter  
of  
First United  
Methodist  
Church

DECEMBER  
2025



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# Note from our Lead Pastors

## A Christmas Invitation Worth Sharing

As we enter this holy season, we are reminded once again that Christmas is, at its heart, an invitation. God steps into the world in Jesus—into ordinary places, among ordinary people—and offers extraordinary hope, peace, joy, and love. Christmas Eve remains one of the most beautiful moments of the year to experience that good news together, and it is also one of the most spiritually open moments for many in our community.

That's why we want to encourage you to invite someone to worship with you this Christmas Eve. Inviting someone to church is not about filling pews; it's about sharing the gift that has shaped our lives. Many people are simply waiting for someone to ask. A simple, genuine invitation can open a door for someone to experience grace, rekindle faith, or find a place to belong.

### Why We Invite

- Because God came near. Christmas is God's reminder that no one is beyond reach. Our invitation mirrors God's hospitality.
- Because people are searching. Many neighbors and friends feel isolated, anxious, or weary during the holidays. Your invitation may offer them the hope they've been longing for.
- Because shared worship blesses everyone. When new people join us, we see the Christmas story with fresh eyes. Our community grows a little deeper, a little kinder, and a little more joyful.

### How to Invite Well

Inviting doesn't have to be complicated. Here are a few simple practices:

1. Pray first. Ask God to place one person or family on your heart.
2. Be natural. Your invitation can be as simple as, "I'd love for you to join me at our Christmas Eve service this year."
3. Share why it matters to you. A personal reason — "This service brings me peace every year"— is often the most meaningful part of the invitation.
4. Offer to sit together. This removes anxiety for guests and makes the experience feel welcoming.
5. Follow up with kindness. Whether they come or not, your invitation is an expression of love. Maintain that spirit.

This year we will gather on Christmas Eve for worship filled with music, candlelight, and the promise of Christ born anew among us. We hope you'll consider who in your life might need to hear the message: "Come and see what God has done."

Your invitation may be the very thing God uses to bring someone closer to Christ.

With anticipation and joy,  
Pastors Justin and Melissa

*Justin & Melissa*



Rev. Justin Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Worship, Care and Administration  
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Rev. Melissa Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Connection, Mission and Outreach  
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[melissa.lowe@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:melissa.lowe@fumcgastonia.org)

# Worship Arts Ministry



Jill Willis  
Director of Traditional Worship  
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jill.willis@fumcgastonia.org



Anthony Pero  
Director of Modern Worship  
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December 10 @ 6:30 PM  
First UMC Sanctuary

## CHILDREN'S CHOIRS CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Featuring  
Music Makers - Wesley Choir  
Asbury Choir - Asbury Ringers

