



**NEWS AT**

*first*

Monthly  
Newsletter  
of  
First United  
Methodist  
Church

**MARCH  
2026**



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# Note from our Lead Pastors

As we journey through Lent, the people of First United Methodist Church are moving steadily toward the great Triduum (three days of the Christian faith—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday).

Holy Week is an invitation to walk with Christ from table, to cross, to empty tomb.

As United Methodists shaped by the theology of John Wesley, worship is a primary means of grace. Wesley reminded the early Methodists that God meets us through practices like prayer, Scripture, fasting, and especially the Lord's Supper. Holy Week gathers all of these means of grace into one sacred movement. We do not merely remember these events—we participate in them. We allow the Spirit to draw us deeper into repentance, gratitude, and resurrection joy.

## **Holy Thursday: “Is it I, Lord?”**

Our Holy Thursday Communion Service, “Is it I, Lord?”, invites us into the upper room—the night of the Last Supper. Around the table, Jesus did not gather perfect disciples. He gathered confused, fearful, devoted, and even betraying hearts. When Jesus spoke of betrayal, each one asked, “Is it I?” That question still echoes.

On Holy Thursday, we will experience the story of the Last Supper and come forward to receive Holy Communion. In the Wesleyan tradition, we believe the Lord's Supper is not just a memorial but a living encounter with the grace of Christ. At the table, we are examined, forgiven, nourished, and sent. This is a powerful night to come with humility and honesty, allowing Christ to search our hearts and renew our covenant with Him.

## **Good Friday: At the Foot of the Cross**

Good Friday marks the final moments of Jesus upon the cross. We slow down. We listen. We remember the cost of love.

Wesley preached Christ crucified because he knew there is no resurrection without the cross. On Good Friday, we confront both the depth of human sin and the immeasurable mercy of God. This service is solemn, but it is not hopeless. We gather at the foot of the cross to remember that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” In a world quick to move past suffering, Good Friday teaches us to stay, to grieve, and to trust.

## **Easter Sunday: Resurrection Joy**

Then comes the dawn.

Easter is not merely a happy ending—it is the decisive victory of God over sin, death, and despair. Wesley proclaimed that the resurrection assures us that grace is stronger than the grave and that holiness and new life are truly possible.

We invite you to celebrate Easter with us in every way you are able:

- **6:30 a.m. – Sunrise Service in the Memory Garden**

As the sun rises, we proclaim that Christ is risen indeed. There is something powerful about greeting Easter outdoors, surrounded by reminders of both memory and hope.

- **9 a.m. – Modern Easter Worship in the Theatre**

- **9:45 a.m. – Easter Brunch in the Family Life Center**

- **10:15 a.m. – Butterfly Release on the Family Life Center Patio**

A beautiful sign of resurrection and new creation.

- **11:00 a.m. – Traditional Easter Worship in the Sanctuary**

Each service offers a distinct expression of the same resurrection hope. Whether you prefer modern or traditional worship, sunrise quiet or celebratory song, Easter at First UMC is a full-bodied proclamation that the tomb is empty.

### Why Come to Worship?

You might ask: Why does it matter if I attend all of this? Because worship shapes us while grace meets us, and we need the story again.

Holy Week reminds us who we are and whose we are. It draws us from self-examination at the table, to surrender at the cross, to joy at the empty tomb. In a culture that rushes past both sorrow and wonder, Holy Week slows us down and anchors us in the saving work of Christ. And we do not come alone.

### How to Invite Others

Easter remains one of the most natural opportunities to invite someone to church. Many are simply waiting to be asked.

- Personally invite a neighbor or coworker.
- Share one of our church posts on your social media accounts.
- Offer to sit with someone who might feel nervous.
- Invite a family to join you for brunch and worship.

Your invitation could be the means of grace that opens someone's heart to Christ.

Friends, Holy Week is not just another set of services. It is the heart of our faith. Come to the table. Come to the cross. Come to the empty tomb.

