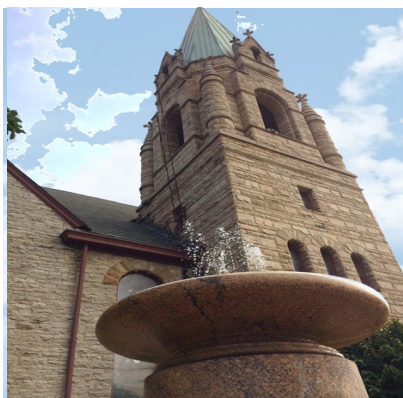




The Ambassador

July 2026

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Dear Friends,

A few years ago, the summer I came to First UMC, my family went on a vacation to Washington, D.C. We were there over the July 4th holiday and got to enjoy the fireworks, concerts, and holiday festivities. While we there, we went to the National Archives Museum to see the Declaration of Independence. I do not think I would have made this a priority for myself, but I was motivated by my daughter's love of the movie National Treasure, where that document plays a critical role. She loved that movie and wanted to see the Declaration of Independence. I am grateful we did so.

It was moving to see this document that our country's founders signed – their actual signatures! I was able to look at the words that began to solidify the foundation on which our system of governance would be built as a nation. These words, these dreams – right before my eyes. The words were faded but they were still there. In a time when there is so much division in our country, it was reviving to go back to our roots.

I'm thinking about that trip as we prepare to celebrate our nation's semi quincentennial this month. And as I am pondering, I find myself thinking about our Christian identity. Like the words on the Declaration of Independence, our vows as Christians can become faded over time. At some point in our faith journey, we made vows in front of a baptismal font. Vows where we promised to reject evil; vows where we accepted the freedom and power God gives us to resist injustice and oppression; vows where we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior and promise to serve him.

For some of us, the day of our baptism was a long time ago, for others it is more recent. But no matter when we were baptized, we may find that over time, the water dries, and the day turns into a distant memory. This is why, as Christians, we recommit ourselves to our baptismal vows at the beginning of every year and every time we celebrate a baptism in the congregation. We do this to keep our commitment from fading, to keep our

Staff

Senior Pastor Kim Armentrout
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Worship With Us

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

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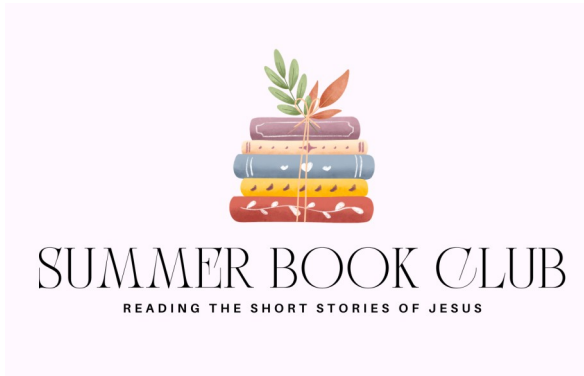
commitment to follow Jesus at the forefront of our living.

As we gather this month to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration, may we continue to not only live up to our highest ideals as a nation, but to also live up to our high calling as Christians in following and serving Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peace,
Pastor Kim
<><

Summer Book Club – reading the short stories of Jesus.

We are continuing our worship series studying the parables of Jesus. At the beginning of June, we shared a few summer series goodies – a worship attendance tracker and a book journal. If you did not get yours, let the church office know, and they will get you fixed up! On the first and last Sundays in July, please see Pastor Kim after worship by her card catalogue – she would love to give you some more bookish goodies: stickers and bookmarks! We will explore lots more parables in July – told to us by our very own amazing storytellers! Here is the worship schedule:



7.5.2026	The Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus	Luke 16:19-31
7.12.2026	The Parable of the Sower	Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
7.19.2026	The Parable of the Weeds & Field	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
7.26.2026	The Parable of the Mustard Seed	Matthew 13:31-32

Pastor Kim Vacation

Pastor Kim and her family will be on vacation in the month of July. Leaving after worship on Sunday, July 5th, they will be heading to Chicago. After spending a few days there with family, they will head further north, camping for a few days in Wisconsin, before ending up in the Upper Peninsula. They plan to camp, do some stargazing in dark sky country, and sail on Lake Superior before heading south again. It will be a slow return to Ohio, stopping at Mackinaw Island, the Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes, and visiting more family. Believe it or not, they will do all that and return home on Sunday, July 19th. Pastor Kim will resume regular office hours on Tuesday, July 21st. Rev. Angela Meeks will be preaching the two Sundays Pastor Kim is off. **If you need pastoral care while she is gone, please contact the church office or Pastor Daniel.**

A Note from Rev. Daniel Cardenas, Associate Pastor

Standing Firm in Difficult Times Matthew 10:25–31

Jesus called His disciples and sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, giving them authority, a destination, and a message (Matthew 10:1–8). However, He also warned them that the mission would not be free from difficulties. If He Himself was rejected, slandered, and persecuted, His followers would face opposition as well, for “a disciple is not above his teacher” (Matthew 10:24–25). Later, Jesus reaffirmed this reality when He said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

At first, this may seem contradictory. Does Christ not transform our lives? Certainly He does. In Him we become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17) and receive a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). Yet we still live in a world affected by sin. That is why Jesus prayed that His disciples would be protected while remaining in the world (John 17:15), knowing that they would face trials and hardships.

