

# NEWS AT

# *first*

Monthly  
Newsletter  
of  
First United  
Methodist  
Church

# JANUARY 2026

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# Note from our Lead Pastors

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ as we step boldly into a new year together! January always feels like a threshold—a holy doorway between what has been and what is yet to come. We pause to give thanks for God's faithfulness in the year behind us, and we lean forward with hope, trusting that the Spirit is already preparing the road ahead. The turning of the calendar is not simply about new resolutions; it is about renewed availability. Once again, God invites us to be a people who pray deeply, serve generously, and live expectantly.

This month, we begin a new sermon series titled **Everyday Amens: Prayers Prayed from Generation to Generation**. We'll explore how simple yet powerful prayers—spoken in kitchens, classrooms, workplaces, and hospital rooms—form us into Christlike people. These are prayers for ordinary days and extraordinary moments, prayers that stretch our faith, deepen our trust, and shape our witness. We hope you'll lean into this journey, reflect on how you speak with God, and rediscover how prayer becomes a way of life.

We are also excited to welcome **Bishop Kenneth Carter, Jr.** as our resident Bishop on January 25. Bishop Carter has been a pastor to pastors, a thoughtful leader in the United Methodist Church, an author and professor of Christian Leadership, and a voice of spiritual hope grounded in grace and unity. We are honored to have him with us preaching in all services.

In the coming weeks, we will continue investing in worship that forms us, discipleship that stretches us, and mission that sends us. We are praying that 2026 will be a year of deeper spiritual roots and wider missional reach. We want to be a church where new friendships are formed, where questions are welcomed, where burdens are shared, and where Christ's love becomes visible in real, practical ways.

January is also a wonderful time to reconnect:

- Try a new Sunday School class or small group.
- Say yes to serving in a ministry or outreach.
- Reintroduce yourself to someone you haven't met yet.
- Look for someone who may be standing alone—and stand with them.

Most of all, begin this year asking, "Lord, what would You have me do?"—and trust that God will meet you with courage and joy. We are grateful to be your pastors, and we are honored to walk into a new year alongside a congregation so full of hope. May 2026 be a year marked by grace, generosity, and a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

With confidence in Christ and affection for you,  
Pastors Justin and Melissa



Rev. Justin Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Worship, Care and Administration  
704-864-4371  
justin.lowe@fumcgastonria.org



Rev. Melissa Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Connection, Mission and Outreach  
704-864-4371  
melissa.lowe@fumcgastonria.org

*Justin & Melissa*

# Worship Arts Ministry



Jill Willis  
Director of Traditional Worship  
704-864-4371  
jill.willis@fumcgastonnia.org



Anthony Pero  
Director of Modern Worship  
704-864-4371  
anthony.pero@fumcgastonnia.org

**JANUARY 11, 2026**  
10:30 AM

## JOINT SERVICE EPWORTH & FIRST UMC

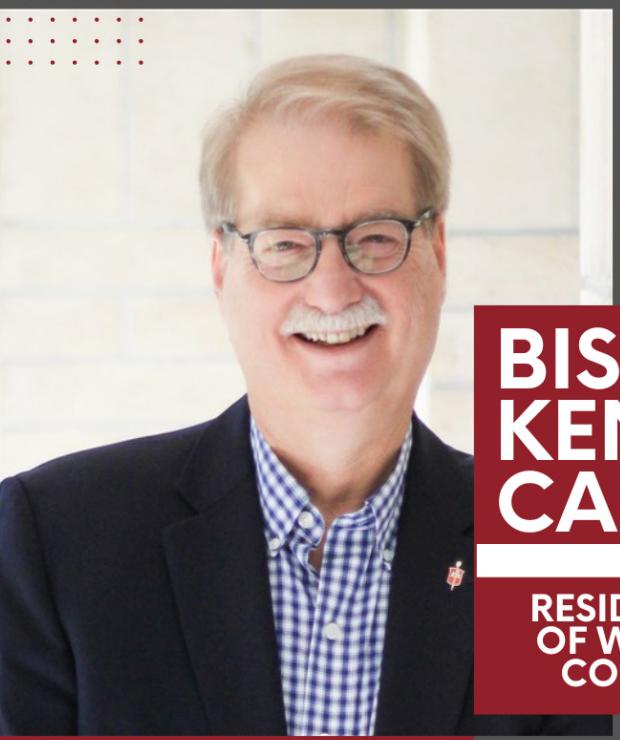


Join us here at First UMC for a special gathering. Epworth UMC and First UMC will come together as a community of believers, united in our faith and commitment to seek God's guidance and to worship Him in the beauty of His glory.