**CHRISTMAS EVE AT FIRST  
WORSHIP SERVICES AND TIMES**

**2:30 PM - MODERN**  
**5:30 PM - FAMILY**  
**10:30 PM - TRADITIONAL**

## COMBINED WORSHIP

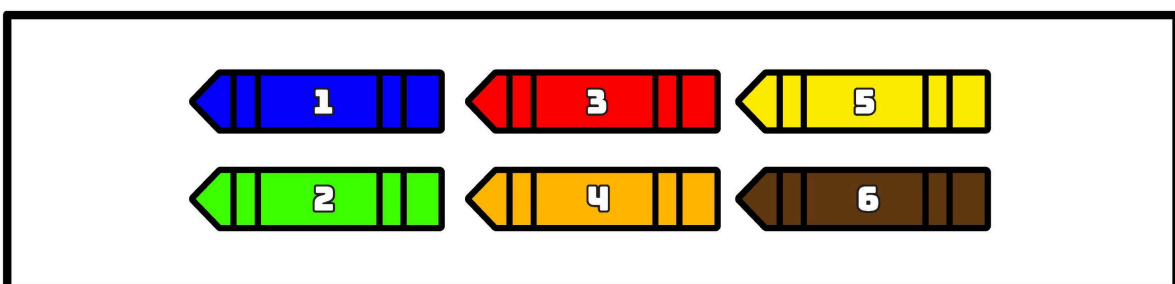
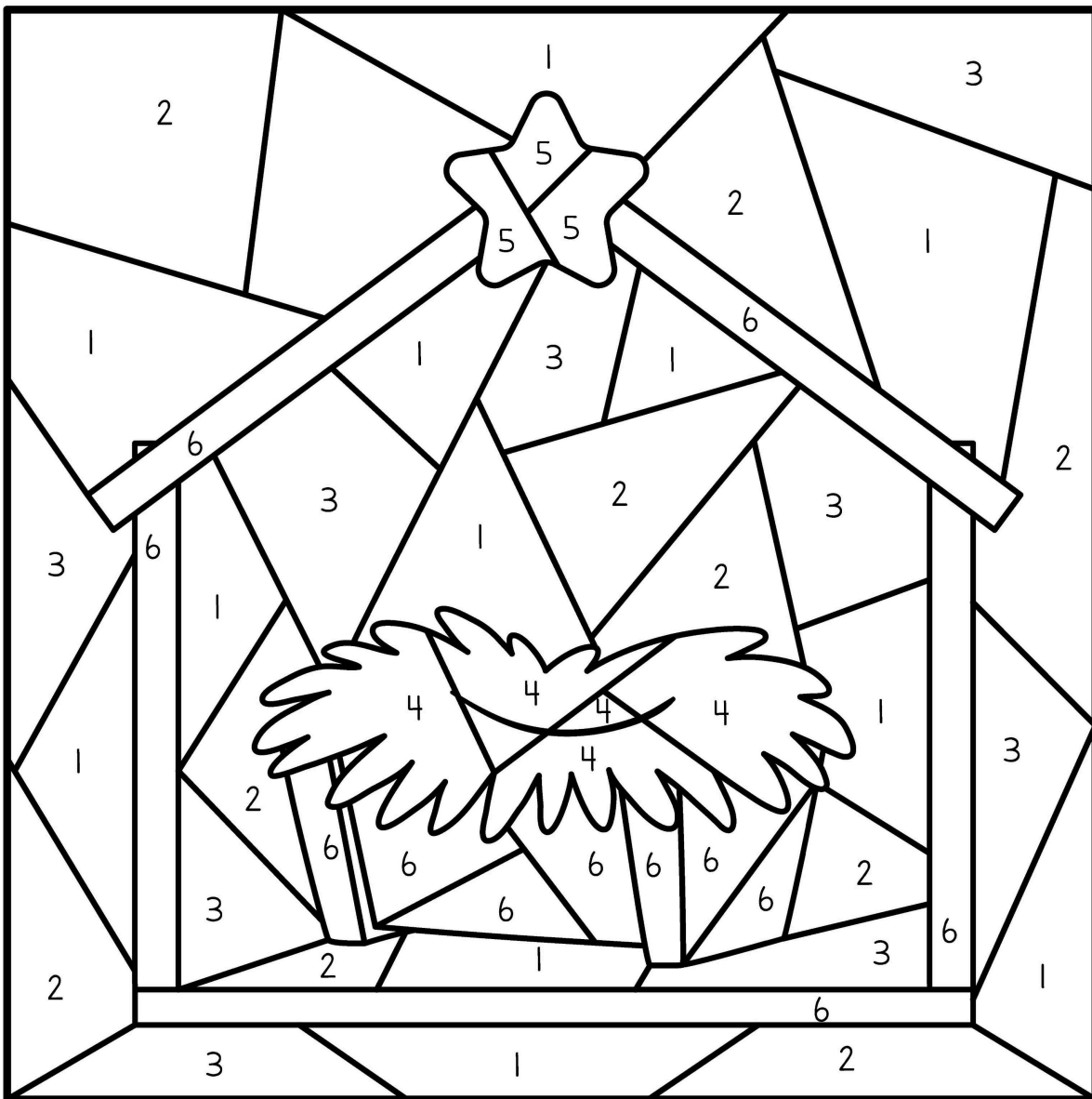
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28 @ 10:30 AM  
FIRST UMC SANCTUARY





As we celebrate the love of Christ this Advent season, see if you can successfully color and connect the dots of this Nativity scene. Yay, God!