But Jesus' words are not meant to discourage us; they are meant to strengthen us. After warning His disciples about opposition, He directs their attention to the Father's care: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care” (Matthew 10:29).

If God cares for the sparrows, how much more will He care for those who belong to Him? Therefore, Jesus concludes, “So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:31).

Moreover, God's care is deeply personal. Jesus tells His followers that even the hairs of their heads are all numbered (Matthew 10:30). The God who created all things knows every detail of our lives and sustains us by His grace.

Participating in God's mission is a privilege, but it also involves facing challenges. When difficult times come, let us remember that the Almighty God cares for us, protects us, and sustains us (Isaiah 41:10). Therefore, let us not grow weary or discouraged in doing God's work, but remain steadfast, trusting in the One who promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20).

*So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.
Matthew 10:31*

Con amor y cariño.
Pastor Daniel Cardenas =)



In 1995, I arrived here as a new resident of Middletown and began attending FUMC with my 3 year old son Andrew. He had some difficulty with me leaving him in his Sunday School room so I helped in his class for several weeks. Eventually there was an opening to teach the 5th and 6th grade Sunday School, and that began my 10 year stint as the teacher! I loved knowing all the kids in the church! When I became the organist/choir director, I began to know more adults in the church and not as many kids. In my time as organist, I have felt a little disconnected to the children and young adults in our church because there's just not as much opportunity to interact with them on a regular basis. I really miss that....but.....ENTER MESSY CHURCH!!!!

Messy Church is a movement that started in England as a way to create relationships across all ages and to have a time outside of our regular worship to gather and praise God. Messy Church is a learning experience, based on creativity, hospitality, and fun. It will be a unique way to introduce people to church, to what it means to be in a faith community, and bring families together. It starts with a gathering time with crafts and food, then worship based on a Bible story. It's informal, with mixed ages, a fast pace, and, well, MESSY! That's it!

There's plenty of opportunity to volunteer—food buying and prep, craft planning, creating worship elements/music. We've got some teams forming and we would love to have you on board! Contact Pastor Kim if you are interested. Our "soft opening" for Messy Church is Sept. 17 (3rd Thursday) from 5:30-7 for just our congregation. Then we are opening it to everyone we know on Oct. 15 (it will always be the 3rd Thursday and time is 5:30-7). We hope you will give it a try! If you want to investigate further, try the Messy Church website: www.messychurchusa.org



Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)

Barb Balsmeyer is the chairperson for the SPRC. There are 9 additional members. They have the job of making sure that the church has sufficient staff to support/carry out the church's many ministries. And to be available to help with any problems they may have fulfilling their job descriptions.

The most recent visible thing that they do can be seen in the Staff Appreciation event. Other non-visible responsibilities are maintaining and updating policies and conducting employee evaluations.

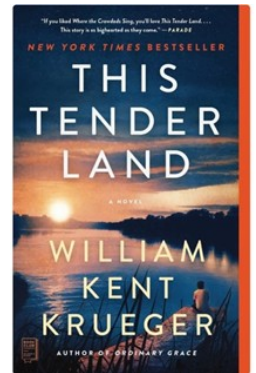
Summer Book Club – Let's read together!

July Book Pick:

This Tender Land by William Kent Krueger

I have loved talking books with you this summer! Several of you have been popping into my office, sharing with me what you are reading, and as a result – my TBR (To-Be-Read) list is growing and growing. I love talking books! And I am so excited about our book for July!

I read *This Tender Land* when it first came out in 2019. It is my favorite genre (literary fiction) and it features my favorite theme (coming-of-age stories). As I was coming to the end of this book, I was torn between wanting to speed up my pace to find out what happened and wanting to slow down to make the story last longer. I cried when it was over. And while the next day I usually pick up a new book to begin, I couldn't do this when I finished *This Tender Land*. I just had to let it settle. I was also grateful that I had this liturgy I found in *Every Moment Holy* entitled, *Lament upon the Finishing of a Beloved Book*.



