The First Word

November 2026

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First United Methodist Church • 212 S. Park Street • Kalamazoo, MI 49007 • (269) 381-6340 • www.umc-kzo.org

Those Who Dream: An Advent Worship Series

This Advent, join us for *Those Who Dream*, a worship series inviting us to awaken to God's dreams for our world.



Through the familiar Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love, we will explore what it means to pay attention, prepare for transformation, nurture joy, and encourage one another. As we anticipate the birth of Jesus, we will listen for God's invitation to draw near and imagine new possibilities for restoration and peace.

The First Sunday in Advent, November 29

Those who dream… keep awake (hope)
Mark 13:24-37 | Isaiah 64:1-9 | Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

We begin by keeping awake to the realities of our world and watching for signs of God's renewing presence.

The Second Sunday in Advent, December 6

Those who dream… prepare the way (peace)
Mark 1:1-8 | Isaiah 40:1-11 | Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

John the Baptist calls us toward repentance and transformation as we prepare the way for God's love and liberation.

The Third Sunday in Advent, December 13

Those who dream… sow joy (joy)
Luke 1:46-55 | Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 | Psalm 126

With Mary, we consider how to tend the dreams God has planted in us, trusting that even small seeds can bear joy.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20

Those who dream… are not alone (love)
Luke 1:26-45 | 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 | Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Mary and Elizabeth remind us that we do not dream alone. Together, we are called to carry, support, and encourage one another.

★ **Children's Pageant: "Pig's Christmas"**
adapted by Robert Small, story by Jeannie Lee
A pageant to reassure all that we each have something to offer the Christ Child, no matter how small it may seem and how small we may feel.

Come with your hopes, your questions, and your holy imagination. Let us journey toward Christmas together, attentive to the dreams God is nurturing among us.

Coming up in December, Music & Arts of Kalamazoo First United Methodist Church Presents…

Advent Concerts

Thursdays @ Noon

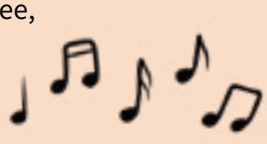
You are invited to enjoy 45 minutes of secular and sacred selections with a wide variety of musicians, styles, and genres

★ **December 3 - Lukas Pederson** - singer and acoustic guitarist

★ **December 10 - KCB's Flute Quartet** - Kalamazoo Concert Band musicians

★ **December 17 - Terry Lower Trio** - Jazz pianist, composer, and arranger

Reception afterwards with coffee, tea, and cookies to mingle and meet the artists.



Freewill offering

2026 Financial Picture Update

by Linda Lueth



During this season of gratitude, we are thankful for your continued support of FUMC with your gifts, your presence, your prayers, your service and your witness. Because of all that you do, we are able to experience, celebrate and share God's Love throughout our community.

We are also grateful for staffing stability; both Bookkeeper Cody Collmenter and Business Manager Linda Hamill have been with us for over a year now. In 2025, the church switched to Quickbooks for its financial records. And this May, the church switched to a new donations platform, Planning Center. Anytime there are software system changes, growing pains occur, but we thank you for your patience during these transitions.

The 2026 budget was adopted before the end of last year, reflecting a deficit of $45,900. Although no one likes a deficit budget, the rationale was that a few more pledge cards would be received after the budget was set (they were); historically spending comes in under budget; and the fact that 2025 finished with a surplus - thanks to support from the Trustees. We were hopeful, as this year unfolded, that 2026 would fare better than the budget deficit reflected.

As shown in the table below , income (giving) was running slightly behind budget (73%) as of September 30 (financial reports for October were not available at press time). Typically, giving is lower during the summer vacation months. We pray that contributions will pick up during the last couple months of the year as many make their year-end gifts. Expenses are running very close to budget (75%), with the main exception being higher-than-anticipated utility costs this past brutally cold winter season. We are still anticipating ending the year with a small deficit, but your year-end gifts and fulfillment of your pledge will help us finish strong and reduce the gap.

We are now in the midst of the budget process for 2027. Your timely pledge response to our generosity campaign will allow us to complete this process and plan for the year ahead. Thank you for prayerfully considering your financial gifts to our church for next year and returning your pledge cards promptly.

(For an overview of our finances during the past year here at First United Methodist Church, including our income sources, ministry area expenses, and the ways your donations are put into action, see our brochure "Our Financial Story - 2026," available HERE.)

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF KALAMAZOO - FINANCIAL UPDATE						
	2024	2025	Month Ending 9/30/26	Year to Date 2026	2026 Annual Budget	% of Annual Budget
Total income ($)	1,053,747	1,200,362	63,542	816,232	1,116,200	73.13%
Total expense ($)	1,166,950	1,095,394	106,280	876,234	1,162,100	75.40%
Excess/ (deficit) ($)	(113,203)	104,968	(42,738)	(60,002)	(45,900)	

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

Jan Baker's family
Wanda Boekhout's family
The Bultema family
Wayne Conner
Bill Dimond & family
Robin Entenman
Janet Hanson
Mary Ellen Fredenburg & family
Carol Hurley & family
Nancy Hyde
Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
Judy McClelland
Mumma family
Anna Rasmussen
Hank Rohs' family
Marcia Royer
Mary Lou Sanderson
Gerry & Tom Schaberg
Michael Seals
Jan Schoenherr
Barb Skuza
Lori Valkema
Christine VanOstran

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.

Submissions for December issue:

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 December 1. Articles may be edited for space and content.

Don't forget to submit your poems for Poetry Corner!