- Margaret



# Preschool



Rebecca Denton  
Director of Preschool  
704-864-5188  
rebecca@fumcgastonia.org

This month, the children enjoyed exploring the letters and themes I (Insects), L (Leaves), and T (Thankful/Thanksgiving). We loved observing the beauty of the fall season together and learning about the colors, shapes, and textures that God so thoughtfully provides in nature. Our teaching staff enjoyed a special time of fellowship as we gathered for lunch to celebrate another wonderful school year and the many blessings we share. Additionally, we were grateful to welcome our preschool families to join us for our Classroom Thanksgiving Feasts. It was a joy to see the children share a meal with their friends and to celebrate the sweet friendships that have continued to grow throughout the year. We are continually reminded of what a blessing it is to be part of the preschool children's lives. We are grateful for the privilege of caring for them each day. Each child is a joy and a gift to their classmates and to all of us here at the preschool.





# Youth Ministry



Hollie Luther  
Director of Youth Ministries  
704-864-4371  
hollie.luther@fumcgastonia.org



Service Learning Trip To:

*Fort Collins, Colorado*

July 26-August 1, 2026

Sign up by January 7, 2026

A Be The Neighbor trip to Fort Collins is all about rolling up your sleeves and learning how housing and homelessness affect real people. Together we will dive into service activities and conversations that unpack the bigger picture of how housing affordability, systemic injustice, and community care are all connected. You will leave Fort Collins with tools to advocate for change back home.

**Sign up by January 7 using the QR code.** The cost for this week long trip is \$500 per person. The cost includes all meals, lodging, and experiences for the week. Flight to Colorado is extra. We will be working to raise money to help off set the costs of this trip. If you want to go, but cannot afford the full amount, please reach out to Hollie.





## Christmas To Do List

- Dec. 3 Boys & Girls Club Dinner
- Dec. 3 Packathon
- Dec. 7 Camp Sunshine Party
- Dec. 7 Christmas Parade
- Dec. 10 Help with Angel Tree
- Dec. 10 Children's Concert
- Dec. 14 Christmas Party
- Dec. 21 Church Wide Christmas Caroling



As a child, Christmas was magical for me. My dad owned a toy store so Christmas always involved making a list and checking it twice. In a small toy business, you basically did the majority of your sales in November and December! What I remember most is how Bill Blanton always put Christ into Christmas. Even though retail was his livelihood, Christ was his way of living.

What did that look like? His demeanor was one of a “cheerful giver.” The store never opened on Sundays. I saw him study his Sunday School lesson regularly, pray often and place his offering in the plate every Sunday. Daddy taught Sunday School for 42 years, including those Sundays in December when he was dead dog tired. He never retired from work or leadership, believing he could still make a difference. He donated treat bags for our church Christmas program. He would unlock the store on Christmas Day for a parent who needed batteries because he never wanted a child to be disappointed. He worked out payment plans so marginalized families could still provide for their families. And if they needed food, our family provided that too.

My dad died when I was 31 years old and Catherine was just 3 years old. He had a heart attack coming back from the toy distribution center in Charlotte the week before Christmas. So you understand that for me I hold the tension of joy and sadness during this season. However, the memories of abiding faith and love keep him alive in my heart and I try to model faith, love, hope and thoughtfulness because of his example.

When it comes to the best opportunities and best possible start for our children in their relationship to Jesus, the one factor that matters most is our relationship with him. Kids are more likely to do what is modeled for them. As we walk through Advent toward the birth of Jesus, let us practice the ways of the baby in a manger.