Here is the official book blurb:

The acclaimed author of Ordinary Grace crafts a powerful novel about an orphan's life-changing adventure traveling down America's great rivers during the Great Depression, seeking both a place to call home and a sense of purpose in a world sinking into despair.

"Ask me, God's right here. In the dirt, the rain, the sky, the trees, the apples, the stars in the cottonwoods. In you and me, too. It's all connected, and it's all God. Sure this is hard work, but it's good work because it's a part of what connects us to this land. This beautiful, tender land."

1932: Located on the banks of the Gilead River in Minnesota, Lincoln School is home to hundreds of Native American boys and girls who have been separated from their families. The only two white boys in the school are orphan brothers Odie and Albert, who, under the watchful eyes of the cruel superintendent Mrs. Brickman, are often in trouble for misdeeds both real and imagined. The two boys' best friend is Mose, a mute Native American who is also the strongest kid in school. And they find another ally in Cora Frost, a widowed teacher who is raising her little girl, Emmy, by herself.

When tragedy strikes down Mrs. Frost, it's the catalyst for a series of events that will send Odie, Albert, and Mose to rescue Emmy and flee down the river in a canoe, heading for the mighty Mississippi, leaving a dead body in their wake. Soon, they are wanted by the law, and they know that Mrs. Brickman will stop at nothing to track them down for dark reasons of her own. Over the course of this unforgettable summer, Odie, Albert, Mose, and Emmy carefully make their way through the small river towns and big cities filled with people who are by turns desperate and generous, cruel and kind. As they search for a place to belong, these four remarkable children will lose their innocence but gain the strength to survive in the face of terrible loss.

With his signature "pitch-perfect, wonderfully evocative" (Dennis Lehane, New York Times best-selling author) prose, William Kent Krueger's This Tender Land shows how the magnificent American landscape connects us all, haunts our dreams, and makes us whole.

I can't wait to discuss this book with you. Don't wait too long to start reading – this book is 400+ pages long. Our book club will meet on Tuesday, July 28th at 2:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. You pick whatever time works best for you! Happy reading!

Pastor Kim <><

Church Family,
Thank you for
an amazing
staff
appreciation
celebration!

Thanks!
Pam

With love
& thanks!
Susan

We feel
blessed
and loved!
Mary Ellen

Thank you
so much
Betsy

Thank you
so much ♡
Daniel C.

Jen

Wow! What an
amazing celebration!
I am so grateful
for you!
Peace,
Pastor Jim

July 2026

Birthdays

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Reminder: Pastor Kim on vacation July 6—July 19 August Reminders: 5 NO Choir 7 First Friday Concert 9 Blessing of the Backpacks 19 NO Choir	Early Aug. Birthdays: Imogene Orts 2nd Debbie Hazelbaker 4th Karen Cooper 5th		1 3 & 7:00 Choir 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study	2 10 Safe Sanctuary	3 12:00 First Friday Concert	4 
5 COMMUNION 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Healing Service	6 8:00 Breakfast Club	7 10 Staff Mtg 2:00 Pantry	8 NO Choir 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study	9	10 9:00 Hope Circle @ Bob Evans	11
12 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	13 8:00 Breakfast Club	14 10:00 Staff Mtg 1:00 SPMC 2:00 Pantry	15 3 & 7:00 Choir 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study	16	17 AMBASSADOR ARTICLES DUE	18
19 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	20 8:00 Breakfast Club	21 10:00 Staff Mtg 1:00 CMC 2:00 Pantry 5:30 Finance 6:00 Admin Council 4:30—5:30	22 NO Choir 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study MESSY CHURCH	23 TRAINING	24	25
26 9:00 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	27 8:00 Breakfast Club	28 10:00 Staff Mtg 2:00 Pantry 6:30 Trustees 2 & 7 Book Club	29 3 & 7:00 Choir 6:00 Hispanic Bible Study	30 9:30 Worship Team	31	

- Mike Snyder 01
- Rev. Kim Armentrout 02
- Debbie Dornon 02
- Gene Goecke 04
- Dan Hausman 06
- Debbie Ellis 08
- Nancy Heberling 13
- Dolly Dixon-Gordon 14
- Nortence Church 15
- Paulette McCandless 15
- Barb Balsmeyer 16
- Chris Buchert 26
- Ron Spaulding 26
- Karon Church-Davis 27
- Sheila Crowe 27

Happy Birthdays!



2026 First Friday Concert & Artist Series

July 3, 2026

My Brother's Keeper

The boys are BACK! One of our most popular groups in the long history of First Fridays returns once again! Get your 4th of July holiday off to a great start with this group that has so much energy you'll think you just saw a fireworks display!

First UMC - Middletown

@noon

Free Admission