



# FIRST UNITED

## METHODIST CHURCH

**DECEMBER, 2024**  
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### PASTOR'S PAUSE DECEMBER 2024



*“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for God who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)*

In December 2022 I lost one of my best friends to brain cancer. It was one week before Christmas when she passed, and I wasn't sure how I was going to be a pastor and get through the season of Christ's birth. Out of the view of people I was literally functioning one moment at a time.

I wonder if you've ever had a Christmas where things were not as they should have been. Or maybe that describes this holiday season for you.

Perhaps you are:

- Exhausted and overwhelmed by your overfull schedule.
  - Financially stretched.
  - Buried in bad news.
- Stressed and sleepless because of relationship challenges. You can't go to another festive dinner and pretend everything is OK when it's not.

In other words, the holidays are a mess; you're a mess. Friend, I get it. But skipping over the month of December (especially as a pastor) isn't an option, and even if it were, we'd only carry our old stresses and messes into a new season.

How do we make it through the “most wonderful time of the year” when we've lost our jolliness, and we don't want to “jingle all the way”? Let's cling to Truth. And God's Truth reminds us that, no matter the size of our holiday mess, we are not alone.

From the beginning, Christmas has been messy. If scratch-and-sniff Bibles were a thing, we would smell the stench when we read about the first Christmas in Luke 2. Unlike the beautiful scenes from children's story Bibles, many people shared their living space with their animals. In as such, Jesus' birthplace was a dirty, stinky manger. Jesus was born in a mess!

Think about it: Jesus Christ, Immanuel, which literally means “God with us,” chose to be born in a mess. And now Jesus promises to be with us always, even in our mess.

## December Pastor's Pause (continued)

One of the verses I clung to during that sad, messy Christmas was Hebrews 10:23, which says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for God who promised is faithful." The Message Bible paraphrases it this way: "Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. [God] always keeps God's word."

I kept a firm grip on God's promise that I was not alone in this grieving. In the midst of my pain, I drew near to God and others. Will you do the same?

Friends, whatever you do, don't sit in your loneliness or isolation. Ask God for the courage to remember that God's with you, and then talk to someone. It'll change everything for you.

*PRAYER: Jesus, thank You for being Immanuel — God with us. In the midst of my holiday messes and stresses, help me to draw near to You and to others. I praise You for always being with me. In Your Name, Amen.*

### **RECONCILING TASK FORCE Cynthia Frederick, Chair**

The educational sessions on Sunday mornings will continue in January. Matt Lewellyn-Otten, (he/him, they/ them) Associate Director of Religious Organizing at OutFront Minnesota, will lead the next class, Queer Theology 101. It takes a look at the clobber passages in the Bible. This will be on Sunday, Jan. 12, in the Fellowship Hall at 11:15, right after church. As Pastor Jenny reminded us, sometimes we need to lean into uncomfortable conversations to grow. Matt makes it easier, as he is very knowledgeable, but also approachable and welcoming to all.

Please feel free to bring your thoughts and questions to the Reconciling Committee, made up of: Cynthia Frederick, Patsy Bellman, Sharry Swann, Lizzie Bellman, Mike Ptacek, and Pastor Jenny Lind Larsen. Also, consider joining the committee, as we seek to live into God's plan for us.



## **WOMEN OF FAITH**

Women of Faith, United Circle will meet at 10:00 on December 10th in the Fellowship Hall at church. Our hostesses will be Pam Hartley and Sue Niethammer. The program will be given by Master Gardner, Pam Hartley where she will share information on Christmas plants. Sue will lead our devotion and we will all enjoy some needed fellowship time of sharing our friendships. All are Welcome, so come and share in the joy of the holiday.



## **HOLIDAY BAKE SALE**

The Women of Faith, United will be holding a Holiday BAKE SALE on December 15th which is also the day our choir presents their Cantata. Funds will be used to support UMCOR and our local church budget. All donations are appreciated. Looking forward to the holiday season celebrating Jesus' birth with hope and love in our hearts.



## WEDNESDAY SUPPERS

Wednesday Dinners will be held December 4 and 11. Following that there will be a 3 week Christmas and New Years break on December 18, 25 and January 1. The weekly dinners will resume on January 8. Plan on joining your church family for a delicious meal at only \$7.00 for fellowship and nutrition!



## OH CHRISTMAS TREE!

THANK YOU to our Super Donors who brought us the beautifully lit Christmas Tree on the Greeley side of the church! It is another reminder of the hope and light brought by the birth of Jesus.



Also, THANKS to Richard and Mary Pat, friends of the church and Wednesday night, regulars for their donation of the Christmas tree by the front entrance.

