



The Ambassador

December 2023/
January 2024

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From the Pastor

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid;
for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy
for all the people:
to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah, the Lord.
Luke 2:10-11*

Dear Friends,

We always consider it a blessing to be serving God with you at First UMC. Yet in this holiday season we find ourselves feeling doubly blessed. Like the shepherds who were sent by the angels to see the good news about which they were told, we believe that we, too, have found our way to this church guided by God's own hand. We are grateful to God for this gift. And we are grateful to you – your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your ministry fill us with joy.

During this holiday season we pray for you to have an abundance of holy days.

With love and gratitude,
The staff of First UMC



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Worship With Us

Online & In Person
Worship @10:30 am
Sunday School @ 9

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A Note from Rev. Daniel Cardenas, Associate Pastor

We give thanks and praise to God because another brand new year is beginning. A bunch of mercy, love, and peace is poured out over our lives in this new beginning—365 new chances to taste God's goodness.

However, even when new beginnings are exciting, they could be challenging to us because we do not know what this New Year will bring. Because of that, we could feel anxious, discouraged, and fearful. Therefore, today is the time to look into God's promises and words of encouragement for us in this new year.

In the book of Joshua, he and the people of God are about to enter and take the Promised Land. They had wandered in the wilderness for a long time, and even when they saw God's providence every day, they could feel fear and doubt before this new challenge. Before this, a group of 12 spies were sent to see the land. These men came back and told all the things they saw there. Ten of these men said negative things in their report. All those written things in the report probably discouraged the people, and when they were about to go into the Promised Land, they were afraid.

To fight against the fear and hopelessness, God gave Joshua, the current leader, these wonderful words: "Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go!" (Joshua 1:9) What amazing and fantastic words!

God promised to be with them wherever they go, even when those places were full of giants and brave warriors, God's presence would be with them to help them conquer the land.

We are in the same spot. We are preparing to enter into a new adventure called 2024. What this new adventure will bring? We do not know if this New Year will be full of giants and discouraging things. No matter what we encounter, God our Lord is with us wherever we go. So, take heart and be hopeful! If God is beside us, who is against us?

Feliz Año Nuevo.
Con amor y cariño fraternal.

Rev. Daniel Cardenas.



Music and Worship Notes by Mary Ellen Clinard

I sometimes have a love/hate relationship with Christmas Carols. There, I admitted it! While they are lovely word-pictures of idyllic scenes of peace and joy, I sometimes need to remember that the first Christmas we sing about wasn't so peaceful or joyful. They depict a calm Mary, a gently

sleeping Jesus, well-behaved animals, softly falling snow, and a well-organized tableau that's Christmas card worthy.

We try so hard, during this season of Christmas, to make this holiday perfect for those we love. From the decorations, to the table settings, to the gifts and special events. When a less-than-perfect Christmas comes, for a variety of reasons, we should take great comfort in remembering that the first Christmas wasn't perfect either. There was a young mother who has just given birth without the support of any female relatives, an exhausted husband who had walked miles while trying to guide a donkey, newlyweds beginning their life together under unusual circumstances, an inn that somehow lost their reservation, a makeshift room to deliver a baby, some unexpected guests, and they still had to get in line to register for taxes!

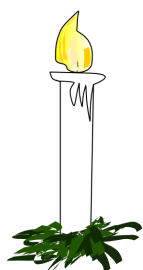
God moves through all this imperfection to give us the gift of God's Son. Perfection in human form. When this Christmas Season begins to feel overwhelming, remember that our Christmases have NEVER been perfect. Christ comes to us at Christmas regardless of our imperfect plans and expectations.

The carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" has in it a last verse that is actually a prayer for this season, "*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.*" Go ahead and enjoy ALL the Christmas carols and feel blessed that God gave us this perfect gift in spite of the imperfection of the season!

Advent Series

Unwrap Advent: Receive God's Gift

During this season of new beginnings we are learning more about the gifts God gives us. We have already unwrapped the the gift of promise. The next 3 Sundays we will be unwrapping the gifts peace, presence, and love. Join us as we Unwrap Advent this year and Receive God's Gift.



