

# NEWS AT *first* Monthly Newsletter of First United Methodist Church

# FEBRUARY 2026

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# Note from our Lead Pastors

February arrives carrying both tenderness and honesty. It is a month that often centers on love and relationships, yet many of us know that even our most cherished connections can feel stretched thin. Schedules fill up, conversations get rushed, misunderstandings linger, and before we know it, relationships that once felt life-giving can begin to feel...parched.

As we begin the month in worship, our theme **Parched: Finding Refreshment in Our Relationships** (February 1–8) invites us to name that dryness without shame. Whether in marriage, dating relationships, friendships, or family ties, we all experience seasons when connection feels strained or distant. The good news is that God's Spirit specializes in renewal. Together, we will explore how God restores communication, rekindles compassion, and breathes new life into relationships where the well feels run dry. Our prayer is that worship becomes a place where honesty meets hope—and where living water is offered freely.

Midway through the month, we will celebrate **United Women of Faith Sunday** on February 15. This is a meaningful opportunity to give thanks for the faithful witness, leadership, and service of the women of our church and denomination. United Women of Faith continue to live out their calling to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously, and we look forward to honoring their impact on our congregation and our community.

February also ushers us into the holy season of Lent. We will gather for our **Ash Wednesday Service on Wednesday, February 18**, marking the beginning of this sacred journey. Ash Wednesday invites us to slow down, tell the truth about our lives, and remember both our humanity and our hope. In the quiet words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return," we are reminded not only of our limits, but of God's grace that meets us there.

As we move through February—from parched places to promised renewal, from ordinary days to holy ashes—we invite you to stay connected in worship, prayer, Wednesday Evening Fellowship and small groups. God is at work among us, drawing us ever closer to the heart of Christ.

With gratitude for each of you,



Rev. Justin Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Worship, Care and Administration  
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*Justin & Melissa*

# Worship Arts Ministry



Anthony Pero  
Director of Modern Worship  
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## Did Jesus Really Say That: February 18 – March 22

We live in a world shaped by algorithms and filters—where we curate what we see, choose which voices to trust, and often hear only what reinforces what we already believe. Over time, that way of seeing can quietly reshape not only our view of the world, but our understanding of God as well. Without realizing it, we can reduce Jesus to a version that feels familiar, comfortable, or convenient. In this series, "Did Jesus Really Say That," we return to the words of Jesus themselves—honest, challenging, and sometimes unsettling. Stripped of cultural assumptions, soundbites, and popular misquotes, we listen again for the truth Jesus came to reveal about God, about ourselves, and about what it truly means to follow Him. Using the language of our digital age—where memes, slogans, and half-truths travel fast—this series confronts common misconceptions and invites us to encounter Jesus as He actually speaks. Along the way, we may discover that His words are both more demanding and more life-giving than we ever imagined.

## FUMC Gastonia Music and Worship Intern

FUMC Gastonia is excited to announce that Gray Radford has accepted the position of Music and Worship Intern. A lifelong member of the church, Gray has been deeply involved in the music ministry from a young age, participating in Music Makers, youth music programs, and now the Chancel Choir. His longstanding commitment to worship and music makes him a natural fit for this role. In addition to his involvement at church, Gray is an active supporter and participant in the arts. He regularly performs in theatre productions during his spare time, including performances right across the street at the local theater. His passion for creativity extends beyond the stage into his personal life as well.

Gray is currently studying at Gaston College, working toward an Associate in Fine Arts, with plans to pursue a dual focus in Fine Arts and Journalism. Through the Music and Worship Internship, he hopes to further develop valuable skills in communication, organization, collaboration, and teamwork—tools that will serve him well in future professional and creative spaces. When he isn't studying or participating in church activities, Gray enjoys drawing, writing, spending time outdoors, and being with friends. We look forward to seeing how his talents, creativity, and dedication will enrich the music and worship life of the congregation in this new role.

# Children's Ministry



Margaret Petrey Smith  
Director of Children's Ministries  
704-864-4371  
margaret.smith@fumcgastonia.org

It's hard to believe that Lent is nearly upon us! We just got out of January and Ash Wednesday is right around the corner on February 18, which means. . . it's time to order caterpillars for Easter! Please use the QR code below or email me with your order. A direct link is available in our Thursday e-blasts. Please be sure and check it each week!