2 CONGREGATIONS, 1 PURPOSE

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 25**

**GUEST PREACHER**



**BISHOP  
KEN  
CARTER**

**RESIDENT BISHOP  
OF WESTERN NC  
CONFERENCE**

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

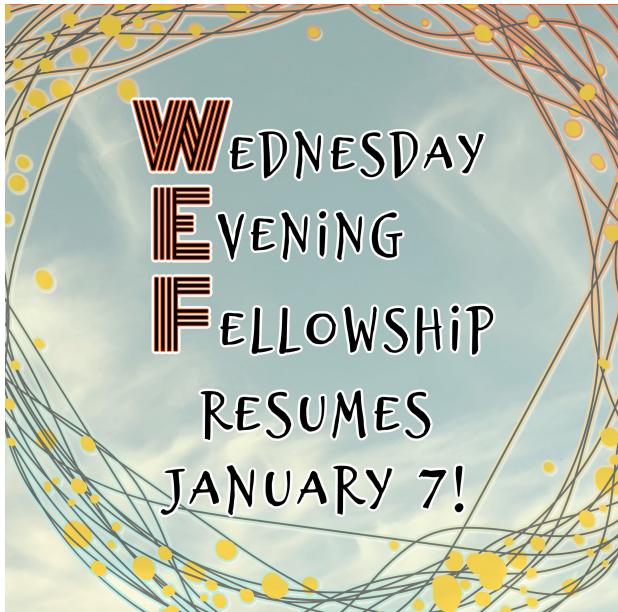
# Children's Ministry



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

A new year brings so many promises and exciting opportunities! Our current Sunday School unit will conclude with Epiphany on January 4, and we'll start a new study on January 11. Wednesday Evening Fellowship resumes on January 7, and FISH has two new dates to save - January 25 and February 4. Looking forward to wonderful, faith-filled times together in 2026. Yay, God!

- Margaret



# Preschool



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

December was filled with joy and excitement at the preschool as we celebrated the true meaning of Christmas. This month, the children focused on our Bible verse from Luke 2:11: “Today a Savior is born, which is Christ the Lord.” We enjoyed helping them learn about the incredible gift of Jesus’ birth and the hope it brings. In the spirit of giving, the children worked hard creating special gifts for their families and friends—adding a heartfelt, personal touch to their holiday celebrations.

Our Fours classroom blessed us with a beautiful Christmas program in the Chapel, joyfully sharing songs and smiles with everyone who attended.

Our younger classrooms also enjoyed meaningful parent-child time while completing holiday crafts together and sharing their own sweet version of the Nativity with their parents—making this season even more memorable.

To close out our festive month, we enjoyed a cozy Pajama Day before the holiday break. Class parties and a special Christmas movie made the morning even sweeter and filled our halls with laughter. We are truly grateful for the opportunity to share these meaningful moments with our preschool families. Thank you for making December such a special time!

# Youth Ministry



Hollie Luther  
Director of Youth Ministries  
704-864-4371  
hollie.luther@fumcgastonnia.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 offset the costs of this trip. If you want to go, but cannot afford the full amount, please reach out to Hollie.



**PROVERBS 31:8-9**

 **2ND ANNUAL**  
**MLK MINI**  
**MISSION WEEKEND**

Calling all youth who want to collaborate, provide insight and make positive change!

**JAN 17-19, 2026**  
**ASHEVILLE, NC**



Register using the QR code. If you need a scholarship to attend, please reach out to your youth leader.

**ACTIVITIES**

- MLK Memorial Service at University City UMC
- Skiing
- Historic Black Asheville Tour
- Mission Work
- Collaboration with other youth groups
- Racial Reconciliation Conversations
- Games

**YOUTH AT FIRST CALENDAR** JANUARY 2026

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4 <small>SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM</small>	5	6	7 <small>WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30</small> <small>Last Day to Sign Up For Summer Sr-Hi Mission Trip</small>	8	9	10
II <small>SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM YOUTH HANDBELLS 1PM YOUTH CHOR 4:45 SUNDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30</small>	12	13	14 <small>WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30</small>	15	16	17 <small>MLK Mini Mission</small>
18 <small>MLK Mini Mission</small>	19 <small>MLK Mini Mission</small>	20	21 <small>WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30</small>	22	23	24
25 <small>SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM Winter Jam! Parent Network</small>	26	27	28 <small>WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30</small>	29	30	31