Christmas Eve Schedule

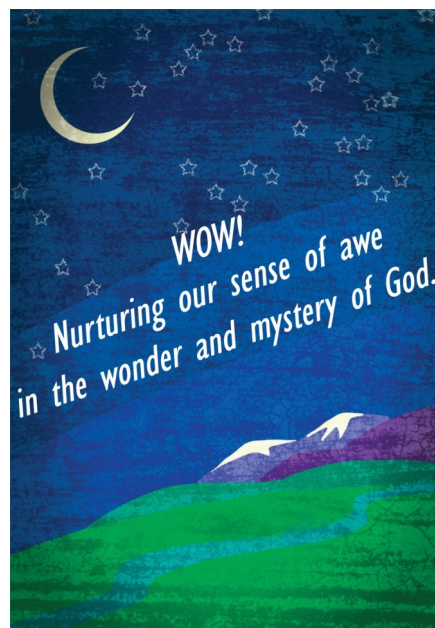
Adult Sunday School	9:00 am	
Sunday Morning Worship/Communion	10:30 am	(No Jr, Church)
Sunday Evening Pre Service Music	7:00 pm	
Christmas Eve Service	7:30 pm	

WOW! Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise
Nurturing our Sense of Awe
Epiphany 2024

We have all had those moments - watching a spectacular sunrise, the birth of a baby, the come-from-behind victory of a beloved team, seeing beautiful works of art, listening to an orchestra, watching the wind blow through trees – moments when we are filled with a sense of awe, when words escape us, when goosebumps cover our arms, when chills run through our body, when all we can do is say: whoa; oh my goodness; wow.

While these moments are amazing in and of themselves, there is a spiritual depth to them. When we are filled with a sense of awe, it is because we have encountered a situation that is making us aware of the mystery of God. These moments of transcendence are holy moments. While part of what makes these moments so powerful is that they are not as routine as brushing your teeth (there is an element of surprise to them), the mystery and holiness of God is available to us if only we turn our attention to it. This series is a guide to help us do just that – to nurture our sense of awe and be present to the majesty of God transforming our everyday life.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Sermon Title</u>	<u>Scripture(s)</u>
7 Jan 2024	Let the Journey Begin	Matthew 2:1-12
14 Jan 2024	When the Heavens Tear Apart	Mark 1:4-11
21 Jan 2024	Hearing the Voice of God	1 Samuel 3:1-10
28 Jan 2024	What is This? The Case for Curiosity	Mark 1:21-28
4 Feb 2024	Infinite Possibilities	Isaiah 40:21-31
11 Feb 2024	Full of Surprises	Mark 9:2-9



United Methodist Church Informational Meetings

In October and November we had our worship series where we explored five things we believe as the people of the United Methodist Church. We explored our one mission, our two expressions of faith (works of piety and works of mercy), our three experiences of grace (prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying), our four tools for discernment (the Bible, tradition, experience, and reason), and our five ways to be a part of the church (prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness). While our five week worship series did not cover all the bases, it is a good foundation from where to begin.

There is a lot of information that is helpful for you to know but these do not lend themselves to worship which is why Pastor Kim is hosting three informational meetings about our church and the United Methodist Church. These will run on consecutive Sundays, beginning Sunday, January 21st following worship. The first meeting will cover our church, how it is structured, how administrative and ministry decisions are made, and how leadership is determined. The second meeting will be about how we are connected to the larger United Methodist Church, our district and conference administration and ministry, and how decisions are made at the largest level. Our last meeting will be about the current challenges the United Methodist Church is facing, how the church got to this point, and what will be happening at the upcoming General Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, April 23-May 3, 2024.

If you have specific questions that you want to make sure are addressed, please let Pastor Kim know.



Confirmation Progress Report

We have been having an amazing time in Confirmation these past few months. We have supplied our confirmands with Bibles and notebooks and all sorts of Bible study accessories. Our class times have been spent exploring God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We have also had times to practice spiritual formation at home. And of course – we have had lots of snacks and played some games, too. We are forming a wonderful group of young people and hope that this will be the start of a youth group.

