

The Key Newsletter

December 2025

Volume 13 - Issue 12

Blue Christmas

A Service of Hope & Healing

**Sunday,
December 21st
6:00 pm**

A special service for people who are having difficulty during this season due to grief, illness, stress, family situations or other life struggles. We come seeking comfort that we are not alone, we come with our heart full of hope and we invite our great sign of hope, Emmanuel, God with us, to break through the darkness of our lives.

First United Methodist Church, 408 11th St., Worthington, MN

Sunday Worship

Adrian UMC
9:00 a.m. Sunday Worship

First UMC
10:30 a.m. Sunday Worship

408 11th Street, Worthington,
Minnesota 56187
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www.firstumcworthington.com

Hello! Welcome to the Family Light Update - where we shed some light on the Family Life Ministry of First United Methodist Church!



My goodness it's been a busy few weeks here at FUMC! And there's more fun and festivity ahead!

Connect is on hiatus for December. We will begin again on January 7th.

Adult Sunday School continues with The Christmas Experience through December 14th. It will wind up with an Epiphany video on January 4th. Each class is a stand-alone, so don't worry if you miss one, you won't feel behind. **Children's Sunday School** also goes through December 14th but they will not reconvene until January 11th.

Our **Ladies' Advent Study, Awakening Wonder; Experiencing the Nearness of Jesus**, will meet on Mondays at 9:00a.m. in the Fireside Room, beginning on December 1st. We will meet for the first three Mondays in December. This is always a special study, and you are welcome to join us or if you'd like a book to study on your own, that is also okay! Cost of the books is \$15.

Our second annual **Ladies' Christmas Party** will be on Friday, December 5th from 6:00-7:30p.m. Please sign up ahead of time for planning purposes. Call Lori in the office or Gretchen. This is a lovely event and a great time to bring a friend!

The **Fireside Book Club** meets on Tuesday, January 27th at 7:00p.m. in the Fireside Room. We are reading ***The Hiding Place***, by Corrie Ten Boom. This classic WWII book tells the story of the Ten Boom family's bravery in the face of harrowing circumstances, and shows that one's faith is not defined by one's circumstances. Come with the book read and prepared for great discussion!

Looking forward to seeing you at many of these activities!

Serving Him Together,

Gretchen

"Worship the Lord with gladness..." - Psalm 100:2a

December Worship: "Come worship the Lord!"

The Heart that grew three sizes - Finding faith in the story of the Grinch This Advent season, join us on Sunday mornings at Adrian at 9:00 am and First UMC Worthington at 10:30 am.

Rediscover the gift of Advent that comes without packages, ribbons, and bows. We don't know why the Grinch hated Christmas. We know he did. This new Sermon Series explores the faith themes in the Christmas classic, 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas!' including how the Grinch's heart grew three sizes come Christmas morning. How did Christmas save the Grinch? Could it be that the very thing we think we hate is the one thing that changes our lives? This Christmas season, look at a familiar classic through the lens of faith and see how Christ speaks to us through our culture.

Events at FUMC Worthington

November 30: First Sunday of Advent. starting the Grinch sermon series and lighting of Advent candles.

December 7: Christmas Cookie Decorating for sugar cookies, icing, sprinkles; activity to be held 10:00-10:30 am in the social hall, post-Sunday school. Open for kids, parents, and grandparents, it is intended as a fun communal event.

December 14: Sunday School Program

December 21: Bell Choir performance, "Noisy Coin" offering, Ugly Christmas Sunday- Wear a sweater, have your picture taken and maybe win a prize

Blue Christmas Service 6 pm

December 24: Christmas Eve Services - 6:00 pm at FUMC Worthington and 8:00 pm at Adrian

No Connect activities on Wednesday nights in December



Message from Pastor John

The Beautiful Tension: When Justice Meets Mercy

There's a profound truth that often gets lost in our understanding of God's character: the delicate balance between justice, grace, and mercy. These three attributes of God aren't competing forces—they're complementary expressions of divine love that shape how we experience our relationship with the Creator and with one another.

Understanding the Difference

Let's start with three simple but life-changing definitions:

****Justice is when you get what you deserve.****
****Grace is when you get what you don't deserve.****
****Mercy is when you don't get what you deserve.****

Reread those. Let them sink in because understanding these distinctions changes everything about how we view God and how we treat others.