Also in February, FISH will meet for a mission opportunity at Crisis Assistance Ministry. The ice, snow, and other important ministry conflicts have upended our last FISH gatherings so, please SAVE THE DATE for 2/22 and sign up ASAP. I am looking at adding an extra event either March or April to make up for missing January. Thank you for your continued support and prayers for all things KidsMin! Yay, God!

- Margaret



# Preschool



Rebecca Denton  
Director of Preschool  
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rebecca@fumcgastonia.org

As our preschool children returned from Christmas break, we joyfully embraced the theme of new beginnings that comes with the start of a new year. With winter weather on our side, the children explored a variety of seasonal activities, including painting with ice and creating cheerful snowmen, making learning both hands-on and fun.

Our Fours class especially enjoyed “Letter G – Grocery Week,” which included a special trip to Publix. During this week, the children learned how God provides different foods to help keep our bodies healthy so we can better serve Him. Letter G also brought plenty of “goofy” activities, filling the week with silly themes, creative exploration, and lots of laughter. It was a wonderful way to begin the year with joy, imagination, and gratitude.

Looking ahead, enrollment for the 2026–2027 school year will begin in February for our current students and their siblings. Enrollment will then open to our waitlist and the public in March, as we work to fill any remaining openings.



# Youth Ministry



Hollie Luther  
Director of Youth Ministries  
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hollie.luther@fumcgastonria.org

**CCYM OFFICERS 2025-2026**

CO-PRESIDENT DAELYNA DENTON	CO-PRESIDENT KENDRA TUCKER
VICE PRESIDENT HARRISON CADWALLADER	SECRETARY NATHAN CLEMENTS & BEN MITCHELL
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSONS: NATHAN CLEMENTS & JACK LAMP COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON: HARRISON CADWALLADER	

**CCYM MEMBERS, HOLLIE, CAROLINE AND KAP**

**IgniteUS**  
MARCH 20-22, 2026  
YMCA CAMP HANES  
REGISTRATION OPEN!!!  
FRUIT-FULL

Two of our own youth are on the Conference Council on Youth Ministry. Kap Porter and Caroline Washington not only represent First, but all youth on this council. Hollie Luther sits on the council as well as a CCYM adult. The Conference Council On Youth Ministry (CCYM) is a leadership team of youth and adults from all over the Conference who come together to share and develop resources/events for youth ministries. In addition, CCYM receives grant applications and awards Youth Service Funds each year for things like local missions and community outreach. CCYM also plans and leads our annual conference youth event, IgniteUs. It is a retreat weekend for middle school and high school youth that is completely planned and led by high school CCYM members. CCYM is open to any youth in high school who is a confirmed member of a UMC. Applications open in the spring and interviews are done over the summer. To learn more about CCYM contact Kap, Caroline or Hollie.



Our 2nd Annual MLK Mini Mission Weekend was filled with fun, friends and fruitful conversations. We began our weekend in worship at the WNCCUMC MLK Service at University City UMC. We joined forces with 3 other youth groups to worship together, have lunch and games and then head to Parkview Community Center—a place that has been practicing love in the community for 30 years. Together, we cleaned the grounds, prepared food for the Monday community meal, and cared for the building itself. And then, we stayed—long enough to laugh, play ball and be present with neighbors. We were reminded that justice is not something we do for others, but something we practice with one another. On Sunday, we worshiped together at First, went out into the community for fun and fellowship and then met back at the Greene House for deeper work. This weekend included plenty of fun and fellowship with friends, but also allowed space and time for true, gut-wrenching exploration of injustice and how that shapes our friends and our communities. We are building world changers here at First!

# Adult Discipleship Ministry



Becky Greene  
Director of Spiritual Formation  
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becky@fumcgastonia.org

As we welcome the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday, February 18, I am reminded of the book *The City of God*. In it, Saint Augustine describes two cities shaping human life. One is the earthly city, and one is the city of God. Lent calls us to ascertain which city is shaping our lives: the earthly city born of greed, pride, and self-control or the one formed by God's love?

The imposition of ashes reminds us the earthly things are temporary. Augustine reminds us that God is the one who will breathe new life into us again and again.

As we journey through Lent together, let us participate in God's presence by practicing prayer, small groups, worship, justice, kindness, and generosity.

Let us faithfully turn our hearts toward the City of God.