And bring someone with you.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

*Justin & Melissa*



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



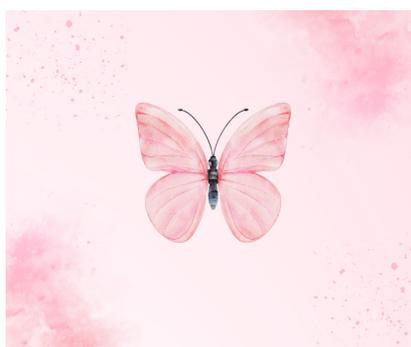
Rev. Melissa Lowe  
Lead Pastor of Connection, Mission and Outreach  
704-864-4371  
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# Connections



## **Eggstravaganza**

Join us for our annual Easter Egg Hunt on Sunday, March 29 at 3 p.m. at Robinson Elementary. It's a fun time for the entire community. Parents, you can help our children by donating pre-filled plastic eggs from now until Palm Sunday. Check our social media for more fun content and invite a friend!



## **Butterfly Release/Easter Brunch**

On Easter Sunday, April 5 beginning at 9:45 a.m., we will gather for our Easter brunch in the Family Life Center. Shortly following, we will release butterflies in the FLC patio as a sign of new life and new creation. Check the weekly e-blast for additional details!



## **Lenten Community Lunch**

Each Wednesday during Lent, area churches offer Lenten lunches. It's a time of worship and fellowship during the sacred season. Lunches are \$8, with donations supporting Least of These Carolinas. Check the weekly e-blast for more details.



## **Crisis Assistance Ministry**

Let's help our neighbors in need this Lenten Season by stocking the shelves at Crisis Assistance Ministry (CAM). Scan the QR code to see dates and details for the items to be collected on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings throughout Lent. Look for collection boxes in the FLC and the Gathering Space from February 22-April 1, 2026.



# Children's Ministry



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

Friends, the season of Lent is here! On Wednesdays and Sundays, we've been talking about what Lent means, what giving up something for Lent might look like, and how sometimes giving up something can actually help us see, feel, or consume things more clearly.

**Lightbulb Moment:** Some of our really smart kiddos figured out through scripture and conversation that eliminating some of the "junk food" in our lives gives our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls more opportunities for the "good food" of God!  
Awesome conversations are happening whenever our children gather!

From Wednesday, March 11 through Sunday, March 15, caterpillars will be available for pick-up in The Gathering Place. I will let you know that they've arrived and are ready.

On Sunday, March 22, FISH will gather again. Plans are still underway, but please be sure and check the weekly e-blast and KidMin texts for details and to sign up. Speaking of our weekly e-blast, please check it every week for important information and updates about all things KidMin! I am also sending a bi-weekly text update. If you are not receiving either of these, please let me know.

On Sunday, March 29 – Palm Sunday – we will hold EGGSTRAVAGANZA, our Annual Easter Egg Hunt, at 3 p.m. at Robinson Elementary. Please help our children have the best time ever by donating pre-filled plastic easter eggs from now until Palm Sunday. I have empty Easter eggs, if you need them. What a joy and privilege it is to spend this Lenten season with your children, as we prepare for Easter! Yay, God!

- Margaret



**THE WORK OF IMAGINATION**

Children, Youth, and some Adult classes are using the same Sunday School theme during Lent, with different formats for each age level. A great opportunity for family and churchwide conversations! The first Sunday, we saw an incredible connection between Sunday School, Worship, and Age-Level Ministries.

Find each Sunday's Bible story video in our weekly e-blast!

**Save the Date!**



**For 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grades**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 22 - 5:30-7:30pm**

**Sign up and details to come! Please be sure and check the weekly e-blast!**

# Preschool



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

This month the preschool was filled with joyful learning, laughter, and meaningful moments. We began with the Letter Q, where the children cozied up in their favorite pajamas while learning about “quilt.” The day felt extra special as they enjoyed a comforting pancake snack made by Ms. Rebecca—bringing warmth and smiles all around. As we celebrated Valentine’s Day, our focus turned to God’s great love for us and how we can share that love with others. The children enjoyed heartfelt lessons, created special Valentine cards for their friends, and delighted in a festive Valentine’s Day party. We also joined in the excitement of the Olympics by wearing our red, white, and blue to cheer on Team USA! The children loved showing their patriotic spirit and talking about athletes working hard to do their best. We ventured into the Letter Z, exploring the zoo and the amazing animals God created, and wrapped up the month with one of our favorite themes—the Letter D for dinosaurs! From roaring imaginative play to dino-themed crafts, the excitement was contagious. It has truly been a wonderful month of growth, faith, and fun. We are so grateful for the opportunity to nurture these little hearts and minds.