- Becky



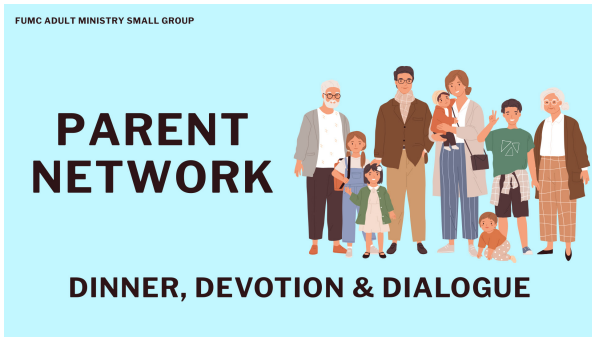
# Friends On The Go

## Recapping Our Veterans Day Event

The Friends On the Go Veterans Day events were filled with gratitude and reflection. We honor all who have served our country.



# Sunday Adult Small Groups



## Parent Network

Parent Network will not meet in December.

We will resume our time of dinner and devotion on January 25, 2026. Our January meeting will focus on how to address vaping with our youth. More details to come.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 25**



**GUEST PREACHER**

**BISHOP  
KEN  
CARTER**

**RESIDENT BISHOP  
OF WESTERN NC  
CONFERENCE**

**ALL 3 SERVICES - 8:45, 9 & 11 AM**



## Wednesday Adult Small Groups

### **WEDNESDAY EVENING FELLOWSHIP**

#### **WEF Resumes**

Wednesday Evening Fellowship resumes on January 7 with weekly dinner and small groups. Additional details to follow.

### **PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY**

#### **Prayer Shawl Ministry**

Each Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. in the Gathering Space lobby, knitters and crocheters come together to make comfort items for members of our church family affected by illness. Yarn, knitting needles, crochet hooks, and patterns are provided. Text Joy Owens at 704-860-1486 to learn more.

## Thursday Adult Small Groups

FUMC MEN'S SMALL GROUP

### **Theology on Tap**

#### **Theology on Tap**

Join Theology on Tap on Thursday, Dec. 11 at 5:30 p.m. at Keepsake Brewery. The address is 211 Columbia St, Gastonia, NC 28054. It's a time of theological exploration and fellowship.

**FUMC**  
*theatre*

PRESENTS

**A SHERLOCK CAROL**

BY MARK SHANAHAN

Directed by  
Eleanor Wixson

**Performance Theatre**  
December 12 at 7:30  
December 13 at 2:30  
December 13 at 7:30

162 East Main, Gastonia, NC 28052  
Reservations at [fumcgastonia.org/theatre](http://fumcgastonia.org/theatre)

ORIGINALLY PRODUCED BY RAYMOND BOKHOUR AND DREW McVETY  
Admission is free. Donations are accepted



# Advent Devotional Booklet



Advent devotional booklets are now available for pick up from the church office. This year's theme is "From Everlasting to Every Day: The Light of Christ in our Modern World." All devotionals were written by members of First United Methodist Church. Special thanks to Stephanie Witten for helping put the booklets together. Pick one up today and be blessed this Advent season.

## Angel Tree

All Angel Tree gifts, teen gift cards and monetary donations are due by **December 10**. Santa's helpers will begin that night organizing everything and making sure that all the angels have been covered and gifts are ready to be delivered. If you have any questions you may email Cathryn Beasley at [cmbeasley3@gmail.com](mailto:cmbeasley3@gmail.com).

**First United Methodist Church**  
Gastonia, North Carolina

**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS**  
OF AMERICA

**Donate \$25 Visa Gift cards for teenagers at the West Gastonia Boys & Girls Club Teen Center.**

- Donate during Sunday offering (write in memo)
- Donate \$25 online at [fumcgastonia.org/givepay](http://fumcgastonia.org/givepay)
  - Bring card to the front desk
  - Or place in business office drop-box

**DEADLINE: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10**





## Angel Tree

BLESS THOSE IN NEED

**Pleasant Ridge Elementary School**

Ways to get a tag with a Child's name:

- The tree will be placed in The Gathering Space on Nov. 12.
- Pick one up between worship services or during office hours.
- You can call the church office and have them pick one out for you.