## SCRIP IS AVAILABLE!

The Scrip Order Schedule is posted on the church website homepage <https://fumcstillwater.com/> under Announcements and on the church Information Center. The next order will be placed on December 8. Orders can be placed after Sunday worship services or anytime by email to the church office at [fumcstillwater@gmail.com](mailto:fumcstillwater@gmail.com). Order blanks are available at the church Information Center or in the office. Payment for email orders can be dropped off at the church during office hours.



## BRIDGE GROUP

The Bridge Group will meet December 6 at noon in the Fellowship Hall. Beginners are welcome! Contact the church office at [fumcstillwater@gmail.com](mailto:fumcstillwater@gmail.com) to join the Bridge Group mailing list.



## UNITED METHODIST MEN (UMM)

Join the United Methodist Men for a monthly devotion, breakfast, free range discussion, and fellowship. The December 14 meeting will be at the Lowell Inn at 8 a.m. Contact the church office at [fumcstillwater@gmail.com](mailto:fumcstillwater@gmail.com) to join the UMM mailing list.



## CARING MINISTRIES TEAM

The Caring Ministries Team supports friends and members of our church family who are in need during times of loss, sadness, illness, or loneliness in the form of food, visits, cards, Communion, or calls. We appreciate all of our volunteers who either do a one-time outreach or are part of the ongoing planning team. If you would like to be an occasional supporter or a monthly team member, please call the church office. Our next meeting will be in January. The date will be available on the church calendar shortly.



# ACT OF KINDNESS AND THOUGHTFULNESS AWARD

Announcing our **DECEMBER Winner...**

## BRIDGET HAUGEN

Bridget is one of the kindest and most generous people among us. She exemplifies what it means to be a follower of Christ always working behind the scenes and stepping in wherever there is a need. Bridget is a high school art teacher and an artist herself who loves to engage with her students. She and her family have been devoted members of our church for over 20 years. She laughs easily and always puts a positive spin on things. We love Bridget!!!



## MUSIC

The music team is wishing everyone a wonderful Advent and Christmas season. The Chancel Choir, assisted by Jason Haugen on guitar and Ruthann Ritchie on piano, will perform Mary Did You Know? on December 1. I know this is a favorite carol for a lot of folks and hope you enjoy the presentation. On December 8, the River Town Ringers will be presenting Wie Schoen Leuchtet, a 16th century advent hymn. In addition, the children from our congregation and Sunny Hill Preschool have been invited to perform for the special music during the service. The Chancel Choir will be augmented with the assistance of several instrumentalists on December 15 for the presentation of The Christmas Story by Fettke and Grassi. On December 22 the congregation will be treated to a violin and cello duet featuring Pastor Jenny and Jackson Wright.

The Christmas Eve service will be held at 5:00 pm on the 24th. It will be a service of lessons and carols featuring several special ensembles and selections. We hope you will join us for these services during this special season. Another event which we hope you will join us with is our annual caroling to the members of our congregation who aren't able to attend services due to mobility issues. The caroling is a wonderful time to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child. It will be held on December 15th. Everyone wishing to participate should meet at the church at 2:00 pm.



Leesa Levy

## YOUTH MINISTRY

Our next youth event will be on Saturday, **December 7th at 10am**. We will meet in the church kitchen and make cookies for our homebound members to be delivered as a Christmas present later in the month.

Plans are in process for a later, fun youth event in December, probably over Christmas break. Time and details to be determined.

## YOUTH COUNCIL

The Youth Council welcomes anyone that would like to be part of this ministry to join either as a member of the Youth Council, a mentor for one of our youth, or a one-time supporter of an activity. We had our last meeting on November 20th and plan to have our next meeting in January. The date and time to be determined.



## THANK YOU!

Our third Chili Cook-Off and Country Store Boutique were held on Thursday Nov 14 and they were a nice success! This is the first time we held an event like this on a Thursday and it worked out fine. We served up about 20 gallons of chili and sides to a constant stream of people, and sold lots of homemade and handmade items at the Country Store too. Total net receipts were \$3416.

By the end of the evening, we ran out of chili and could have sold more. Most of the attendees were not members so this truly was the type of community event we envisioned. A hearty THANK YOU to the 25+ workers at the Cook-Off and Country Store. We couldn't have done it without you!



## WHO DO YOU KNOW THAT SHOULD READ OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETTER?

If you have a friend, acquaintance, visitor, former member or have a family member who would benefit from receiving First United monthly newsletter and other church communications, please contact Denice to add them to our church email list. We want as many people as possible seeing the good work FIRST UNITED

## HELP WANTED:

Many of us are in the de-cluttering time of our lives. I find myself needing to de-clutter my schedule so am asking for someone to step forward and try out a new "job".