# Adult Discipleship Ministry



Becky Greene  
Director of Spiritual Formation  
704-864-4371 ext. 227  
becky@fumcgastonia.org

## Ordinary People, Extraordinary Discipleship

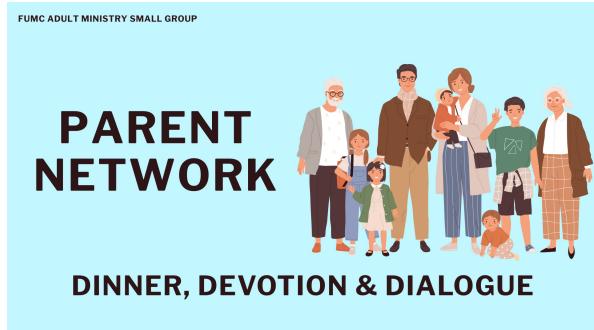
As we step into a new year, I am reminded by Diana Butler Bass that as Christians we began our new year with Advent. The Liturgical calendar can keep us tethered to our roots and faith tradition, but we must intentionally contrast it with the flow of the calendar year. Jesus first followers found sacred time and human time confusing. Even after the gift has arrived there is still more waiting. Waiting for the gifts of the magi, peace on earth, the season of Lent and the resurrection. We wait for a new heaven and a new earth.

The Christian calendar does not always make headlines. It looks more like quiet faithfulness: meals prepared and delivered, prayers spoken in hospital rooms, small groups gathering, generosity shared and seeking new relationships. It looks like showing up when it would be easier to stay home. It looks like Emmanuel, God with us. It looks like love that refuses to give up.

That is who this congregation is at its core, an ordinary community doing extraordinary acts. You have stepped into new ministries and reminded one another that following Jesus is not a program to complete, but a life to live. In this new year, may we keep loving boldly, serving joyfully and trusting our Savior deeply.

Becky

# Sunday Adult Small Groups



## Parent Network

We will resume our time of dinner and devotion on January 25, 2026 at 6 p.m. Join us for an important and timely program designed to help parents understand the realities of vaping, the risks for teens, and how to talk with your child.

# 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. Join us starting January 13. 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.



# Wednesday Adult Small Groups

## WEDNESDAY EVENING FELLOWSHIP

### WEF Resumes

Wednesday Evening Fellowship resumes on January 7. Join us at 5:30 p.m. each week for dinner, followed by small group gatherings at 6:30. Purchase a season pass and get 13 meals for the price of 11. Adult season passes are \$110. Child season passes are \$55. 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.

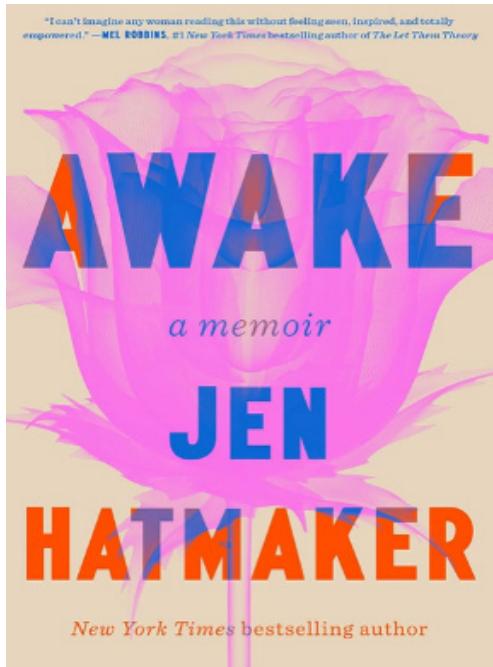


### Make It/Take It

A friendly group gathers to prepare a dish for delivery to a neighbor or shut-in. It's simple, shared cooking that becomes caring outreach. Starting January 7, meet us each Wednesday in the Greene House kitchen at 6:30 p.m. For more information, contact Becky Greene at [becky@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:becky@fumcgastonia.org).