- Rebecca



# Youth Ministry



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

Hi, First UMC!

Check out the events happening in our youth ministry!

-Hollie

YOUTH AT FIRST CALENDAR							MARCH 2026
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	
1 SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM SUNDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30	2	3	4 WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30	5	6	7	
8 SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM SUNDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30 Paint Party	9	10	11 WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30	12	13	14	
15 SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM SUNDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30 Glow Egg Hunt	16	17	18 WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30	19	20-21 IgniteUs Retreat!		
22 IgniteUs Retreat!	23	24	25 WEDNESDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30	26	27	28	
29 SUNDAY SCHOOL 10AM SUNDAY EVENING MEET UP 5:30-7:30 Palm Sunday Hike	30	31					

**GLOW**  
**YOUTH EGG HUNT**  
 MARCH 15, 2026  
 5:30-7:30PM GREENE HOUSE  
 EVERYONE IS INVITED TO OUR FIRST EVER YOUTH GLOW IN THE DARK EGG HUNT!

**HEY HIGH SCHOOLERS!**

**CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP FOR UNIFIED**

UNIFIED IS A DAY OF FUN, FELLOWSHIP, LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

UNIFIED IS ORGANIZED BY YOUTH FROM CCYM, HARAMBEE & BLACK METHODISTS FOR CHURCH RENEWAL

**UNIFIED**  
*Save the Date*  
**SATURDAY**  
**APRIL 25, 2026**  
 9:30-2:30PM  
 YOUTH AGES 12-18  
 IN THE WESTERN NC CONFERENCE UMC

CONNECT WITH OTHER UNITED METHODIST YOUTH & GROW IN LEADERSHIP SKILLS

HOOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
 SALISBURY, NC

# Adult Discipleship Ministry



In this new season of Lent, am doing a “new thing.” To be honest, this is something I thought about doing since the pandemic. During that time, we recorded devotions as a way of staying connected to our members. But once the pandemic ended, we were anxious to get people in the pews, so we went away from our technology presence. Recently, I have received several nudges to do both—maintain a physical and online presence. Keith Porter has offered his assistance with this endeavor.

I am unveiling to you the graphic that will be associated with the Greenhouse Podcast. So, whether you have heard me many times or not at all, I hope you will find this podcast inspirational, educational and entertaining...three keys to successful public speaking my father shared with me at least 50 years ago. Stay tuned.

- Becky



## Daughters of the King - First UMC Women's Gathering - April 15

You are invited to a gathering for women of all ages as we come together as *Daughters of the King*. Rooted in Colossians 3:12, we will reflect on what it means to live as God's beloved children—clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. As daughters of the King, we are called to carry His light into the world. Come as you are and be reminded of who you are.

Motivational speaker Molly Grantham will be our special guest with catering by Dahlia Grove, a nonprofit that supports women survivors of trafficking and abuse. We'll begin in the Gathering Space. Scan the QR code or call 704-864-4371 to sign up.



FIRST UMC WOMEN'S GATHERING

FREE EVENT  
SCAN QR CODE TO REGISTER  
OR CALL 704-864-4371

WED, APRIL 15  
5:30-7:30 P.M.

SPECIAL GUEST  
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER MOLLY GRANTHAM

190 E FRANKLIN BLVD - GASTONIA, NC 28052

**Sign up by April 10**

## Tuesday Adult Small Groups

### Gather

Gather is a call to women living in Charlotte, Mount Holly, Belmont and Gastonia to the table for food, fellowship and faith-based discussion. Our next gathering is March 10 at Burtons Grill & Bar in Charlotte. 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. through March 17 in Room 218.