Grace and peace,

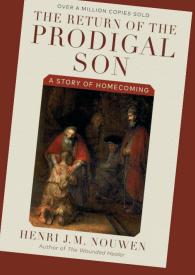
Rebecca B. Greene

Director of Spiritual Formation

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON  
BOOK STUDY

WEDNESDAYS  
FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 25  
10 AM  
ROOM 315

PURCHASE BOOK FROM IN-PERSON OR ONLINE STORE  
LED BY DAVID AND BEE POSTON



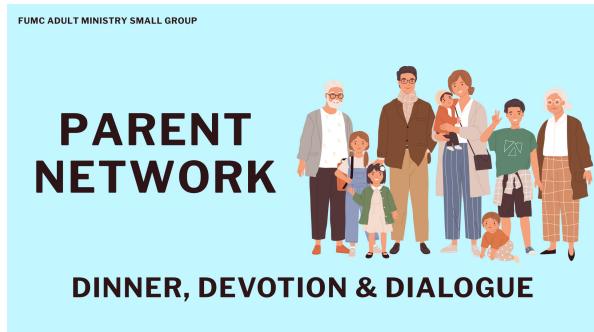
SAVE THE DATE - WOMEN'S EVENT

*Daughters of the King*  
Wednesday, April 15  
5:30 PM  
First UMC Gastonia  
Molly Grantham, Guest Speaker

MORE DETAILS TO COME



# Sunday Adult Small Groups



## Parent Network

We will resume our time of dinner and devotion on February 22 at 6 p.m. in the Family Life Center. Join us for an important and timely discussion on strengthening the connection between parents and their children.

# Tuesday Adult Small Groups



## Gather

Gather is a new group calling women living in Charlotte, Mount Holly, Belmont and Gastonia to the table for food, fellowship and faith-based discussion. Contact Becky Greene at [becky@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:becky@fumcgastonia.org) for more information.

You can sign up by calling the church office at 704-864-4371.



## My Antonia

It's a story about growing up on the Nebraska prairie at the turn of the 20th century. Meaningful lives are built through love, labor, loyalty and resilience, and the sacred is found in ordinary lives lived faithfully.

Study will run each Tuesday at 10 a.m. from February 10 - March 17 in Room 218.

## DEMENTIA CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

### Dementia Caregiver Support

The dementia caregiver support group provides practical tips for caregivers dealing with loved ones with cognitive issues. Join us for our next meeting on February 24 at 4 p.m. in Room 218.

## Wednesday Adult Small Groups

## WEDNESDAY EVENING FELLOWSHIP

### WEF Resumes

Join us at 5:30 p.m. each week for Wednesday evening dinner, followed by small group gatherings at 6:30. Individual meals are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. For more information, scan the QR code or call 704-864-4371.

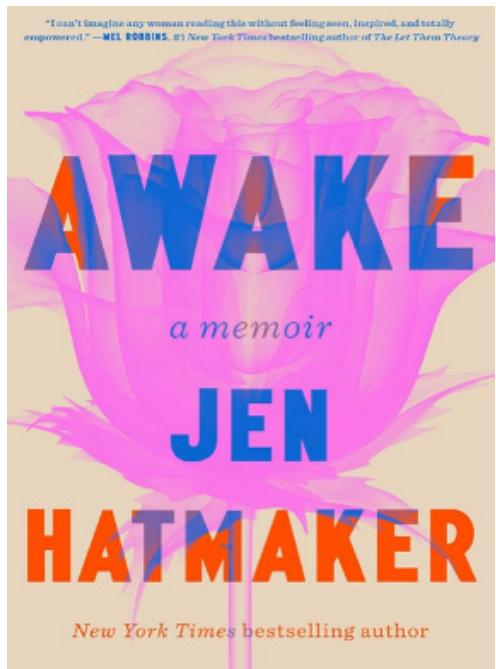


### Prayer Shawl Ministry

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 for care and celebration purposes. Yarn, knitting needles, crochet hooks, and patterns are provided. Text Joy Owens at 704-860-1486 to learn more.