**Deadline: Wednesday, December 10**

*\*Return gifts to The Gathering Space by the deadline. Please make sure all bags and gifts are labeled with the correct number from the tag.*

# First UMC Community Health Ministry

## Support the Community Health Ministry



Please consider giving to the FUMC Community Health Ministry using the QR code. Examples of how money is used include: outreach to seniors in low income apartment complexes & nursing homes (Adopt a Senior & Christmas in July), kindness bags to homeless, Veterans Day luncheon, CPR classes, caregiver outreach, annual women's event/dinner, Service of Hope, Caregiver Outreach, Dementia Live experience, Fitness & Nutrition initiatives/Food tastings/giveaways, Flu & COVID clinics, hand sanitizers, durable medical equipment, honorariums for speakers, etc, etc). If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Marisiddaiah at [Nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:Nurse@fumcgastonia.org)



## Flu Clinics Recap

More than 120 Flu, Covid, & RSV vaccinations were given on-site at First UMC. We are grateful for the opportunity to ensure members of our church and community receive the healthcare they need.

## PEAS Program



The Providing Elders Additional Sustenance (PEAS) Program is designed to support older adults in our community by providing grocery or meal delivery to qualifying individuals. Call 704-348-2708 to sign up.



## Infant CPR and Newborn Care Class

Classes are held the first Tuesday of every month from 5 to 7 p.m. Learn infant CPR, including choking and breathing emergencies, plus how to care for your newborn and create a safe environment for your baby. For more information, call 704-862-6516.



Lisa Marisiddaiah  
First UMC Community  
Health Ministry  
[nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fumcgastonia.org)



## Kindness Day Recap

To celebrate Kindness Day, a "blessing mix" of delicious treats was provided to residents of Glenwood Senior Apartments.



## Veterans Day Luncheon Recap

The Community Health Ministry thanks all sponsors, Ashbrook JROTC and members of the Gaston Symphonic Band for making the annual Veterans Day Luncheon a tremendous success.





Dave Davis  
Business Administrator  
704-864-4371  
ddavis@fumcgastonia.org

# Financial Report



E. Marie Revels  
Bookkeeper  
704-864-4371  
marie.revels@fumcgastonia.org

## Year-to-Date October 2025 Financial Results

Total spending through October 2025 was \$1,785,901 (\$14,320 less than budget). Total revenue in the same period was \$1,639,136 (\$149,445 more than budget). Consolidated cash flow was \$146,765 negative (Kitchen/Food Service was \$2,520 negative, Preschool was \$179 negative, and Church Operations was \$144,066 negative.)

If you desire additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the Church Business Office. Your continued support of our Church is deeply appreciated. FUMC Gastonia is actively carrying out our ministries and missions throughout the year. Please make every effort to make your donations as early as possible during the year. Thank you for being a valued member of First UMC!

- Your Finance Committee



Camp Sunshine needs volunteers! Please email **Beth Patton** at **bethpattonnc@gmail.com** if you would like to volunteer or need additional information. The following positions need to be filled.

**Camper Registration:** This position would need to email counselors at schools and send out information.

**Volunteer coordinator:** Volunteer would need to send out forms through email to camp volunteers and keep information on spreadsheet if possible.

**Camper spreadsheet:** We need someone to make a spreadsheet for camper information or use existing spreadsheet and keep updated as new information comes in.

**Lead bus driver:** This person would need to ask three people to be bus drivers and find three monitors for the morning and afternoon routes in transporting campers from their homes to and from camp each day. In addition, you would need to map out routes for bus drivers on google maps and email to bus drivers.