**DEMENTIA CAREGIVER  
SUPPORT GROUP**

The dementia caregiver support group provides practical tips for caregivers dealing with loved ones with cognitive issues. Join us for our next meeting on March 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**

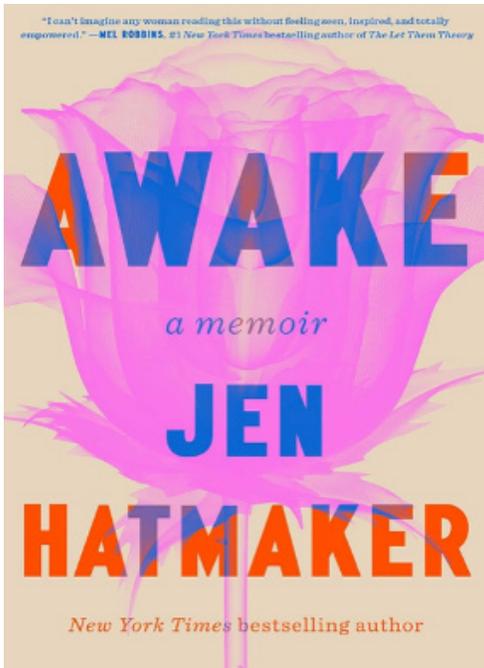
**Prayer Shawl Ministry**

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.



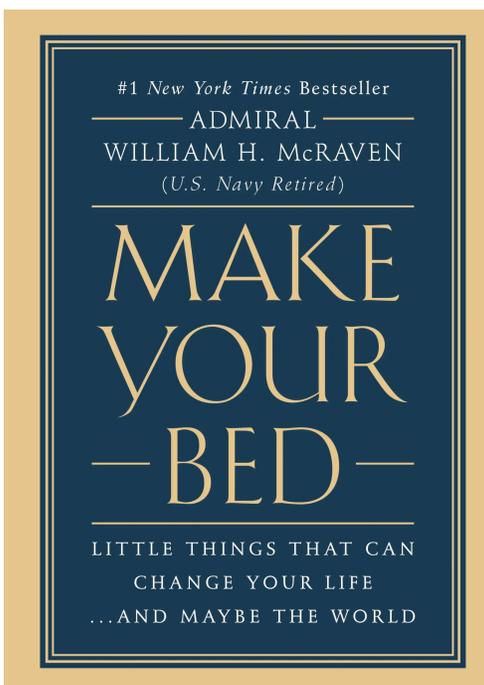
### Prayer Pause

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

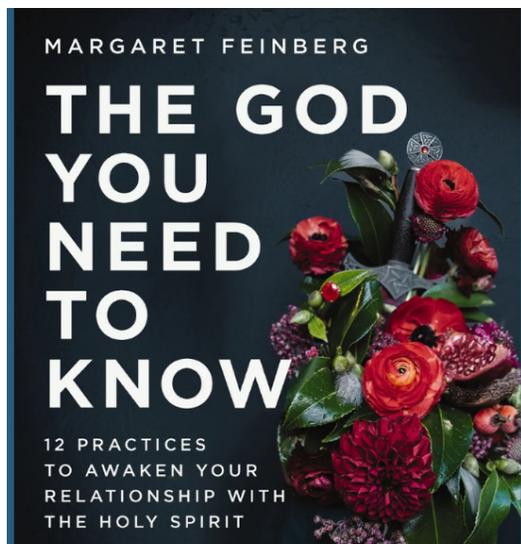
Theology on Tap returns on March 12 at 6:30 p.m. at Keepsake Brewery (211 Columbia St). Join us for a time of faith-based fellowship and theological discussion.



## 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.

To sign up, scan the QR code or call 704-864-4371.



## 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 on 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

## The Art of Growing Younger

Join us in the Wesley Center building on Thursday, March 5 at 6 p.m. for the annual women's event, "The Art of Growing Younger."

There will be a time of connection and conversation, and a presentation from Lisa Marisiddaiah. Sign up by scanning the QR code or calling 704-864-4371.



## Blood Pressure Screenings

Blood pressure screenings will be held on Wednesday, March 11 from 5 to 6:30 p.m. in the First UMC Family Life Center.