Fall 2026 One Big House Meeting

by Deb Search Willoughby

About 75 FUMC folks gathered on Sunday, October 18, for a delicious potluck and a time of fellowship before joining into "house meeting groups" throughout the church. After taking time to get acquainted, we reflected on Luke 17:11-19, noting Jesus' radical acceptance of those who come



to him for healing and how only one returned to express thanks. We then explored three questions about belonging, nurturing faith, and service opportunity in our faith community.



BELONGING: We all shared evidence that we do feel we belong whether we are new attenders or life-long members. We see that the smaller groups we are part of offer varieties of opportunities for sharing talents and gifts and more deeply cement greetings we share on Sunday mornings.

NURTURING FAITH: Having others in the church reaffirming us in our experiences and our diverse faith histories leads to feeling that our faith is being nurtured.

SERVICE THROUGH FUMC: We felt that there are many opportunities at FUMC to lean into our gifts and interests with respect for boundaries. There are likely many opportunities to discover and wonder how these can be communicated more fully, or how we might invite one another into service relationships.

Outreach Team: Who We Are and What We Do

by Christina Stamper

Have you ever wondered who was behind the "Mission of the Month" requests and the Special Offerings that are taken in worship services during the year?

The FUMC Outreach Team is a group of individuals who facilitate both financial and service-based outreach to the community. We partner with a variety of organizations, including our own Food Pantry (with Loaves and Fishes), ASP (Appalachian Service Project), Ministry with Community, WMU Seita Scholars, the YWCA, Spring Valley Elementary School, Growing Community Gardens (Sunnyside UMC), Northside Ministry Alliance, ISAAC/ Justice Team, the DOCC (Downtown Churches), and many others. We help them with both financial gifts and hands-on service depending on their needs.

For example, this spring and summer our members provided $2,000 to Growing Community Gardens to help offset the equipment and gardening costs, $1,700 to the ASP Youth trip to Appalachia, purchased food pantry items and school supplies for Spring Valley Elementary, participated in the Kalamazoo United Day of Service, sorted donations at the YWCA, and coordinated spiritual and community support events with representatives of other downtown churches. We also facilitate annual events such as the annual Salvation Army Coat drive and Angel Tree gifts.

If you have questions about the Outreach Team or would like to offer your help to our partners, please email Dan Duncan, team co-chair, at danduncan56@gmail.com, or watch for Outreach Team announcements in future *First Word* and *Around the Corner* publications.



FUMC Staff Introductions

Jackie Stilger - Director of Music

by Linda Hamill

If you've ever wondered who's behind the beautiful, thoughtful, toe tapping, spirit lifting music at FUMC, look no further than Jackie Stilger, our Director of Music.



Jackie has been involved in shaping the sound of worship here for 17 years, and she brings a beautiful blend of skill, creativity, and heart to everything she does.

Jackie directs… well… everything musical around here: the Chancel Choir, Choral Singers, Handbell Choir, First Beats, and she even plays the organ. She's also a key collaborator in worship planning, helping choose music that beautifully matches each week's theme, season, and scripture. If the service has a soundtrack, Jackie had a hand in making it meaningful.

Her regular workweek runs Thursday through Saturday, but anyone who knows Jackie knows she's creating, planning, listening, arranging, and dreaming up music all week long. And what keeps her coming back with such passion? "Working with all of our wonderful congregational volunteers to make music together." That's her joy.

Outside of the choirs, Jackie enjoys gardening and playing the Irish whistle. She is also the proud mom of three amazing adult children: Carston, Drew, and Avery. At home, she shares life with Tea Berry the cat, who we assume supervises her gardening and tune making.

We are grateful for Jackie's leadership, insight, and the way she helps our church praise, pray, and celebrate through music. Our team wouldn't be the same without her!

Christmas Sanctuary Decorating

Tuesday, November 24th

If you enjoy stringing lights, hanging wreaths, and other Christmas decorating, consider helping prepare the church for the Advent season. We will spend a few hours the morning of November 24 setting up trees, lights and wreaths. If you would be willing to join in the fun, please contact Dawn Wheaton at Dawheaton53@gmail.com or phone (269) 330-5152.

Leggy Soil

by Elaine Van Belleghem

Soil is the good part of dirt. It is a mixture of organic matter, minerals, gases, and organisms that help support the life of plants. Without this rich soil, plants become leggy, with spindly stems and very few leaves. They can die!

This problem can also affect humans. People who are lonely, ignored, threatened, unloved, damaged by the tragedies of life can die. Drug and alcohol abuse, refusal or inability to care for themselves, homelessness, joblessness, and hopelessness can take a toll.

This is where kindness can help. A smile, kind word, time spent talking and listening to people can be valuable. Showing someone you care about them gives them hope. Going a little further and helping them to find help could be lifesaving.

Youth & Family Event - Dec. 6 Making Ginger Bread Houses

We will meet on Sunday, December 6, in Wesley Hall, 6-7:30pm. This is a joint Youth Ministry and Children and Family Ministry event. We will work in small groups to make the best gingerbread houses. Bragging rights to be earned for most creative!

Mission of the Month for Nov./Dec. - Angel Tree



First United Methodist Church will be participating in the Salvation Army Angel Tree again this year. The tree is now up in the Perks area. If you would like to purchase a gift, please select a tag from the tree and return the gift, unwrapped and with the tag, by Sunday, December 6th. Gift cards should be turned in to the office (there is a drop box behind Chris Stakely's desk). Thank you for helping to make Christmas brighter for children and families in need!