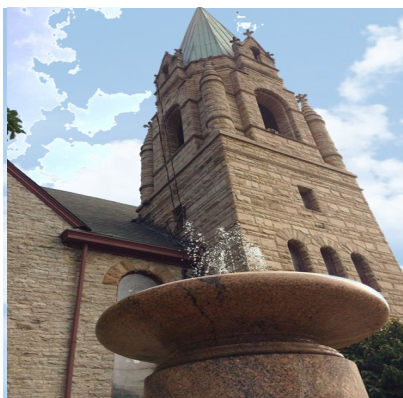




# The Ambassador

February 2026

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Dear Friends,

Each year we hear Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount in our Ash Wednesday services:

*Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them;  
for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

In this caution, Jesus teaches his followers to have a unified life, one where our external practices are solely a reflection of our inward piety. As we begin our observance of Lent, we respond to Jesus' call to practice the spiritual disciplines of almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. I invite you to join me in the following as one way to be faithful:

**Almsgiving – giving to others who are in need** – This year, as in years past, we will have our Lenten and Easter offering go toward our ministries that feed our neighbors. There is an article on page 5 that lists the pantry items that are needed as well as other ways to support and get involved with these ministries.

**Fasting – to refrain from consuming** – Typically the focus is on fasting from a particular food, like chocolate, or food item, like sweets, but you can also choose to fast from activities, like watching tv or social media. During this time of self-denial, followers of Jesus are encouraged to focus on God who is the provider of all of our needs. While First UMC does not have a fasting focus like we do for almsgiving, you are encouraged to fast during Lent, to empty yourself before God who is the One who fulfills.

**Prayer – to seek the presence of God** – I invite you to join me in two particular prayer practices. The first practice is to pray aloud the Lord's Prayer each day. I will do this with my regular morning devotions but you can choose to pray it at a different time. And the second practice is to read the Sermon on the Mount once a week or maybe even each day during Lent. It can be found in Matthew's gospel, chapters 5-7.

## Staff

Senior Pastor Kim Armentrout  
Assoc. Pastor Daniel Cardenas  
Worship Mary Ellen Clinard  
Building Supt. Greg Cooper  
Office Mgr. Pam Fugett  
Treasurer Betsy Koval  
Financial Secy. Susan Beagle

## Contact Us

120 S. Broad St.  
Middletown, OH 45044  
513.423.4629  
office@myfumc.net  
www.myfumc.net

## Worship With Us

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

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Pastor Daniel 4  
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As you read, I encourage you to prayerfully reflect on the scripture and wonder why Jesus chose to address these concerns; let Jesus' words speak to you, noticing what challenges you; and let the scriptures become for you the Living Word, asking what God is calling you to do, change, be, or become.

Throughout Lent, we will explore Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in worship, you can find more information on our worship series below. I look forward to our time together this Lent.

Peace,  
Pastor Kim  
<><

### Lenten Series

Early in the Gospel of Matthew, we encounter Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Originally addressed to the disciples after a crowd had gathered, these teachings of Jesus have become some of the most quoted and most analyzed words that he spoke. Theologians and ordinary folk seeking to be faithful have dedicated themselves to the study of this sermon of Jesus'. In Lent, we too, will sit at the feet of Jesus and learn what he taught about what it means to be blessed, to be faithful, and to be a disciple.

| <u>Date</u>                | <u>Sermon</u>         | <u>Scripture</u>                    |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2.18.2026<br>Ash Wednesday | Spiritual Disciplines | Matt 6:1-6, 16-21<br>Psalm 51:1-17  |
| 2.22.2026                  | The Beatitudes        | Matt 5:1-12<br>Psalm 32             |
| 3.1.2026                   | Salt, Light & the Law | Matt 5:13-20<br>Psalm 112:1-9       |
| 3.8.2026                   | The Law Intensified   | Matt 5:21-37<br>Psalm 119:1-8       |
| 3.15.2026                  | Forgiveness and Love  | Matt 5:38-48<br>Psalm 119:33-40     |
| 3.22.2026                  | Trusting God          | Matt 6:24-34<br>Psalm 62:5-12       |
| 3.29.2026<br>Palm Sunday   | Narrow and Wide Gates | Matt 7:1-20<br>Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 |

### SHALOM Shelter Ministry Begins **FEBRUARY 8TH**

Yes, this is a schedule change! One of the host churches could not cover its week. Shalom has asked us/FUMC to host Feb. 8th-15th instead of our original week. Steve Swank is our church coordinator and will be seeking volunteers to help. Please talk with Steve and see how you can serve our neighbors in need.