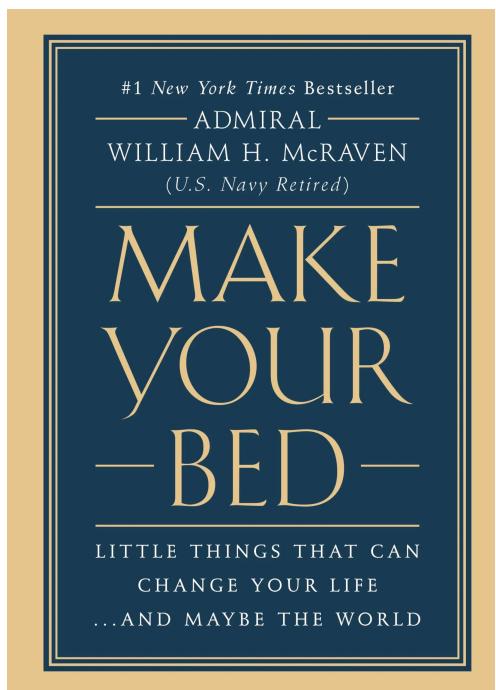
## Prayer Pause

Each week, a faithful group of moms gathers for Prayer Pause, a gentle space carved out of busy schedules, carpools, workdays and the constant rhythm of caring for others. They come with open hearts, seeking a moment to breathe, connect and find sanctuary with God. It's part devotion, part sisterhood and part holy exhale and you are invited. Meet us on Wednesdays in Room 312 at 6:30 p.m.



## Sabbath: Awake

Awake takes readers on a ride: she's hilarious, big-hearted, self-aware, vulnerable, devastated, ready to burn it all down, and eager to build it all back up. Join us each Wednesday in the parlor at 6:30 p.m., as we discuss this incredible memoir of resolve, resilience, and laughter.



## Men's Bible Study

Join us on Wednesdays in Room 316 at 6:30 p.m. for *Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life ...And Maybe the World*. It's a story based on a Navy seal's inspiring graduation speech. Purchase the book at your local bookstore or at an online retailer.

# Thursday Adult Small Groups



## Embrace: Women's Study

Embrace women's study group will continue its study of **12 Daring Women of the Bible**. The group will meet every other Thursday in Room 218 at 6:30 p.m. Check the church calendar at [fumcgastonia.org/calendar](http://fumcgastonia.org/calendar) for more details.



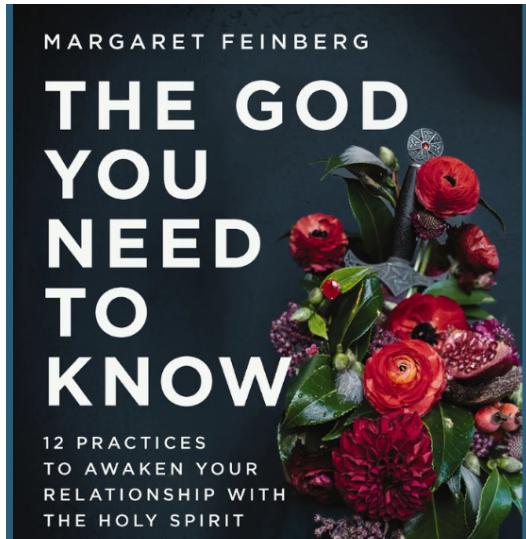
## Theology on Tap

Theology on Tap returns on Thursday, February 19 at 6:30 p.m. at Keepsake Brewery. Join us for a time of faith-based fellowship and theological discussion.



## Men's March Madness

Join us on Thursday, March 19 at 6:30 p.m. at the home of Mark McIntosh (305 Eagles Walk Drive) for basketball, barbecue and Bible chat.



