



December 2025

The First Word



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Origin of the Beloved Christmas Carol “Silent Night”

It was 205 years ago when “Silent Night” was first heard by Austrian villagers attending Christmas Eve mass in St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf. How did this simple melody, with its words of comfort, become a beloved hymn of peace throughout the world?

“Silent Night” is about a calm and bright silent night, and the wonder of a tender and mild newborn child, words written in 1816 by a young priest in Austria, Joseph Mohr, not long after the Napoleonic wars had taken their toll.

“The backstory is that the priest went for a walk before he wrote it, and he looked out over a very quiet, winter-laden town,” says composer/conductor John Conahan, who created a new arrangement of the famous carol. “He was inspired...the town was at peace.”

It was Christmas Eve, 1818, when the now-famous carol was first performed as *Stille Nacht Heilige Nacht*. Joseph Mohr, the young priest who wrote the lyrics, played the guitar and sang along with Franz Xaver Gruber, the choir director who had written the melody.

An organ builder and repairman working at the church took a copy of the six-verse song to his home village. There, it was picked up and spread by two families of traveling folk singers who performed around northern Europe. In 1834,

the Strasser family performed it for the King of Prussia. In 1839, the Rainer family of singers debuted the carol outside Trinity Church in New York City.

The composition evolved, and was translated into over 300 languages with many different arrangements for various voices and ensembles. It was sung in churches, in town squares, even on the battlefield during World War I, when, during a temporary truce on Christmas Eve, soldiers sang carols from home. By 1914, “Silent Night,” was known around the world.



Over the years, the carol’s mystique grew with its popularity. After the original manuscript was lost for decades, some speculated that the music had been written by Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. In 1994, an original manuscript was found in Mohr’s handwriting, with Gruber named as composer.

Today, the Franz Xaver Gruber Museum in Hallein and the Joseph Mohr School in Wagrain, Austria honor the creators of this classic carol. The *Stille Nacht Gesellschaft*—or Silent Night Society—hosts a virtual Silent Night museum, tracks events, and promotes the use of all six verses, which in the words of Silent Night Society president “[encourage] peace and [demand] responsibility for the globe.” - Story by Susan Lewis, WRTI 90.1 Radio



Children and Family Ministries & Youth Group

Julia Librizzi

The children and the youth group met together in Wesley Hall on Sunday, December 7, for a gingerbread house competition! Teams drew a theme from a Santa hat and had half an hour to create a gingerbread house using that theme. The themes were mostly Christmas movies or songs, like *Jingle Bells*, *The First Noel*, *the Grinch*, *the North Pole/Santa's Workshop*, *Away in a Manger*, *We Three Kings*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, *Elf*, and *a Charlie Brown Christmas*.

When the gingerbread houses were finished, we took turns showing them off and trying to guess each other's themes. Everyone got a paper plate award, such as: "Most Structurally Sound," "Most Festive," "Best Use of Materials," "Most Decorated," "Most True to Theme," and "Most Cheerful."

We ended by watching *The Grinch* together and eating popcorn. It was a lot of fun!



Youth Group Christmas Caroling

We will be going Christmas Caroling December 14 at 5pm. Mark your calendars! More information will be coming soon.

Recently baptized in worship:

Lucas Nolan

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

Wayne Conner
Robin Entenman
Janet Hanson
Carol Hurley & family
Nancy Hyde
Jan Kayser & family
Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
Judy McClelland
Ellie Miller
Mumma Family
Susan Noble
Sue Paul
Peavler Family
Anna Rasmussen
Lois & Jim Richmond
Hank Rohs
Marcia Royer
Mary Lou Sanderson
Gerry & Tom Schaberg
Michael Seals
Carol Shilts
Barb Skuza
Sally Stevens Family
Jacqueline Stilger and family
Marcia Stobie and family
Lori Valkema
Christine VanOstrand

New Prayer Requests

If you would like to share a prayer request with our clergy and prayer ministry team, please visit www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/ or call the church at (269) 381-6340.

Email List

Would you like to stay up-to-date on our latest news and events? Sign up to receive *Around the Corner*, FUMC's weekly email newsletter. Contact Erika Jones at ejones@umc-kzo.org to be added to our list.

First Word for January 2026

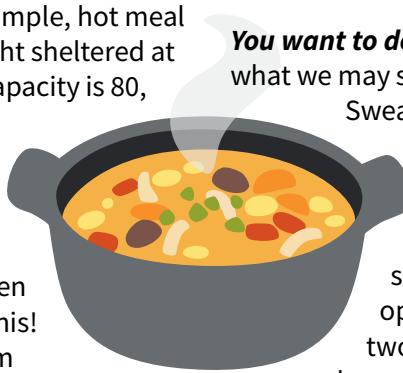
Do you have news items or photos to contribute to the next issue of *First Word*? We'd love to include them! Email submissions to our Communications Coordinator, Erika Jones, at ejones@umc-kzo.org, by **January 1**. Articles may be edited for space and content.