### First Friday @ First United Methodist Begins It's 20th Year!

It's hard to believe that we are heading into our 20th year of hosting our First Friday @ First United Methodist Noontime Concerts for our community!

Although it's not a typical "ministry", we wanted to reach out and serve those people who might either work downtown and would enjoy music during their lunch hour or those who not might not be able to get out after dark and experience live music in another venue or afford tickets. We also wanted to be a part of a positive narrative about downtown Middletown and be seen as an open and welcoming community space for music.

Our first scheduled concert was in the courtyard and featured a Jewish Klezmer group to make the message clear – this was not a way for us to get people in the sanctuary for a church service. This concert was followed by Broadway Show tunes, original rock, honky tonk piano, and classical instrumentals each month. For several years we were asked to hold ½ of our concerts at Governor's Square to further disassociate our concert series from religious services. Thankfully we were eventually allowed to have all of our concerts in the sanctuary. Those were tough years!!

Eventually we settled into a rhythm where we could offer all types of music and have added gospel to our line-up without issue. Originally we offered cookies, coffee, and soft drinks to encourage people to bring their lunch and eat during the concert. COVID not only ended the concerts for a little over a year, but the refreshments did not return. Special thanks to our loyal cookie bakers and hosts over those beginning years!

Some interesting facts also include: most of the audience do not attend our church, the large majority of our audience attend all the concerts during the year, and most people meet their friends and the concert and then go out to lunch. If you haven't made attending First Friday Concerts a part of your routine, our 20<sup>th</sup> year is a great place to start!

Here's what's coming up—

- Feb 6 **Adena Brass Quintet** – with a wide variety of styles and some classics with brass and pipe organ
- Mar 6 **Appalachian Grass** – Bluegrass
- Apr 10 *(date changed due to Good Friday)*  
**Berachah Valley** – Gospel and Bluegrass
- May 1 **Raison d'Etre** – Women's Trio performing Swing, Western, Standards
- June 5 **Michael Ronstadt and Serenity Fisher**- Piano, Cello, Vocals
- July 3 **My Brother's Keeper** – A favorite! Bluegrass, gospel
- Aug 7 **Native American Flute**- Soothing and peaceful on handmade instruments
- Sept 4 **Dean Simms and Rich Begel** – Louis Armstrong Tribute Show
- Oct 2 **Queen City Cabaret** – Vocals and Piano favorites from Sinatra, Clooney, Garland, and more.
- Nov 6 **Milt Goedde** – Piano interpretations of favorites from the 60's to today
- Dec 4 **Christmas Harps**

## A Note from Rev. Daniel Cardenas, Associate Pastor

God is faithful.  
Hebrews 10:23

Most of the time, we tend to associate the New Year with quiet beginnings, high expectations, and a slower pace. After all, we assume that the celebrations and festivities are behind us, left behind in the old year that has come to an end.

However, the truth is that we must acknowledge that, even though the year has just begun, it already feels fast-paced and heavily burdened with countless difficult and complicated situations that affect us both personally and as a community. Without a doubt, these realities concern us, weary us, and weigh heavily upon our hearts.

And although all of this is very normal, we must not lose the hope that lives within us—even when everything around us seems lost, or feels as though it is falling apart, or moving far too quickly. This leads us to ask: How can we continue to cultivate hope when the year does not unfold as we imagined?

Well, the first thing we can do when a new year moves rapidly forward, carrying storms and despair along its path, is to never deny that reality. Many times, we think that by denying what is happening, everything will simply disappear as if by magic. Yet the passage in Hebrews calls us to remain firm in the face of every troubling forecast, assuming that there will indeed be pressure, weariness, and circumstances that may cause us to tremble and worry. Therefore, when bad news, global events, or simply a difficult day knock at your door, keep your life anchored in the hope we find in Christ Jesus.

This leads us to the second point: shift your focus. Do not fix your gaze on how the year is going, nor solely on what is happening in the world or in your community (this does not mean ignoring these realities), but rather, make sure they do not cloud your purpose or your focal point, which is God and His character of goodness, faithfulness, and love. In other words, when your eyes are drawn toward the problems that arise, intentionally change your focus and behold the wonderful and blessed character of our Lord.