## The God You Need to Know

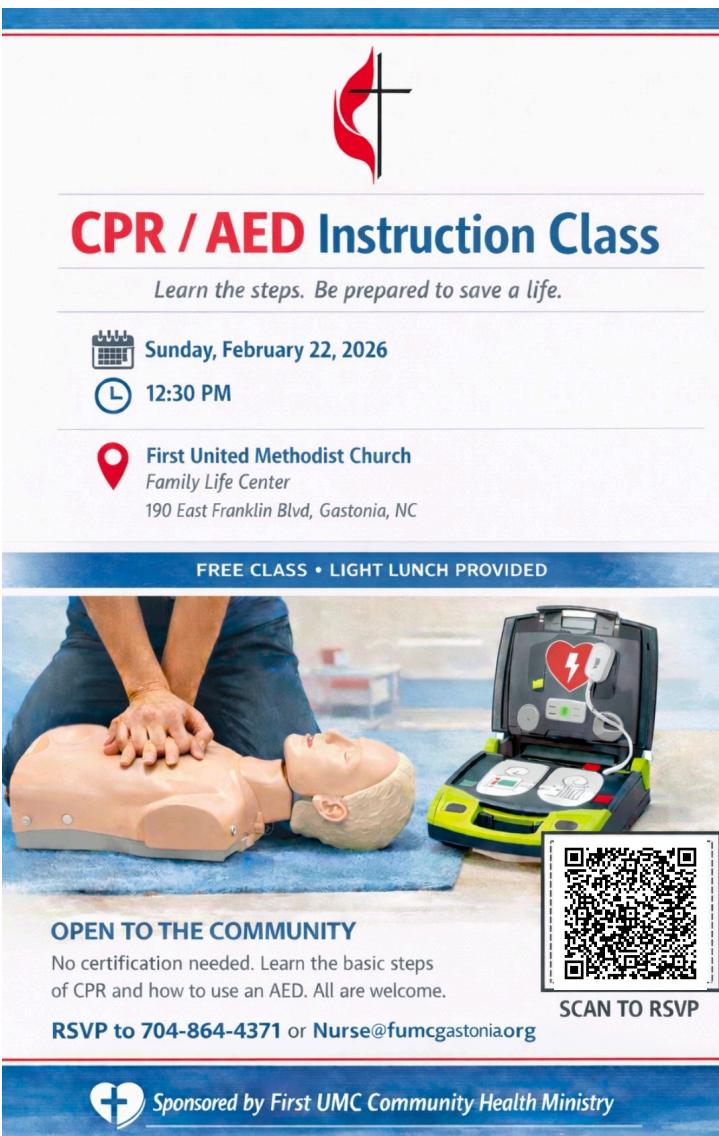
Women of the Word (WOW) will begin a six-week study on the Holy Spirit with Margaret Feinberg's book *The God You Need to Know*.

Sessions will be held via Zoom each Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m., from March 5 through April 9. If you'd like to be a part, please connect with Marti Sell at [martisell01@gmail.com](mailto:martisell01@gmail.com).

# First UMC Community Health Ministry

## Upcoming Events

The community health ministry is hosting upcoming events at First United Methodist Church. Attendees will learn how to save a life through the CPR/AED class on February 22. And on March 5, get tips on how to age well in our annual women's event "The Art of Growing Younger." Details are in the flyers below.