Think about the last time a police officer pulled you over. Maybe you were speeding—perhaps significantly over the limit. You knew you were guilty. You deserved the ticket. That's justice. But if the officer let you go with just a warning? That's mercy. You didn't receive the punishment you deserved.

Now imagine that same officer not only let you go but also gave you a gift card for coffee and encouraged you to have a better day. That would be grace—receiving something good you absolutely didn't deserve.


The Cry from the Depths

The book of Lamentations provides one of Scripture's most raw expressions of human suffering. Written in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction, it doesn't sugarcoat the pain: "Life stinks. Life is unfair. My body is wrecked. I can't sleep. I'm broke. I'm overwhelmed with anxiety."

Sound familiar? Maybe you're in that season right now. Perhaps you feel like God doesn't even notice your struggle.

But right in the middle of this brutal honesty comes one of the Bible's most beautiful declarations of hope:





"The faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness. His mercies begin afresh each and every morning."

This isn't cheap optimism. It's a hard-won faith that speaks truth in the darkness. Even when everything falls apart, God's mercy shows up fresh every single morning like manna in the wilderness.

The Problem We All Share

Ephesians 2:1-3 paints an uncomfortable picture of humanity without God's intervention: "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil."

Strong words. But they highlight a critical truth: without Christ, we're subject to God's justice. And if we're honest, that's terrifying. None of us want what we truly deserve based on our thoughts, words, and actions.

But then come two of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture: "But God..."

"But God is so rich in mercy. He loved us so much that even though we are dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead."


We should be grateful that God is not a "fair" God. If God operated purely on fairness and justice, we'd all be in serious trouble. Instead, God operates from a place of being "rich in mercy"—not occasionally merciful, not reluctantly merciful, but abundantly, extravagantly merciful.

Mercy from the Beginning

Some people imagine that God was angry and wrathful in the Old Testament but became loving and merciful in the New Testament. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of God's character.

Go back to the very beginning—Genesis chapter 3. God gave Adam and Eve paradise with one simple rule: don't eat from that one tree. They broke the one rule. What did God do?

God didn't strike them dead. God didn't abandon them. Instead, God sacrificed an animal to make clothing to cover their shame. Even in the moment of humanity's first sin, God's response included provision and protection. That's mercy operating from day one.





The Mercy Seat

(continued from p. 5)

When God gave instructions for building the temple—that sacred space where heaven and earth would meet—He was incredibly specific. Exact dimensions. Precise materials. Detailed descriptions of every room and feature.

But right in the middle of it all, God said to create a mercy seat—a place of atonement, a place where people could receive forgiveness and grace.

Think about that. When God designed the house that would bear His name, He put mercy at the center. Not judgment. Not condemnation. Mercy.

The message is clear: when you build your life in a way that honors God, make room for mercy.

The King Who Knew Mercy

King David—the man after God's own heart—had some really good days of following God. He also had some spectacularly bad days. When he realized his sins could bring severe consequences on himself and countless others, he made a telling statement:

"Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great, but do not let me fall into human hands."


David understood something profound: God's mercy is greater than human mercy. God shows mercy more readily than people do.

And here's where it gets uncomfortable for those of us who follow Christ: we who have received the most mercy are often the least merciful toward others.

It sits right at the center.

The Mercy Crisis

One of the biggest obstacles to people embracing Christianity today isn't intellectual doubt or scientific questions. It's the perceived hypocrisy of Christians who claim to follow a merciful God but show little mercy themselves.





(continued from p. 6)

We're often high on justice and low on mercy. Quick to judge. Slow to forgive. Harsh in our assessments. Stingy with second chances.

James 2:13 declares boldly: "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Not that judgment doesn't have its place. Not that justice isn't important. But when mercy and judgment face off, mercy wins. That's God's economy.

Making Room for Mercy

So what does it look like to make room for mercy in your life?

First, it means receiving mercy. This is harder than it sounds. We're wired to earn, to deserve, to prove ourselves worthy. Receiving undeserved mercy requires humility and trust.

Second, it means extending mercy. When someone hurts you, disappoints you, or fails you—especially repeatedly—mercy means not giving them what they deserve. It means choosing compassion over condemnation.