During the winter months we are continuing with our regular meetings but also having an overnight on Martin Luther King Jr weekend and then serving breakfast at our Monday morning Breakfast Club. And in March we have signed up to go over to our West Ohio Conference office for a special confirmation event with Bishop Gregory Palmer.

You can help with confirmation if you would like. We could always use snacks (these young people like to eat!). We may also need help with transportation when we go to meet Bishop Palmer. And of course, we are always in need of your prayers. Please pray for our confirmands: Robert, Ryan, Danica, Liz, Maya, and Raquel.

Mission Moment

An update from Dr. Les and Debbie Dornon, missionaries to Nepal working in the Tansen Hospital

November in Tansen

Most mornings during this season, as we look down into the valley below our house, there is what we call the "White Lake". It is actually clouds covering the valley floor which tend to dissipate through the day - but it is quite beautiful in the mornings.

One day, a doctor friend took us down to his home which is located below the "White Lake"! Fortunately, we went in the afternoon, so the clouds were gone and the sun was breaking through. We have known Dr Rab (name changed) since he came to Tansen just out of medical school about 10 years ago. He was not the easiest person to work with at the beginning, but Les (being the patient and kind person that he is) worked alongside him and tried to teach him not only good medicine, but also good holistic patient care. Over the years, we have seen much growth in him, and when we left Tansen in May, 2022, he was the one who organized the farewell for us, and said many encouraging words as we departed.

During our time away, he has become a leader in the hospital - a trainer of junior doctors, and a caring person. He has grown into a doctor and man who is quite respected in the hospital community, and we are very thankful for his commitment to serving the patients well. We are also encouraged that he has been having conversations with Les about our beliefs!

As we are coming into the season of Advent, we ask your prayers that we and the believers here would continue to faithfully lift up Jesus so that all people can be drawn to Him. Merry Christmas to you! We miss you!

Love, Debbie & Les

Les & Dr. Rab



The "White Lake"



Calling All BAKERS

The United Women in Faith is having a Cookie Walk on Dec. 10th. We greatly need and appreciate all those willing to bake cookies and donate them to our annual fund raiser. If you are willing to contribute please mark your cookies as Nuts/Peanut Butter or Nut Free and have them to the church by Sun. morning Dec. 10th. Please call the church office if you any questions.

Thank you in advance!



United
Women
in Faith



Mark Your Calendars!

You are invited to a Women's "Tea" on Saturday Dec. 9th from 2-4 pm. On Sun. Dec. 10th the UWIF's Annual Cookie Walk will be held in the Commons. You may purchase your baked goods before and after worship. Here's the cool thing—if you are baking cookies you may bring them to the Tea and they will automatically be put out for sale on Sunday morning. Hope to see you at both events!

SHALOM

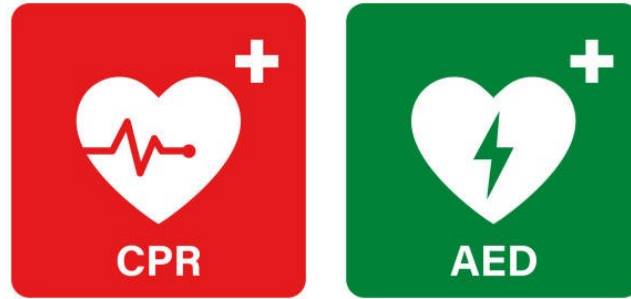
SHALOM will start offering shelter on Sunday, Dec. 31st. The current schedule is for it to run for 8 weeks, ending on Feb. 24th. Eight area churches will be host for a week. Intake will be held at First United Methodist each Sunday starting at 4. The participants are then taken to the host church where they will be given dinner, overnight shelter, and breakfast before being brought back to FUMC each morning. FUMC will be the host church for the week of Feb. 18th—24th. We will need volunteers for meals (dinner & breakfast) and overnight hosts. More information will be available in Feb. In the meantime, if you have any questions please feel free to contact John Tack.