**CPR / AED Instruction Class**  
Learn the steps. Be prepared to save a life.

**Sunday, February 22, 2026**  
**12:30 PM**

**First United Methodist Church**  
Family Life Center  
190 East Franklin Blvd, Gastonia, NC

**FREE CLASS • LIGHT LUNCH PROVIDED**

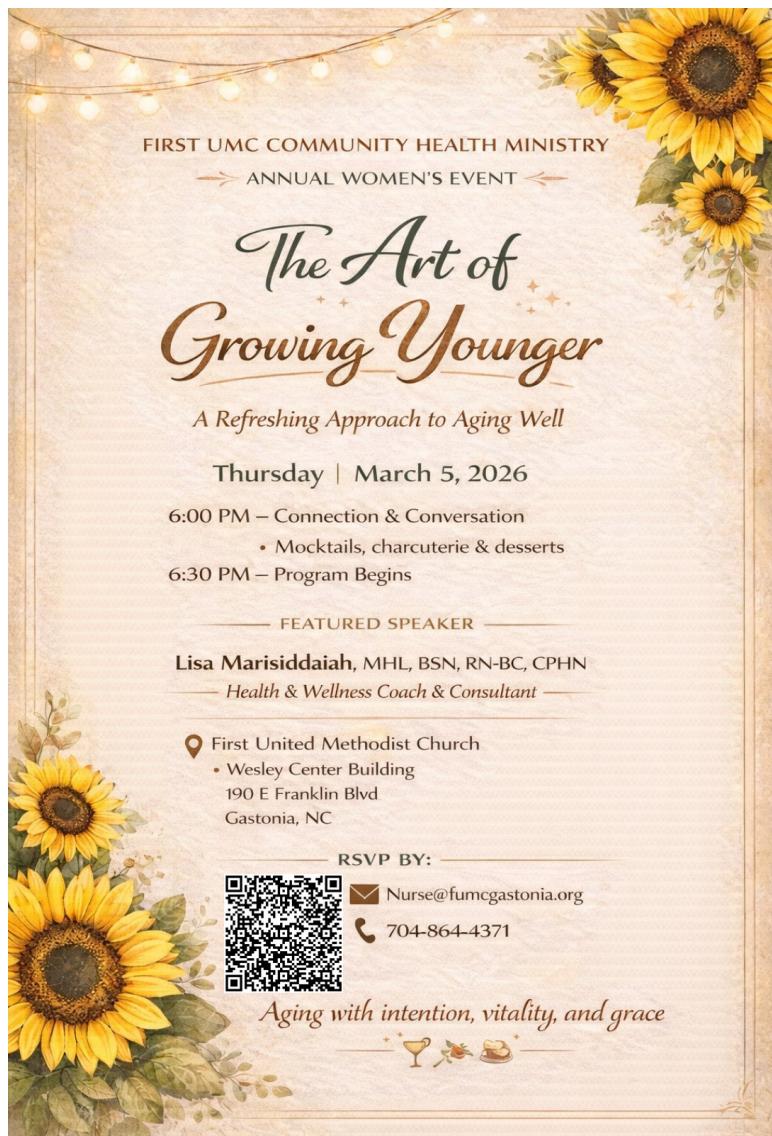


**OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY**  
No certification needed. Learn the basic steps of CPR and how to use an AED. All are welcome.

**RSVP to 704-864-4371 or Nurse@fumcgastonia.org**

**Sponsored by First UMC Community Health Ministry**

  
SCAN TO RSVP



**FIRST UMC COMMUNITY HEALTH MINISTRY**  
ANNUAL WOMEN'S EVENT

## *The Art of Growing Younger*

*A Refreshing Approach to Aging Well*

**Thursday | March 5, 2026**

6:00 PM – Connection & Conversation  
• Mocktails, charcuterie & desserts

6:30 PM – Program Begins

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

**Lisa Marisiddaiah, MHL, BSN, RN-BC, CPHN**  
Health & Wellness Coach & Consultant

**First United Methodist Church**  
• Wesley Center Building  
190 E Franklin Blvd  
Gastonia, NC

**RSVP BY:**

  Nurse@fumcgastonia.org  
 704-864-4371

*Aging with intention, vitality, and grace*



**Lisa Marisiddaiah**  
First UMC Community  
Health Ministry  
nurse@fumcgastonia.org

## JOIN US FOR THE CONVERSATION



DARKNESS  
to LIGHT

free child  
sexual abuse  
prevention  
education

Darkness to Light, *Stewards of Children* is a free, 2.5 hour, evidence-informed training that teaches adults how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Anyone who interacts with Youth:

**WHO:** organizations/parents/caregivers  
OR any adults in the community

**WHEN:** April 20th  
12:45 pm - 3:15 pm

**WHERE:** First United Methodist Church  
Fellowship Hall  
190 East Franklin Blvd., Gastonia

Register below!  
Lunch will be  
provided for  
those who  
RSVP by April  
15.

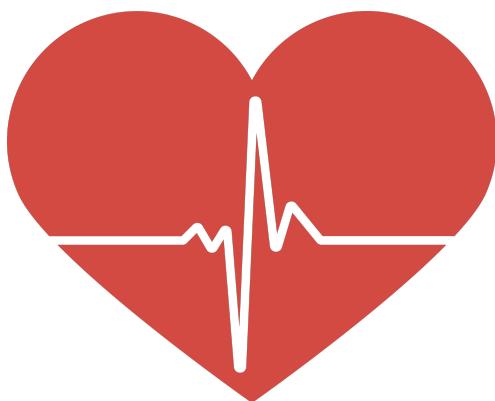


### Sponsored By:



THE  
**LIGHTHOUSE**  
Children's Advocacy Center

First UMC Community Health Ministry  
&  
Nurse Family Partnership/Gaston County



### Cardiac Arrest:

- Occurs about 1000 times every day
- Claims over 350,000 victims every year
- No one can predict who, when or where
- How quickly you provide an electric shock means the difference between life and death

### Defibrillation

### Statistical Survival Rate

Within 1 minute	90%
Within 4 minutes	70%
Within 10 minutes	2%



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

# Financial Report



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

## Year-End December 2025 Financial Results

Great news, FUMC! Our church is in a solid and stable financial situation. Here are some bright spots from 2025:

1. FUMC funded every ministry and mission that was budgeted for in 2025 by the staff and committees.
2. Collectively, our congregation was able to eliminate 100% of our debt and save our church hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest expense over the term of the note.
3. Our church has had a financial surplus over budget for the past two years.
4. Your finance committee and staff remained committed to transparency and open communication with our congregation through announcements and our monthly newsletters.
5. Your finance committee met consistently over the course of the past two years and our church is on a financially stable path.
6. We have a 2026 plan to further stabilize the foundation of the church with legacy giving and general endowment fund rebuilding plans.
7. We will be assessing our traditional stewardship campaign strategies and improving them to meet the changing needs of our congregation and increased online worship.