## Prayer Pause

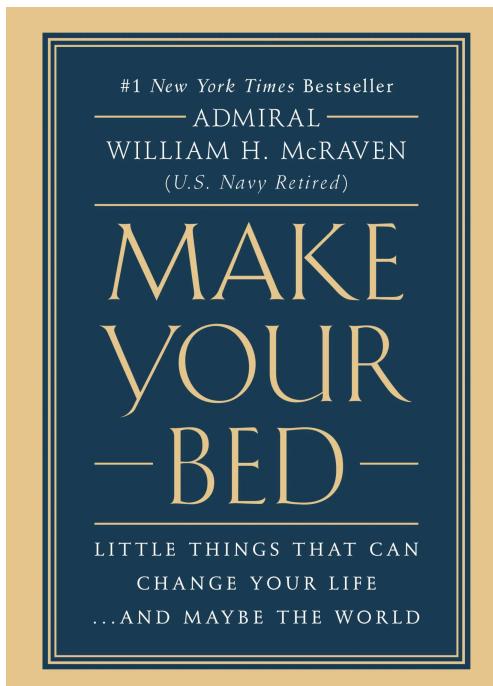
Each week, a faithful group of moms gathers for Prayer Pause, a gentle space carved out of busy schedules, carpools, workdays and the constant rhythm of caring for others. They come with open hearts, seeking a moment to breathe, connect and find sanctuary with God. It's part devotion, part sisterhood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



## 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.

Anne Mallonee will lead the group.



## 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



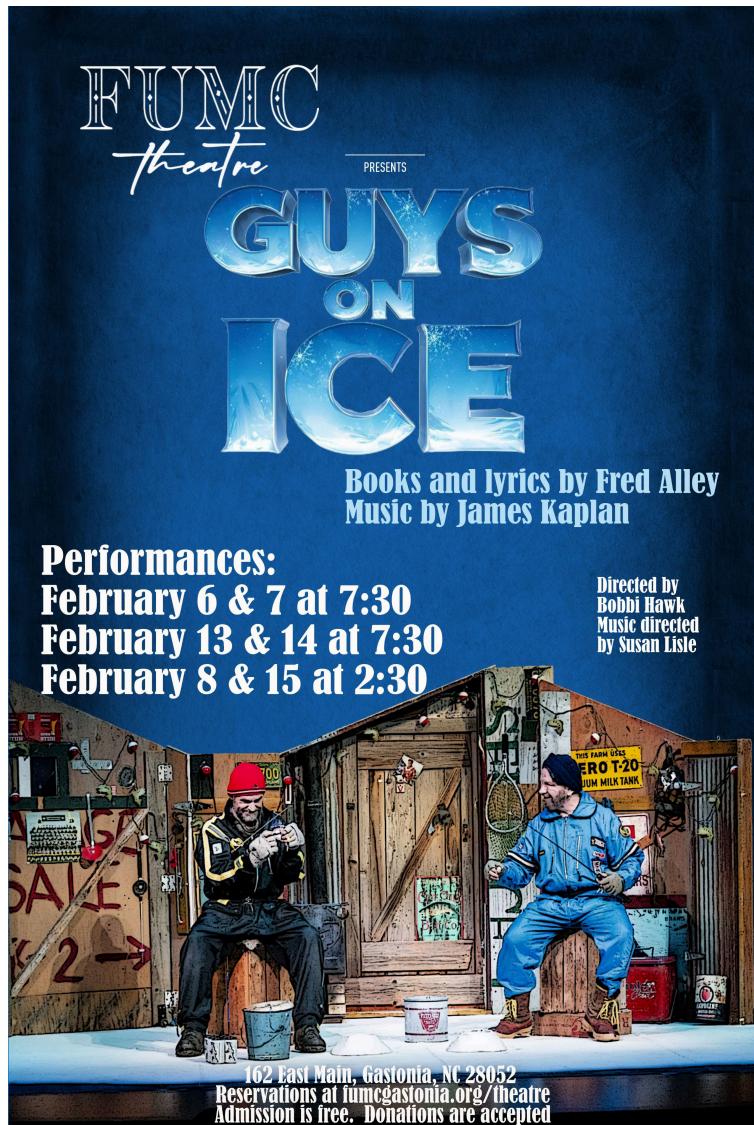
## Embrace: Women's Study

Embrace women's study group will continue their study of **12 Daring Women of the Bible**. The group will meet every other Thursday beginning January 8 in Room 218 at 6:30 p.m.

## Theology on Tap

Theology on Tap continues this month. The group will meet on January 22 at 6:30 p.m. at Keepsake Brewery. Patrick McConnell leads the group.