For several years I have been responsible for purchasing all the coffee used at the church as well as the juice and cookies used on Sunday mornings. This is all paid for by the people who contribute to the basket that is out on Sunday mornings. The "job" also includes a little book keeping by getting the money and paying yourself back. If you are willing to accept the position, please let me know. Thanks so much. Mary Harcey, 651-439-7363 harceydm@comcast.net.



### DECEMBER

**Dec.2 Pam Hartley, Marshall White, Meara White; Dec. 4 Abraham Anderson ; Dec. 7 Cole Funck; Dec. 8 Ann Haraldson, Gail Martell; Dec. 10 Sharon McAuliffe; Dec. 11 Abby Helwig; Dec. 16 Bernie Darling; Dec. 24 Diane Jackson, Jane Krentz,; Dec. 26 Sue Niethammer Dec.28 Kristine Bruggeman Dec.30 Maurice Grogan, Brett Hartman, Jason Haugen, Teresa Myhra, Elias Roll.**

# THINGS TO BE EXCITED ABOUT OVER THE LAST YEAR (2023 - 2024)

Things to be excited about over the last year (2023 – 2024)

- Positive, productive, healthy staff
- Reconciling congregation as of April 2024
- ♦ Providing adult forums throughout 24'-25' to better inform our congregation of how we best support the LGBTQ community.
- 6 new members
- 4 baptisms
- Rebooting confirmation
- More youth involved in intergenerational church events and worship.
- Supportive and effective leadership for ALL our ministry teams as well as growth in lay leadership.
- Strong welcoming/hospitality focus INDENT Big emphasis on caring ministries - providing meals for those homebound and/or sick as well as monthly communion, and correspondence to support those in need.
- Collaboration with New Heights School – working towards volunteer programming with 10 of our members including pastor Jenny.
- ♦ Tutoring for English and math.
- ♦ Looking to create new programming around the arts
- Growth with Wednesday night meal – new visitors
- New attendees on Sundays that are coming consistently. (Means new member potential)
- Weekly Bible study with great elder/lay leadership
- Weekly centering prayer at noon on Wednesdays
- Strengthening of our music programming with bi-annual events:
  - ♦ Christmas cantata as well as special music from our River Town Ringers and Chancel Choir
  - ♦ Christmas Caroling for the **home bound**
  - ♦ Hosting concerts from outside Stillwater such as the Dakota Wesleyan University choir/bells of South Dakota



## THINGS TO BE EXCITED ABOUT (continued)

- Consistent missional presence including UMCOR and local community needs IE: Stuff the Bus.
- Yearly meet apportionment goal
- Successful 2nd annual Trunk and Treat with 115 kids coming through in 2024
- Successful 3rd annual chili cookoff and country store. Seeing more new faces from the community.
- Involvement in Stillwater's Lumber Jack Days and provided parade float.
- Continued growing partnership with Sunny Hill through music
- Offering Monday morning Tai Chi classes



## A LOOK BACK IN OUR HISTORY By Patsy Bellman

The 1979 Annual Report (45 Years Ago) tells of the hiring of the first youth director. Jon Carson began in September working with the Jr. and Sr. High youth. He was a seminary student enrolled at the United Theological Seminary in St. Paul. 1979 is also the summer of a pastoral exchange. Rev. Art Hill and family traveled to Wales and Rev. Jolley and family came to Stillwater. "A Year of transition..." This statement is repeated over and over again in...

The 1984 Annual Report. ( 40 Years Ago ) Rev. Arthur Hill was assigned to the Fridley UMC church after serving in Stillwater for almost 13 years. (He was pulled 2 months early because of the need in the Fridley church.) After 2 months of various lay speakers, Rev. Alan Hagstrom and a few guest pastors, Rev. Manning VanNostrand came to Stillwater at the end of June. In July, Elaine Hill also left as our Music Director, Organist and director of several choirs. The job was divided and Kathy Hauser (now Hartman) took over the positions of Music Director, Organist, and Senior Bells along with Youth Bells and Joyful Noise Choir. Janet Larson took the positions of Senior Choir Director and Teen Choir along with Jr. Choristers. A few highlights in 1984 include the installation of a three panel marker board and three panel bridal mirror in the Wesley Room. (Note - this is pre 1991 expansion and remodel so we are talking about the original Wesley Room at our church.) The church and Sunny Hill sign at the Greeley Street entrance was also designed and installed.

The 1989 Annual Report (35 years ago ) tells of replacement of the old hymnals with the brand new, long awaited 1989 United Methodist hymnal. 260 hymnals were given in memory or a loved one, in honor of a loved one or as a special gift to the church. The Long Range Planning group asked that a Building Committee be appointed to begin assessing the needs of the church and move forward with the idea to expand the church building in the near future..