Finally, walk hand in hand with your faith community. If we pay attention, the text is written in the plural, reinforcing the call to walk together—as one body that supports, sustains, and nourishes one another. We are not called to live out our faith in isolation or individually, but in unity, woven together with one another.

In conclusion, we do not know what the rest of the year holds, nor do we know what else may come our way. What we do know, however, is that the Lord is faithful and just, and He is always on our side—guiding our steps and bringing new hope and mercy day after day.

Con cariño y aprecio  
Pastor Daniel Cardenas =)



## Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Join us as we observe this holy day with scripture, prayer, song, and the imposition of ashes. We are offering two identical in-person services in the sanctuary on Ash Wednesday as well as an online service that can be viewed at whatever time is best for you. Let us begin our observance of Lent together with Ash Wednesday worship.

## Lenten Lunches

Pastor Kim is meeting with clergy in the Middletown area to plan Lenten lunches this year. As plans are finalized we will share them in the bulletin and with a constant contact email. Thanks for your patience!

## Lenten Offering

As has become our tradition, our Lenten and Easter offering this year will focus on the ministries of our church that focus on feeding our neighbors. We have a weekly **food pantry** that is open every Tuesday afternoon. We also offer pantry items in the form of **emergency food**, which is a grocery bag full of canned goods, peanut butter, crackers, etc. Last, but certainly not least, we host Monday morning **Breakfast Club** which provides a hot breakfast to anyone who comes.

This Lenten season you are invited to purchase items that are the quickest to leave our shelves. These items are:

### Pantry:

|                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Toilet tissue (4 pack)* | Ramen Noodles (Chicken/Beef) |
| Laundry detergent       | Shampoo (V05)                |
| Dish soap               | Apple Juice (Half Gallon)    |
| Vegetable/Canola Oil    | Evaporated Milk*             |
| Flour/Sugar/Salt        | Paper Towels                 |
| Vienna Sausages         | Bar Soap (Ivory/Zest)        |
| White Rice              |                              |

\* can be used in both areas

### Emergency Food:

|                        |                 |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Spaghetti              | Spaghetti Sauce |
| Corn                   | Green Beans     |
| Tuna                   | Tuna Helper     |
| Chicken Noodle         | Tomato Soup     |
| Saltine Crackers       |                 |
| Peanut Butter (Creamy) | Jelly           |

In addition to purchasing items for the pantry, prayerfully consider how you can be involved with these ministries year-round. Could you volunteer to serve during pantry hours or be a shopper for food pantry items that do not get donated? Or could you come to the church on Monday mornings to make a hot breakfast for our neighbors?

If you have any questions about our Lenten & Easter offering, or if you want to serve in one of these ministries, please contact the church office.

## **Bishop's Day on the District - March 7, 2026 at Resurrection Mason UMC**

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung will spend Saturday, March 7 in our district meeting with clergy and laity from the Great Miami River and Scioto River Districts.

### *Laity Schedule 11:00 am\* - 3:00 pm*

A special training for laity on leadership skills, will be held at 11:00 am. All laity are encouraged to participate. Laity are then invited for lunch at noon. From 1:00 - 3:00 pm, the bishop will lead a discussion on the Five Strategic Pillars of the Ohio Episcopal Area Missional Direction and closing worship. \*Laity traveling with their pastors are invited to attend opening worship at 9:30 am and then be dismissed following worship for a time of fellowship and connecting from 10:30-11:00am, before their training at 11am.

If you are interested in attending this event, call the church office and we will assist you in getting registered

## **First UMC/The Gathering**

Our district, Great Miami River District, has asked First UMC to consider having a formal relationship with The Gathering, a United Methodist mission site just a few blocks from us in downtown Middletown. At our February Administrative Council meeting, Will Fenton-Jones, from the West Ohio Conference office, will be joining us to answer questions we may have and to talk about what this partnership could look like. All are invited to our February Administrative Council meeting on Tuesday, February 17th at 6:00 pm.

## **Finance Committee Report**

Greetings from the Finance Committee! We want to update our financial situation for you. As you remember, 2025 was a difficult year, necessitating a "2<sup>nd</sup> Mile" pledge campaign. So, at the beginning of 2026, how did we do in 2025, and what is our outlook for this year? Here are three sets of data that indicate 2026 will be much more favorable.

After finishing 2024 with a deficit, we finished 2025 being \$45,000 to the good, thanks to your added support, and a large reduction in expenses of about \$40,000.

Our Operating and Operating Reserve accounts starting this year are about \$20,000 more than the start of 2025. These are the funds from which we pay most of our bills.