**Leadership team:** We would love to have additional volunteers to be on our leadership team to help coordinate details of camp and Christmas party.



# Life at First UMC

## Vespers Worship Service



Vespers worship service dates for December:

December 3

December 10

December 17

There will be no Vespers worship service on Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve. Following the two-week break, Vespers will resume on January 7, 2026.

Services are held on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. in the Chapel.

## Youth Sports Program Returns



First United Methodist Church's youth sports program returns, with basketball league play beginning on December 15. Leagues are based on the child's age at the start of the program. Basketball league play is for youth between the ages of 3 and 10.

Registration ends on December 15. The cost to play is \$30. Coaches are also needed.

For those interested in playing or coaching, contact Walt Mallonee at 704-678-4820 or [walt.mallonee@gmail.com](mailto:walt.mallonee@gmail.com).

The background is a deep red with a shimmering, textured effect. At the top, there are several gold musical notes and a small Christmas tree decorated with a red bow and greenery. The text "Christmas Caroling &amp; Holy Communion" is written in a large, elegant, white cursive font. Below it, "FOR THE HOMEBOUND" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The date and time "December 21" and "2:30 PM - 4:30 PM" are written in a gold, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the text "To participate, scan the QR code or call church office 704-864-4371" is written in a white, sans-serif font. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner. The corners of the image are decorated with gold, ornate scrollwork.



## HAVE CHURCH NEWS TO SHARE?

SUBMIT NEWS BY THE 15TH OF EACH MONTH AT:

[FUMCGASTONIA.ORG/RESOURCES/COMMUNICATIONS-PROMOTIONS-REQUEST](http://FUMCGASTONIA.ORG/RESOURCES/COMMUNICATIONS-PROMOTIONS-REQUEST)

OR SCAN QR CODE:



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GASTONIA

## *Join Us!* *Sunday* **WORSHIP**

Modern Worship 8:45 AM

Relaxed Traditional 9 AM

Traditional 11 AM



## *Joy & Sympathy:*

Joy to:

Cody and Hannah Coleman on the birth of their son, Tate Christopher, who was born on November 6, 2025.

Sympathy to:

Fielding Yelverton on the death of her father, Charles David “Mike” Randall, who died on October 27, 2025.

The family and friends of Mike Rohm, who died on October 30, 2025.

David and Katie Spurrier on the death of David’s daughter, Ally Spurrier Henson, who died on November 1, 2025.

The family and friends of David Allen Smith, who died on November 6, 2025.

Dave Kirlin and family on the death of his mother, Eleanor Kirlin, who died on November 6, 2025.

Nadia Hunter and family on the death of her father, Paul Carson, who died on November 7, 2025.

Steve Quinn and family on the death of his brother, Mike Quinn, who died on November 8, 2025.

The family and friends of Gerald “Jerry” Thompson, who died on November 11, 2025.

Sandy Simpson and her husband Dave, on the death of Dave’s stepmother, Barbara, who died on November 17, 2025.



# 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 Totals
Nov. 2	46	51	65	198	211	309
Nov. 9	31	31	47	149	149	258
Nov. 16	30	30	66	158	112	254
Nov. 23	30	27	49	124	124	203

Thanksgiving Service on Nov. 23 - 36

To get a weekly e-blast or a monthly newsletter in your inbox, email ***stephanie.s@fumcgastonia.org***

**For any additions to the newsletter, please submit submissions by the 15th of the month at**

***[fumcgastonia.org/resources/communications-promotions-request](http://fumcgastonia.org/resources/communications-promotions-request)***

*Connect with us...*

Website: [www.fumcgastonia.org](http://www.fumcgastonia.org)

Phone: 704.864.4371

Email: [contact@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:contact@fumcgastonia.org)



First United Methodist  
Church of Gastonia, NC



FUMCGastonia



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*To reach a Pastor on nights or weekends, please call the church office **704-864-4371** it will direct you to the ext. 247 and you will be forwarded to the minister on call.*

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