Community Christmas Dinner

On Tues. Dec. 5, Community Ministries will be hosting a Community Christmas Dinner starting at 5:30 pm. Please join us as we welcome our neighbors to share a meal in celebration of the holidays. Vickie Frazier is organizing this event. Volunteers are needed to help cook, set up, serve, and clean up. If you can help with any of this, please contact her or the church office and we will help you get connected.





First UMC's Community Ministries is offering CPR Training. It will be given by the local fire department, on Saturday, December 9th, at 9 A.M., in the Commons area. It will cover CPR, use of the AED, Narcan use and other emergencies. There is a fee of \$40 to be paid when registering. That fee covers the presenter's time, your card and materials that will be given out. To register, go to: www.aclsandblstraining.com, click the link that says book, scroll down until you find the class with the church's address, click book now and sign up. You do NOT have to save for future classes, that is optional. If you have trouble, please call the church office 513-423-4629. This class would be very helpful to those working with Shalom, ushering, working in the pantry or just around church grounds. **Please register by Monday, December 4th.**

**Dearest Members of
First United Methodist Church,**

The members of the United Women In Faith want to take this opportunity to

SINCERELY, THANK YOU

for your undying support of the following Fund Raisers this past year:

Bern's Cards Pies Sale Nut Sale Porch Pots And of course "The Cookie Walk"

You support was greatly appreciated.

Again,

THANK YOU!

(From the UWIF)



Adam Hamilton is Coming to the District

January 16 @6:30 pm at Mason UMC

Rev. Adam Hamilton is touring Ohio with the release of his upcoming book, "*Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith.*" This is an incredible opportunity to learn from a successful author of church resources and pastor of one of the most influential churches in America, The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City. Each stop will be 90 minutes with a short presentation followed by a Q & A about the book. **The event is free, but registration is required.** Books will be available to purchase on site.

Register here: <https://www.westohioumc.org/event/adam-hamilton-ohio-book-tour-cincinnati>

Reading Schedule for December 2023

This month has finally arrived. I will be honest – in April it did not feel like we would ever get to the end of the Bible. Yet we did! I am celebrating with you!

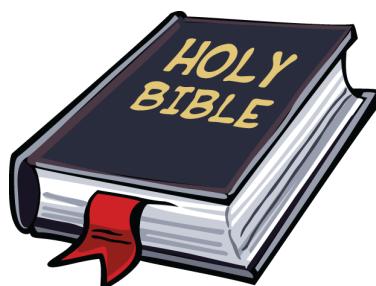
This month will have us reading entire books on six different days. Talk about a sense of accomplishment! There is a downside to our reading schedule – if you look ahead to December 24, we are not cozying up with the Gospel of Luke to read about a baby, first time parents, a manger, angels, and shepherds. On Christmas Eve, we are scheduled to be starting Revelation. If you want to read ahead, please do so. You can take advantage of the shorting readings and the days when we have short books of the Bible by reading ahead so that you are done early.

If you have any questions as you read and study this last part of the Bible, please do not hesitate to ask me or Pastor Daniel. We love to talk about the Bible!

Pastor Kim

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December 1	II Thessalonians	December 16	I Peter 3-5
December 2	I Timothy 1-3	December 17	II Peter 1-2
December 3	I Timothy 4-6	December 18	II Peter 3
December 4	II Timothy 1-2	December 19	I John 1-3
December 5	II Timothy 3-4	December 20	I John 4-5
December 6	Titus	December 21	II John
December 7	Philemon	December 22	III John
December 8	Hebrews 1-3	December 23	Jude
December 9	Hebrews 4-6	December 24	Revelation 1-2
December 10	Hebrews 7-9	December 25	Revelation 3-5
December 11	Hebrews 10-11	December 26	Revelation 6:1-8:5
December 12	Hebrews 12-13	December 27	Revelation 8:6-11:19
December 13	James 1-2	December 28	Revelation 12-14
December 14	James 3-5	December 29	Revelation 15-17
December 15	I Peter 1-2	December 30	Revelation 18-20
		December 31	Revelation 21-22