# Drama Ministry



# First UMC Community Health Ministry

Each year, the Community Health Ministry identifies a word that becomes the theme for the programs, events and outreach. For 2026, we are focusing on “Collaboration.” Collaboration in church community health ministries involves partnering with public health, medical, mental health, and other faith-based groups to leverage shared resources, build trust, and address community health needs like food insecurity, maternal health, or chronic disease, moving beyond simple health fairs to create faith-informed, impactful programs that improve health equity and support vulnerable populations. The benefits of collaboration include sharing resources for broader impact, enhancing trust with the underserved, and integrating spiritual-emotional and physical well-being. In doing this, we aim to build stronger, more effective relationships with community partners and work toward more effective solutions with the issues we choose to address. If you have any ideas for collaborative efforts, please send to [nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fumcgastonia.org).

## **Fitness & Nutrition Display - Jan. 14**

Blood pressure checks will be offered from 5 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 14 in the Family Life Center.

## **Volunteers Needed**

Accountability partners can be so important when we are starting a new fitness or nutrition program, and working toward a personal goal. January is typically a time when people have a desire to improve their health and wellness.

Would you be interested in leading a walking/running/hiking or exercise group? Do you exercise at the YMCA/Planet Fitness or another gym on a regular basis? Would you be interested in inviting others who have memberships to meet you there at a specific time? If so, please email [nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fumcgastonia.org) with details and a list will be shared with church members.



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

## Parent Network Presentation - January 25

We had come so far in reducing the smoking rate among our teens and then came vaping. Kids who would never have thought to pick up a cigarette think nothing of picking up a vape. Part of Cancer Services' Mission is to promote healthy lifestyles. Kim Elmore will provide education on the dangers of vaping and any kind of tobacco use to attendees of the Parent Network on Sunday, January 25 at 6 p.m. in the FLC.



### Smoke Detectors

Gaston County Emergency Management and Fire Services is currently offering free smoke alarm assistance for residents who do not have a working smoke alarm in their home. This program is designed to help keep our community safe and prevent fire-related injuries.

If you or someone you know can benefit from this service, scan the QR code below or visit the website, [www.gcoemfs.org](http://www.gcoemfs.org). Once submitted, Fire Services will follow up and schedule a time to come out and install the smoke alarms at no cost.





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

# Financial Report



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

The following is the approved budget for 2026. The budget was recommended by the Finance Committee on December 2, 2025 and approved by Church Council on December 18, 2025.

 <b>First United Methodist Church</b> Gastonia, North Carolina	<b>2025 Budget</b>	<b>2026 Budget</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	\$ 1,800,000	\$ 1,978,053
<b>Budget Expenditures</b>		
Conference And District Total Conference And District (@100%)	114,547	126,328
Missions	3,500	3,300
Outreach	40,600	42,800
<b>Total Outreach Ministry</b>	<b>44,100</b>	<b>46,100</b>
Communications/Digital Ministry		
<b>Total Communications/Digital Ministry</b>	<b>12,680</b>	<b>17,780</b>
Worship Ministry		
Total Traditional Worship	9,975	15,150
Total Modern Worship	4,150	6,000
Total Music	19,350	23,500
<b>Total Worship &amp; Music Ministry</b>	<b>33,475</b>	<b>44,650</b>
Educational Ministry		
Total Adult Ministry	24,350	34,350
Total Children's Ministry	23,700	26,500
Total Youth and College Ministry	13,300	15,700
Total Youth Outreach	9,500	11,000
Total Recreation Ministry	500	500
<b>Total Educational Ministry</b>	<b>71,350</b>	<b>88,050</b>
Nurture Ministry		
<b>Total Nurture Expenses</b>	<b>38,250</b>	<b>42,000</b>
Total Planning and Stewardship	40,500	1,500
Personnel Expenses		
Total Employee Benefits & Insurance	180,701	180,617
Total Employee Compensation	988,534	1,094,722
<b>Total Personnel</b>	<b>1,169,235</b>	<b>1,275,339</b>
Asset Ministry		
Total Administrative Expense	140,701	187,700
Total Buildings And Grounds Expense	217,301	224,500
<b>Total Assets Ministry</b>	<b>358,002</b>	<b>412,200</b>
Prepaid Embrace Initiative Expenses	(40,500)	-
<b>Staff Parish Reserve Fund</b> (Was an "Offset for Open Staff Positions" in the 2025 Budget.)	(41,639)	-
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>1,800,000</b>	<b>2,053,947</b>
<b>Operating: Surplus / (Deficit)</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>(75,894)</b>
Kitchen Ministry		
Total Kitchen Income	95,000	70,000
Total Kitchen Expenses	96,800	88,900
<b>Total Kitchen Ministry</b>	<b>(1,800)</b>	<b>(18,900)</b>
Weekday Preschool Ministry		
Total WPS Income	136,480	127,425
Total WPS Expenses	134,336	125,937
<b>Total Weekday Preschool Ministry</b>	<b>2,144</b>	<b>1,488</b>