Third, it means starting fresh every morning. Just as God's mercies are new every morning, we can choose to release yesterday's grievances and begin again.

The Promise That Sustains

Whatever season you're in—whether you're thriving or barely surviving—this promise holds true: God's faithful love never ends. His mercies never cease. They're fresh every single morning.

You may feel dead in your soul because of past mistakes. You may feel subject to judgment you know you deserve. But God is rich in mercy. Not stingy. Not reluctant. Rich.

Make room for that mercy. Receive it deeply. Then give it freely.

Because in God's kingdom, mercy doesn't just have a seat—it sits right at the center

Pastor John



Sunday Morning Coffee Fellowship

Come to the Fellowship Hall on Sunday morning before church to enjoy a cup of coffee or juice and a roll, and visiting with other members and friends of the church. It all begins at 9:45 a.m.!

Women's Coffee

The women's weekly coffee group meets every Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. at HyVee in the Starbucks serving area. All women are invited to come and join this fabulous group!

Men's Breakfast Group

The Men's Breakfast group meets every Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. at the Blue Line Cafe. The men discuss shared concerns, solve the problems of the world, and make sure the rain gauges are up to speed. All guys are welcome to join us each week!

Christmas Poinsettias

Don't forget to order your Red Poinsettia for a Christmas decoration of the sanctuary this year in memory of a loved one or for a special occasion. The cost per poinsettia will be \$11 and will be delivered to the church. Please share them with the church until after the Christmas Eve service. The deadline for the order is December 8th. Order forms will be in the narthex or order on church website.



Chamber Singers Concert

"Awake My Soul" Come enjoy the Worthington Chamber Singers in Concert along with the Worthington Brass on December 14, 2:00 pm at First United Methodist Church.

Thank you

Thank you for all the prayers, cards, and support during my health issues. Galen Benton



Operation Christmas Child


The Mission team would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this year's Operation Christmas Child project. Through your generous donations –both items and monetary gifts that allowed us to purchase additional items-we were able to fill 180 boxes! We are also able to send funds to help cover shipping costs. A special thank you goes to Myra Palmer and Dianne Dalrymple for leading the jump robe project and coordinating the sewing kits for bags and skirts. We are grateful to everyone who helped assemble the kits and to those who helped make the items. Thank you as well to all of the wonderful helpers who prepared for our packing day and to those who came to pack the boxes. We couldn't have done it without you! Because of this church's generosity, children somewhere in the world will receive not only useful and meaningful gifts, but also a reminder that they are loved.

Food Shelf Donations

Your donations for the local food shelves of non-perishable food items are accepted throughout the year, please place your items in the wagon located in the narthex. Please be aware of the "best by" or "use by" dates on the items that you are donating. Items are taken alternately to the two food shelves.

Coat Closet

Love INC provides for those who need warm clothing during the winter months, taking donations of new or clean, gently used coats and snow pants for all ages. They also accept donations of new hats, scarves, mittens and boots for all ages. If you would like to donate any of these items, please bring them to the church and place them in the collection spot in the hallway. These items will be taken to First Lutheran Church Coat Closet for them to distribute to those in need. Thank you for your consideration as we reach out to help others during the cold winter months.



Reverse Advent Calendars

Reverse Advent Calendars are here! Please grab one in the Narthex on your way out of church. This is always a great way to give back and help others during the Christmas season. Full bags can be returned the end of December or early January.



REVERSE
ADVENT
CALENDARS
ARE AVAILABLE
IN THE
NARTHEX!

Ladies' Advent Study

Awakening Wonder; Experiencing the Nearness of Jesus

Always a favorite study of the year!

*Mondays at 7:00a.m.
in the Fireside Room
December 1st-15th
Cost of book is \$15*



Ladies' Christmas Party!

With live entertainment from
the Worthington High School Madrigal Singers

December 5, 2025 6:00-7:30p.m.

Cost is free - bring a friend and join us for this festive evening!

**First Methodist Church
408 Eleventh Street Worthington
Please sign up ahead by visiting
firstumcworthington.com
or by calling 507.372.2939**

Sunday School Christmas Program

Our Sunday School Christmas program, which is always a fun and crazy and heart-warming time, will be December 14th during the morning worship service. Bring Grandpa & Grandma to share this fun morning with our kids!