### The Year-to-Date numbers for 2025 were:

Total spending : \$2,128,553 (\$22,583 less than budgeted)  
Total revenue (income) : \$2,250,803 (\$219,323 more than budgeted).

As we work through the changes in our Kitchen/Food Service ministry, we were over budget by \$8,234.

Our thriving Preschool ministry was \$6,554 positive.

This gave us a year-to-date total for Church Operations of \$123,930 to the good. If you desire additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Dave Davis in our 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

# Drama Ministry

## Guys on Ice

Check the new dates for performances of Guys on Ice. To reserve your tickets, visit our website at [fumcgastonia.org/theatre](http://fumcgastonia.org/theatre).

**FUMC**  
*theatre* **New dates!**

**Performances:**  
**February 12, 13 & 14 at 7:30**  
**February 15 at 2:30**

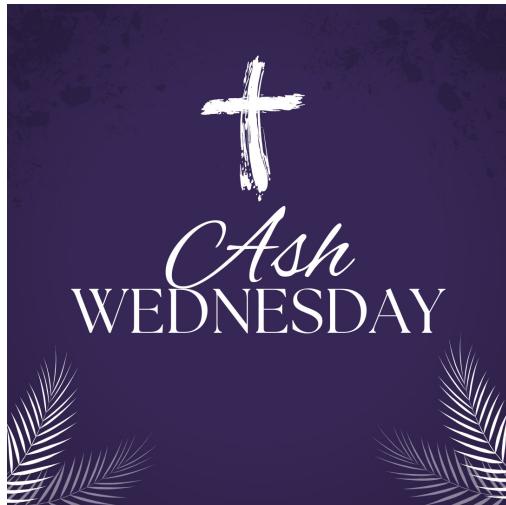


# Midweek Worship at First



## Vespers Worship Service

Vespers services are held on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. in the Chapel. Come for a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal.



## Ash Wednesday

We will gather for our Ash Wednesday Service on Wednesday, February 18 at 6:30 p.m., marking the beginning of the Lenten season. Ash Wednesday invites us to be still, be honest, and remember both our humanity and our hope. In the quiet words, “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” we are reminded of God’s grace that meets us in our frailties.

Regular Wednesday evening dinner will be held in the FLC at 5:30 p.m.



First United Methodist Church Gastonia

## **VOLUNTEER BUILDINGS & GROUNDS WORK DAY**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026  
8:30 AM - NOON**



**FOR MORE INFO  
EMAIL DDAVIS@FUMCGASTONIA.ORG**



## **UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH**

### **SCHOLARSHIP**

**KINDLY CONSIDER GIVING TO  
UWF SCHOLARSHIP FUND CAMPAIGN**

**DEADLINE: MARCH 8**

**TO DONATE,  
SCAN THE QR CODE**

[fumcgastonria.org/givepay/uwf-scholarship](http://fumcgastonria.org/givepay/uwf-scholarship)



# *Joy & Sympathy:*

## **Sympathy to:**

The family and friends of Steve Mack, who died on January 24, 2026.

Sylvia Short upon the death of her husband, Roy Short, who died on January 26, 2026.

Tom and Charlotte Matherlee and family, upon the passing of Charlotte's brother Henry Franklin Forbes, who died on February 2, 2026.

Bill and Sharon Eccles and family, upon the death of Bill's sister Judie Hancock, who died on February 3, 2026.



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH GASTONIA

Join Us!  
Sunday  
WORSHIP

Modern Worship 8:45 AM  
Relaxed Traditional 9 AM  
Traditional 11 AM

# 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
Jan. 4	40	98	65	161	163	266
Jan. 18	75	99	44	282	288	401

\*Jan. 11 was 10:30 a.m. combined service with Epworth UMC.

In-person attendance: 176 | Online views: 234

\*Jan. 25 was 9 a.m. online only service due to snow/ice.

Total views for Jan. 25 service: 1,092

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

**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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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