## Year-to-Date November 2025 Financial Results

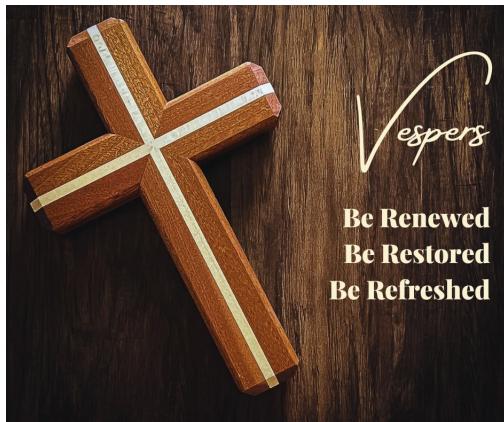
The following is a summary of First United Methodist Church of Gastonia's financial position through November 2025.

Total expenses year-to-date were \$1,960,874, which is \$9,203 under budget. Total revenue for the same period was \$1,883,809, exceeding the budget by \$150,684. Consolidated cash flow reflects a net negative position of \$77,065, primarily due to the timing of expenses and contributions across ministry areas. Church Operations accounts for \$73,295 of this variance, Kitchen/Food Service reflects \$5,948 negative, and Preschool continues to operate positively at \$2,178 above expenses. The ministries and mission of First UMC Gastonia continue throughout the year—serving our community, nurturing faith, and sharing the love of Christ in tangible ways. Your faithful generosity makes this ongoing work possible. As we look ahead, contributions made earlier in the year help support consistent ministry funding and operational stability. If you have questions or would like additional information, the Church Business Office is always glad to assist. Thank you for your continued support and partnership in ministry as a part of our church family at First United Methodist Church of Gastonia.

- The Finance Committee

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## Life at First UMC



### Vespers Worship Service

Vespers will resume on January 7, 2026. Services are held on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. in the Chapel. Come for a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal.



### Baptism of Wesley Michael Hunter

Wesley Michael Hunter was baptized on Sunday, Dec. 7 during our modern worship service.

First United Methodist Church rejoices with Wesley's parents, Graham and Nadia Hunter, and pray God's peace and joy be with the Hunter family.

## A Visit from Rev. Dr. Michael Brown

On Sunday, Dec. 7, First UMC welcomed pastor Rev. Dr. Michael Brown, author of the book *A Long Ago Birth in a Right Now World*. Rev. Dr. Brown preached at all three of our services, and during our Sunday School hour, he joined Pastors Justin and Melissa in the chapel during for a time of Q & A and reflection.



# WATER AT WORK MINISTRY

**WITH YOUR GENEROUS  
GIVING, FIRST UMC RAISED  
\$5,978 TOWARDS  
WATER AT WORK  
MINISTRIES!**



**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:



**United Methodist Men's  
Hot Dog Lunch**

FUMC Family Life Center  
Main Avenue & Oakland Street



Hot dog, chili,  
chips, cookie &  
drink for only \$5

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 9  
NOON - 1 PM**



# *Joy & Sympathy:*

## **Joy to:**

Graham and Nadia Hunter on the baptism of their son, Wesley Michael, who was baptized on December 7, 2025.

## **Sympathy to:**

The family and friends of Robert 'Bob' Jackson Stager, who passed away on December 2, 2025

Michael Buchanan on the death of his mother, Martha Palmore, who died on December 7, 2025

The family and friends of James Roy Peach, who died on December 10, 2025

The family and friends of Frank Rea, who died on December 13, 2025

Hollie Luther on the death of her father, Walter "Pete" Luther, who died on December 17, 2025

Ashley Clark on the death of her mother, Jean Kiefer Wood, who died on December 20, 2025

The family and friends of Ralph Jonas, who died on December 28, 2025

Pam Flynn upon the death of her father, Rev. Herbert Abraham 'Abe' Moyer, who died on December 20 and her mother, Winnifred 'Winnie' Moyer, who died on December 29, 2025



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
Dec. 7	46	66	60	188	207	294
Dec. 14	38	37	62	160	200	260
Dec. 21	47	41	60	211	165	312

Dec. 24	In-person	Online	Dec. 28 - 10:30 AM Combined Service
2:30 p.m.	80	89	In-person 171
5:30 p.m.	305	99	Online 238
10:30 p.m.	140	211	

**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



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