Finally, our 2026 pledge drive result is about \$39,000 higher than the start of 2025.

We cannot forecast the future, but we are very hopeful that 2026 will be a financial success for FUMC. We thank you for your continued generosity.

## **Ministry Spotlight — Congregational Care**

This month we'll be highlighting our Congregational Care Committee. This committee is a team of people who stay in contact with members who are unable to attend worship. They connect with them at least once a month by phone calls, cards, and/or visits. We want them to know that they are still part of our congregation. This is an important ministry that shares God's incarnational love. If you feel God leading you to help us, please contact the church office at 513-423-4629 or Nancy Heberling at 513-433-1213.

# February 2026

| Sun                                                         | Mon                                                 | Tue                                                                                    | Wed                                                                                 | Thu                                                                          | Fri                                                                          | Sat |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1<br>9:00 Sunday School<br>10:30 Worship                    | 2<br>8:00 Breakfast Club                            | 3<br>9 Staff Mtg<br>10 Investment Committee<br>2:00 Pantry<br>2:00 Congregational Care | 4<br>3 & 7:00 Choir<br>6:00 Hispanic Bible Study                                    | 5<br>Worship Team<br>2:00 Elizabeth Cir.<br>@ Mt. Pleasant                   | 6<br>10:00 UWV Board<br>12:00 First Friday Concert                           | 7   |
| 8<br>9:00 Sunday School<br>10:30 Worship<br>— SHALOM WEEK - | 9<br>8:00 Breakfast Club<br>6:00 Legal Clinic       | 10<br>10 Staff Mtg<br>11 Memorials<br>1:00 SPRC<br>2:00 Pantry                         | 11<br>3 & 7:00 Choir<br>6:00 Hispanic Bible Study<br>—SHALOM —                      | 12 9:00<br>Worship Team<br>2:00 Elizabeth Cir.<br>@ Mt. Pleasant<br>WEEK —   | 13<br>9:00 Hope Circle<br>@ Bob Evans                                        | 14  |
| 15<br>9:00 Sunday School<br>10:30 Worship                   | 16<br>8:00 Breakfast Club<br><b>Presidents' Day</b> | 17<br>10:00 Staff Mtg<br>NO Pantry<br>5:30 Finance Mtg<br>6:00 Council Mtg             | 18 <b>ASH WED.</b><br>2 & 7:00 Service<br>3 & 6:00 Choir<br>NO Hispanic Bible Study | 19<br>12:00 Celebration of Life for Kay Fraley<br>AMBASSADOR<br>ARTICLES DUE | 20<br>12:00 Celebration of Life for Kay Fraley<br>AMBASSADOR<br>ARTICLES DUE | 21  |
| 22<br>9:00 Sunday School<br>10:30 Worship                   | 23<br>8:00 Breakfast Club                           | 24<br>10:00 Staff Mtg<br>2:00 Pantry<br>6:30 Trustees                                  | 25<br>3 & 7:00 Choir<br>6:00 Hispanic Bible Study                                   | 26<br>1:00 Celebration of Life for Dee Young                                 | 27                                                                           | 28  |
|                                                             |                                                     |                                                                                        |                                                                                     |                                                                              |                                                                              |     |



|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Matthew Dixon      | 01 |
| Kathy Lambert      | 03 |
| Mark Frazer        | 05 |
| Anita McLaughlin   | 08 |
| Mary Davis         | 09 |
| Lynda Goecke       | 09 |
| Kim Stephens       | 09 |
| Steve Swank        | 15 |
| Mary Ellen Clinard | 16 |
| Darryl Fairchild   | 16 |
| Daphne Murphy      | 16 |
| Landry Ward        | 17 |
| Bill Alderton      | 19 |
| Marilyn Clark      | 20 |
| Johnny Schmitt     | 21 |
| Sylvie Gadness     | 26 |
| Donna Burley       | 28 |

Happy Birthday!



**Dates to Remember in March:**  
 2 Angela Murphy's Birthday  
 6 First Friday Concert  
 15 Easter Flower Order Deadline  
 29 Palm Sunday



# **2026 First Friday Concert & Artist Series**

**Feb. 6, 2026 - Adena Brass**

**New to our concert series, this popular brass group plays a wide variety of styles. For our First Friday concert they will be joined by our 32-rank pipe organ on several classical favorites!**

**First UMC - Middletown**

**@noon**

**Free Admission**

**masks encouraged, not required**

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