Blue Christmas Service

Blue Christmas is on December 21st at 6:00 pm, both online and in person. This experience is best in the sanctuary. This is my favorite service of the year. Blue Christmas Blue? Yes, blue as in the blues. As in "I am feeling blue." Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the

loss of a job, living with cancer or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our community. This service will create a sacred space for people living through dark times. The service is reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope. There will be prayer, communion, and powerful music for this service.



First United Methodist Christmas Eve Service

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH WORTHINGTON

Christmas Eve Service

Wednesday, December 24th at 5:00 p.m.
Candlelight & Communion
408 11th St., Worthington, MN

Adrian United Methodist Christmas Eve Service

ADRIAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Christmas Eve Service

Wednesday, December 24th at 8:00 p.m.
Candlelight & Communion
202 E. Main St., Adrian, MN

Fireside Book Club

The Hiding Place
By Corrie Ten Boom
January 27, 2026
7:00 p.m. in the Fireside Room



*Packing Operation
Christmas Boxes*



Here are the highlights from the First UMC Council meeting held on Thursday, November 20

CELEBRATIONS:

- Jewelry Make & Take was a fun event and brought in \$400 for Mission Haiti. Many thanks to Myra Palmer for leading this event and donating her supplies and time!
- The Thanksgiving Connect was an entertaining, light-hearted event for all who attended.
 - Due to many other events happening in December, Wednesday Connect will reconvene Jan. 7, 2026.
- Four individuals attended the Area Charge Conference and submitted all necessary paperwork for the continuation of Pastor John's assignment in Worthington.
- Mission Haiti update:
 - \$2898 has been raised so far through fundraisers and some personal donations.
 - Dec. 21 will be the last noisy offering
- 180 Operation Christmas Child boxes were filled by First & Adrian churches.
- Many events are still coming up this year:
 - Bingo - Nov. 22
 - Church decorating and lunch - Nov. 23
 - Ladies' Advent bible study begins Dec. 1
 - Ladies' Christmas party – Dec. 5
 - Cookie decorating during pre-church fellowship time – Dec. 7
 - Christmas program—Dec 14

CHALLENGES:

- Volunteers are sought to join the rotation for Sunday morning coffee fellowship. Training will be provided.

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CURRENT FOCUS:

- Advent gift bags have been prepared and will be delivered by volunteers in the coming weeks.
- Church decorating will take place after the service Nov. 23. Soups and desserts will be provided.
- Decorative "refresh" in Fireside room and Fellowship Hall update: rolling vs spraying of paneling in Fellowship Hall is being assessed. An electrician has been contacted but has not yet come to assess the lights in the Fireside Room.

CUTTING EDGE ISSUES:

- Prayer List: The council discussed and approved listing only the most recent prayer concerns (in last 2 weeks) in the Sunday bulletin. On-going/long-term prayer concerns will be listed in the Friday email, newsletter, and in a separate list available in the Narthex. This change will be initiated the first of January. Any individuals who would like to be removed from the prayer list may contact the church office.
- Concern for potential burnout of volunteers was voiced.
 - It is common for a similar group of volunteers to be involved with many activities, and new/different volunteers would always be welcomed in helping carry out the mission of our church.
- During the last Trustees meeting, the repairs and updating of the Fireside room was discussed. Kyle Johnson will be assessing necessary repairs.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

There were some higher expenses earlier in the month for Congregational Care items. However, giving was up and two months' apportionments were paid; leaving \$4714 in past apportionments, plus December's to be paid.

- The council unanimously approved the purchase of a new computer (capped at \$750) for the Family Life position because the current laptop is very old and lagging.

Next meeting: Dec. 18

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Shirbroun, Covenant Council Recording Secretary

Happy Birthday!

1	Pastor John Mitchem	13	Nancy Hyink	22	Ezra Karels
2	LeAnn Donovan		Dennis Miller		Amy Molter
	Kelli Hendel	14	Cade Heidebrink	25	Gary Boltjes
3	Burdell Kuhl	15	Keyona Klingenberg		Diane Dalrymple
4	Lia Miller	16	Gabriella Zebe		Carol Krosch
6	Justin Roelfs	17	Brooke Erwin	26	Brent Hokeness
8	Julie Hohensee		Emma Gordon	27	Paul Reyne
9	Jeffrey Homan		Taylor Heidebrink	28	Cindy Langendorfer
10	Austin Klaassen	20	Dane Jeppesen		Nathan Reyne
	Laura Schuett		Andrew Johnson		Mary Rydeen
11	Bryer Carson		Kelly Maras	30	Tracey Reyne
12	Rebecca Brignac				

Happy Anniversary!