December 2023




Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	HOPE					
3 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT/ COMMUN. 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	4 8:00 Breakfast Club 6:00 Sonshine Bible Study	5 2:00 Pantry 5:30 Community Christmas Dinner	6 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 6:00 Choir Christmas Party	7	8	9 9:00 AED/CPR Traain UWIF Christmas Tea 2-4 pm
10 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship UWIF Cookie Walk	11 8:00 Breakfast Club 6:00 Sonshine Bible Study 6:00 Immigration Clinic	12 2:00 Pantry 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study NO SPRC	13 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrl	14		16
17 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Children's Christmas Prog.	18 8:00 Breakfast Club 6:00 Sonshine Bible Study	19 2:00 Pantry NO Finance Mtg NO Council Mtg	20 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrl	21 2-4 Confirmation Class	22	23
24 CHRISTMAS EVE 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship No Jr. Worship 7:00 Pre-service Music 7:30 Candlelight Service	25 CHRISTMAS DAY/ OFFICE CLOSED 8:00 Breakfast Club	26 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED ALL DAY NO Pantry NO Trustees	27 3 & 7 Choir Rhrl.	28	29	30

Tommy Dixon-Gordon	4
Allison Palmer	7
Fred Sander	7
Marcia Greenham	16
Cecil Jackson	16
Kelli Wilson	20
Kathy Wright	22
Tom Buchert	24
Rick Lyke	25
Ashley Palmer	26
Cory Smarzinski	26
David Young	26
Dee Markle	28
Juanita Driscoll	29
Duane Gordon	30
Belinda Hausman	30

Happy Birthday!

January 2024

Birthdays

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Dec. 31 NEW YEAR'S EYE/\$5 ON THE 5TH 9:30 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	NEW YEAR'S DAY/ OFFICE CLOSED 8:00 Breakfast Club	2 2:00 Pantry	3 3 & 7 Choir Rhrls	4	5 12:00 First Friday Concert	6
7 COMMUNION/ EPIPHANY SUN. 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	8 8:00 Breakfast Club	9 1:00 SPRC 2:00 Pantry	10 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrls	11	12 10:00 UMW Meeting	13
14 HUMAN RELATION'S DAY 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Confirmation Class Over-night	15 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY/ OFFICE CLOSED 8:00 Breakfast Club 6:00 Immigration Clinic	16 2:00 Pantry 5:30 Finance Mtg 6:00 Council Mtg 6:30 Adam Hamilton—Mason UMC	17 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrls	18	19 <u>AMBASSADOR ARTICLES DUE</u>	20 9:00 Hope Circle @ Bob Evans 10:00 Elizabeth Circle
21 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship UMC Info Session	22 8:00 Breakfast Club	23 2:00 Pantry	24 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrls	25	26	27
28 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship UMC Info Session	29 8:00 Breakfast Club 6:00 Sonshine Bible Study	30 2:00 Pantry	31 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study 3 & 7 Choir Rhrls			

Dates to remember in February:
 Feb. 2: First Friday Concert @ noon
 Feb. 4: UMC Info session
 Feb. 4: Confirmation Class 2-4 pm
 Feb. 14: Ash Wednesday

Happy Birthday!

- Glenna Combs 9
- Chris Urso 10
- John Andrews 16
- James Irwin 19
- Anthony Hurrigan 22
- Pat Schaefer 22
- Gregory Caudill 24
- Phyllis Lolli 25
- Alex Mills 26
- Wilma Mucha 28
- Judy Andrews 29
- Shelby Grace Rutledge 30
- Carolyn Tucker 30



2023 First Friday Concert & Artist Series

**December 1, 2023
Christmas Harps**

**Capture a moment of peaceful reflection
to prepare for all those wonderful
holiday events!**

**First UMC - Middletown
@noon
Free Admission**

**first**
church
MIDDLETOWN
a united methodist community
120 South Broad Street
Middletown, OH 45044