## Advanced Care Planning Clinic & Dinner

Do your loved ones know your wishes if you become suddenly ill and cannot speak for yourself? Join us on Tuesday, April 28 at 6 p.m. in the FLC for this clinic. We'll answer your questions about Health Care Power of Attorney (HCPOA) and Living Will decisions. Official forms will be available during the class. A light dinner will be provided.

Michelle Petty, Notary Director of Community Engagement at Carolina Caring, will be presenting.

A follow-up meeting will be offered, if needed.

Give your loved ones the gift of knowing your wishes and lift the burden of uncertainty.

RSVP required by April 27, 2026. To register, call 704-864-4371 or email [nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fumcgastonia.org).



# Upcoming Events



## Darkness to Light

Join us on April 20 from 12:45 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. in the First UMC Fellowship Hall for an important training.

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.

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

To register, scan the QR code.



## OTC Medicine Giveaway

First UMC will be hosting an over-the-counter medicine giveaway on May 8 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Take home free over-the-counter medicine, including allergy, cough and cold, pain relief, vitamins, children's medicine, and more. You can pre-order online and schedule a pick up time by scanning the QR code. Registrations begin on April 8.

If you'd like to volunteer, visit [medassist.org/volunteer](https://medassist.org/volunteer).

Children 12 and older can volunteer with parental supervision.





# Financial Report



## A Strong Start to the Year

January closed with a small overall loss of \$3,303, but the encouraging news is that this is far better than what was budgeted. Giving was strong, and many ministry areas kept expenses lower than expected. Thank you for your continued generosity and faithfulness—it truly makes a difference.

### How Our General Church Operations Performed

- Income came in at \$143,123, which is \$17,245 above budget.
- Expenses totaled \$153,100, which is \$23,381 below budget.

Though operations still showed a loss of \$9,977, this is significantly better than planned and reflects careful stewardship across the church.

## Ministry & Program Highlights

### - Kitchen Ministry

- The kitchen ended the month with a \$1,614 loss, very close to its budgeted loss of \$1,575.

### - Preschool Ministry

- The preschool performed better than expected, with a \$797 loss, compared to a budgeted loss of \$953.

These ministries continue to serve our congregation and community in meaningful ways, and their financial performance remains steady.

## Total Operations Across All Ministries

When combining the church, kitchen, and preschool:

- Total income was \$168,009, well above the budget of \$141,215.
- Total expenses were \$171,312, significantly below the budget of \$194,471.

This combination of higher income and lower expenses helped reduce the overall monthly loss and puts us on solid footing as we move into 2026.

## Looking Ahead

January's results give us a hopeful start to the year. Your generosity and the careful management of resources by our staff and ministry leaders continue to support the mission and ministries of First United Methodist Church.