22 Dick & Denise Schlichte

30 Chad & Kristen Jaycox

First United Methodist Church Staff

Pastor:	Rev. John Mitchem
Administrative Assistant:	Lori Nienkerk
Family Life:	Gretchen O'Donnell
Youth Leader:	Lisa Gerdes
Bell Choir Director:	Brenda DeSmith
Finance Manager:	Marie Lonneman
Custodians:	Sarah & Chad Nickel

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Live Streaming!

Each Sunday we live streaming our worship services from First UMC. If you are going to be out of town, you can catch the live broadcast on our church app (download to your device) or any one of four different online locations:

The Boxcast TV Channel

<https://boxcast.tv/channel/qikol6fqes2qwhperl2l>

First UMC YouTube Channel

Go to YouTube: First United Methodist Church Worthington

First UMC FaceBook

Go to FaceBook: Worthington: First United Methodist Church

First UMC Website

<http://firstumcworthington.com/>

Worship services for First UMC are scheduled to be broadcast on the public access Channel 3 in Worthington. The broadcast times are Sunday at 6:30 am, Monday at 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. for the current week. Worship services for Adrian UMC can be found on the church's YouTube Channel.

Greeters, Live Stream and Media Tech

We can use one or two more pairs of persons to help with our live stream media on Sundays. Please contact Pastor John if you are interested. Here are the persons who are scheduled to help with the greeting, sound, media, and live stream services:

First UMC		Sound/Video	Media Shout
Sunday	December 7	Kari Meyer	Claire Meyer
Sunday	December 14		
Sunday am	December 21	Kari Meyer	Claire Meyer
Sunday pm	December 21		
Wednesday	December 24	Deb Steinle	John Steinle
Sunday	December 28		

First UMC		Greeting Team
Sunday	December 7	Eldon & Sue Bents
Sunday	December 14	Dennis & Cheryl Bonsma
Sunday	December 21	Mike & Shauna Brignac
Wednesday	December 24	Rebecca Brignac, Taliyah & Treyson
Sunday	December 28	Craig & Madonna Carlson

Prayers for health concerns:

Rod Behrends	Sherry Benton
Chris Nelson	Shellie Williams
Beth Habicht	Logan Waldner
Virgle Buck	Clyde Scheevel
Ron Husenga	Lowell Carlson
Kathy Tetrack-Hoffbeck (Pastor @Jeffers)	
Colter (Thelma Yager's great nephew)	
Kristin (Dalrymple) Amundson	
Anne Christine Lindell (Pastor John's friend)	
Remsen, Ia St Mary's High School girls' basketball team	



PRAYER CORNER

Those dealing with cancer:

Janelle Johnson	Christopher Brown	Myron Grussing	Shellie Williams
Duane Enns	Marion Reitsma (friend of Jolene Kuhl)	Stacey White	
Mike Miller	Galen Benton	Jeff Wachell (friend of Deb Steinle)	

Those recovering/dealing with health issues:

Nancy Hyink	Bill Carlberg	Larry Doeden
Weston Erlandson	Emma Schnyders	
Ariana Lopez	Aiden Remme	Pat Huisenga

For those dealing with grief and loss...

Giving thanks & praying for:

Our farmers during this harvest season
Our Bishop and District Superintendent...
Our teachers, administrators, students...
Front line health care workers...
Law enforcement & emergency workers...
Service women & men and their families...

Prayer Chain

Please send requests to our
email Church Office
methodistoffice@gmail.com or
(507) 372-2939

Care Centers

First UMC: Meadow Memory Care

Ray Hinz

The Shores

LaDee Grant

Sibley Specialty Care Center

Norma Swenson

Adrian UMC:

Mary Jane Brown Ctr (Luverne)

Mary Prins

Adrian Country Living Cottage

Margaret Loger