Serving Supper on a Cold Night

On a cold Sunday, December 7, an intrepid group of seven people from FUMC spent a joyful evening at Ministry With Community, preparing and then serving a simple, hot meal to 90 guests who were able to spend the night sheltered at MWC's temporary night shelter. The usual capacity is 80, but that expands on nights like December 7, when a low near zero had been forecast.

With serving scheduled for 6:00, we had 2 hours to learn the kitchen and prepare mac & cheese with ground beef and a side of green beans. Friends, we learned that we can do this! We were well assisted by Tony and Beth from MWC, in addition to our own group, each of whom stepped up in some way to make sure supper happened.

We were glad to have more on hand than we really needed this first time on site. We had hoped to have exactly the experience we did have, of a number of people learning how to use a kitchen that was new to us, and then talking



through the experience so in the future we can lead teams to provide more meals.

You want to do this! Especially when it's so easy to focus on what we may see as a cold, bleak season, it's a joy, as Ray Sweany has said, to share love via the food that we prepare.

The details: We think a crew of 6 to prepare the food and another crew of about 4 to serve will be about right. The night shelter is open through March; we could provide, say, two meals per month during that period. Just how many we offer depends on **YOU** and what you want to do. Let us know, and we'll work with you to make it work. It's still early in the life of this program, so we have lots of choice on dates/days of the week. The schedule to cook is 4-6; serving, 5:45-7:30. Contact Ray or Ann Sweany to get started: rasweany@charter.net.



Giving in 2025: A New Opportunity to Make a Difference

Recent updates to federal law have introduced provisions that may encourage charitable giving. These changes include a reinstated deduction for certain donors and adjustments to existing limits for those who itemize. While we cannot provide tax advice, we encourage you to explore these opportunities with a trusted advisor.

Why This Matters for FUMC

Pooling our gifts together allows us to make a bigger, lasting impact in our community—supporting families, funding youth programs, and sustaining worship and outreach.

How You Can Give

- Place your gift in the offertory plate during worship
- Send your donation by mail
- Give online through our secure platform [HERE](#).

Thank you for prayerfully considering how you can support our ministries. Together, our gifts become hope, compassion, and transformation for those we serve.

FUMC Staff Introductions

Alison Ericson - Building Host

Alison began here at FUMC in August, and we've already come to depend on her quite a bit! Hers is often the first face visitors see when they enter our church. Her duties include opening and closing the building for after-hours



events, greeting guests, answering phones, handling building security, and helping provide our unhoused neighbors with food bags. She says, "My favorite part of the job is helping all the different people who come in everyday, and seeing my wonderful co-workers." Her family includes husband Jim, two grown sons Josef and Jacob, and a handicapped Chiweenie dog.

Sunday Worship Services - 10 am

Dec. 14, Advent 3

“Even in Our Fear, We Are Called Forward”
with Chancel Choir & FUMC Handbell Choir

Dec. 21 - Advent 4

“When You’re Afraid, Give Me Your Hand”
with Childrens Christmas Pageant

Christmas Concerts and Events

“Above All this Bustle...Silver Bells”

Kalamazoo Ringers Concert

Saturday, Dec. 13 at 3pm & 7pm



Kalamazoo Children’s Chorus

Sunday, Dec. 14 at 3pm

Academy Class: “Looking Deeply: A Meditative Journey with Our Stained Glass Windows”

Sunday, December 14, after worship

Walk the Labyrinth in Wesley Hall

Sunday Dec. 14 & 21: 8:30am – 12:30pm and 5:30 – 7:30pm

Dec. 18 at noon: “Brass for Christmas” Advent concert

The Kalamazoo Concert Brass Quintet



First United Methodist Church staff: top row, Erika Jones, Jim Tiffany, Linda Hamill, Christiane Stakely; middle row - Drew Bolton, Rev. Matt Weiler, Bryan Heany, Julia Librizzi; front row - Samantha Lee, Rev. Julie Kline, Jackie Stilger, Alison Ericson, Cody Collmenter.
Not pictured - Cari Miller, Eamon Bronson, Ruth Butters



David Brown performing at the first Advent concert of the season, “Through the Eyes of a Child,” on Dec. 4, at FUMC. Photo by Erika Jones

Christmas Eve Worship Services

We will celebrate the Nativity with three special worship services:

4:00 pm - Family & Children Worship

This worship is designed for children and families, focusing on the Christmas Story. Children will have the opportunity to choose their character and costume props at the door and participate in creating the Nativity. Worship will conclude by raising our candles and singing “Silent Night.”

7:00 pm - Lessons and Carols

Throughout Advent, we have lit candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. This evening, we will light the Christ candle to honor that Christ is our Light. We will raise our collective voice to sing Christmas carols accompanied by brass instruments. The Chancel Singers will share uplifting anthems, and we will be assured that the God of love knows our name. we will end this worship by raising our candles and singing “Silent Night.” Child care will be provided in Room 206.

11:00 pm Lessons and Communion

In a quieter spirit, we sing carols, listen to the beautiful handbell music, and gather at the communion table to receive the bread of life and the cup of blessing. If weather permits, we will take our candles to the front steps and sing “Silent Night” as a call for peace and goodwill for all.