# Drama Ministry

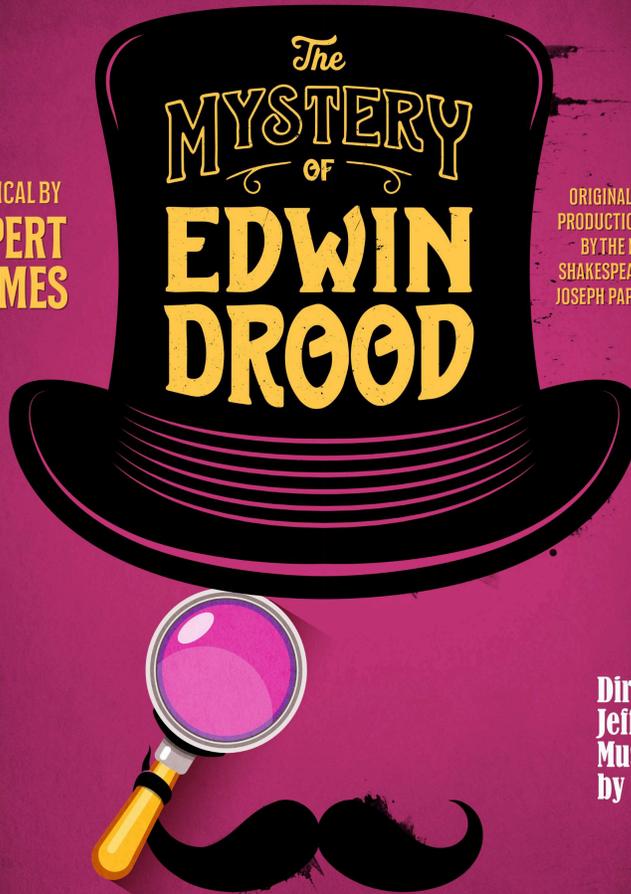
FUMC  
*theatre*

PRESENTS

A MUSICAL BY  
**RUPERT  
HOLMES**

*The*  
**MYSTERY  
OF  
EDWIN  
DROOD**

ORIGINAL BROADWAY  
PRODUCTION PRODUCED  
BY THE NEW YORK  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL.  
JOSEPH PAPP, PRODUCER



Directed by  
**Jeff Manus**  
Music directed  
by **Susan Lisle**

**Performances:**  
**April 17 & 18 at 7:30**  
**April 24 & 25 at 7:30**  
**April 19 & 26 at 2:30**

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

Presented by arrangement with Tams-Witmark, A Concord Theatricals Company ([www.tamswitmark.com](http://www.tamswitmark.com))

**Admission is free. Donations are accepted**

## Around the Conference



Bishop Ken Carter and the Conference Creation Care Ministry Team invite you to a special in-person gathering on April 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Maple Springs UMC in Winston-Salem, NC. The Bishop's Climate Summit will include worship, conversation, learning, lament, and shared hope. Workshops will offer practical ideas and ministry tools that churches of all sizes can implement in their communities. Ongoing resources and support will be available from the WNCC Creation Care Ministry Team to help congregations take next steps throughout 2026 and beyond. To learn more and to register, visit <https://www.wnccumc.org/bishopsclimatesummit>. If you are interested in exploring Creation Care opportunities at FUMC Gastonia, please contact Pastor Melissa.



Our Western NC Conference's Peace Building Ministries invites you to the 2026 Peace Conference at Lake Junaluska, from March 13-15. Through this year's theme, "Disarming Hatred," we will explore how to recognize and confront systems that perpetuate hatred and division and how to build practices that unite and strengthen our ability to work across differences. Through worship, plenaries, workshops, hands-on shalom experiences, film screenings, and fellowship, we will share strategies and hopes of how we, as people of faith, can build bridges of peace across political, theological, and social divides. We will learn from front-line peace practitioners how to put peace into action through hands-on workshop leaders who will teach us about skills, practices, and organizing that can heal and restore our communities. You can register for the full conference experience or select a one-day participation option. To learn more and to register, visit <https://www.wnccumc.org/peace-conference-2026>.

# Joy & Sympathy:

## Joy to:

Hannah and Ben Adams on the birth of their daughter,  
Miller Beth, who was born on February 17, 2026.  
Grandparents are John and Lisa O'Neill.

## Sympathy to:

Charlotte Matherlee and family upon the death of her brother,  
Henry Franklin Forbes, on February 2, 2026.

Bill Eccles and family upon the death of his sister Judie Hancock,  
on February 3, 2026.

Rev. Ashley Anne Sipe and family upon the death of her father,  
Mark Allen Lloyd, on February 11, 2026.

Cheri Parker and family upon the death of her father,  
John Swart Parker, Jr. on February 15, 2026.



## *Easter Lily Order Form*

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Qty: \_\_\_\_\_

In HONOR or MEMORY (circle one) of:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Given by: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Number Ordered: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Paid: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to place an Easter Lily in the church in honor or in memory of a loved one, please fill out the form and return to the business office by **March 30**. Each lily costs \$15. The lilies will be to used to decorate the altar on Easter Sunday, April 5. Additional funds will go to the Ministers' Discretionary Fund.

## Orders Due By March 30

- Would you like to (check one):
- Pick up your lily by April 8
- Donate lily to be delivered to homebound



# 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
Feb. 8	54	49	48	120	192	222
Feb. 15	49	92	57	134	264	240
Feb. 22	50	81	56	218	165	324

\*Feb. 1 service online only due to snow  
Viewership - 353

**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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