



*Church of
the Cross*

CHURCH OF THE CROSS
NEWSLETTER
DECEMBER 2025
JANUARY 2026

CROSSWINDS

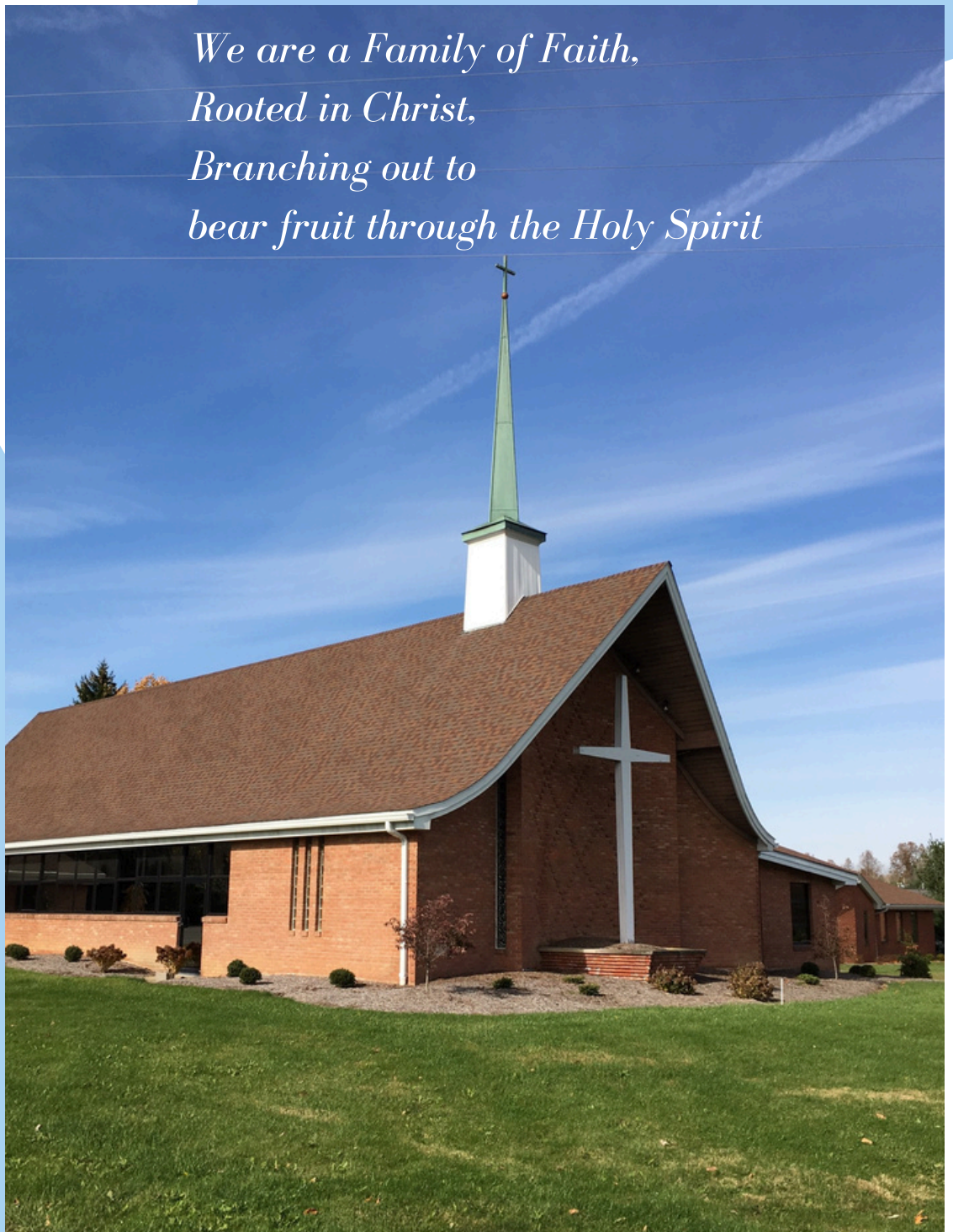
*We are a Family of Faith,
Rooted in Christ,
Branching out to
bear fruit through the Holy Spirit*

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from the desk of
PASTOR JAMES



Dear Church of the Cross,

As we enter December, we continue our exploration of how we can understand our humanity within the framework of five concepts of health: Physical, Volitional, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual. As human beings we experience all five of these, and we are all strong in some and weak in others. While we break them down to help us understand and work on them individually, we must always remember that they are connected in us and one will always affect the others. In the month of December, we will look at Spiritual health.

Spiritual health is the one we as the church focus on and are most aware of a lot of the time. However, even in the church, it tends to be the most forgotten or overlooked. There are multiple reasons why spiritual health is overlooked, but there are two reasons I wish to focus on. The first is the church (general over centuries) has tried to limit God's connection with us. The second, we as humans tend to value production over connection, especially connection with God. These are two big ideas that could use their own articles, but I will try to cover them briefly.

One primary obstacle that gets in the way of our spiritual health is, as the "Church," historically, we have made a habit of deciding which ways to connect with God are correct and incorrect. "The Church" tended to say you had to kneel three times a day, say this certain prayer out loud, then be in silence for 3 minutes. Only certain music was considered holy, and nature was pagan. The truth is, as we explore scripture, we realize that that is a human limitation. Our God created the heavens and the earth, God created all of nature.

If being in nature, taking a hike, praying in the forest helps you connect with God that is good. God inspires all sorts of music. We can feel the Holy Spirit moving in organs and piano, we can feel the Spirit moving in guitar and violin. Some people connect with Jesus better when they sing one or two verses on repeat like the monks of old would chant growing closer spiritually. Some connect better when they sing hymns with multiple verses that call them to think and reflect. God has created so many ways for us as humans to connect with the Lord, and we as humans have created so many barriers for ourselves and others.

The other obstacle that gets in our way of spiritual health is we, as humans, tend to prioritize production over connection, especially connection with God. What I mean by this is where we place our value. How do we value others? First, we tend to place our own personal value in how much we can produce. This is how well we do at work, how much we can get done, how much money we can make, or how "successful" we are. Second, we tend to judge/value others by these standards of their production. However, when we read scripture, we see that Jesus calls us to value our neighbor, to value others, not by their production and what they can do, but by who they are. Jesus calls us to love them because they are human beings who are inherently worthy of being loved. We then take these ideas and apply them to God and since we don't normally "see" or "realize" God's production in our lives or our production to God, we don't value our relationship with God.

Christmas is a busy season, so I ask us, can we choose one of these two aspects to pray on this month? How do you connect with God? Or how do you value relationships? Which one are you called to work on this month? How can you work on it this month? How can you grow your spiritual health this Christmas? As we are called to celebrate the birth of our Savior, how can we grow closer to Christ?

from the desk of
PASTOR AIMEE



One of the things I love about my morning drive to church, is that it gives me time to listen to the radio and drink a cup of coffee (2 of my favorite things!). I always listen to Air1 in my car and in the morning the D.J.s (Dan and Michelle) are great! They are funny and to be honest, they are so “real.” They are a married couple so for me they are relatable and they are always laughing with each other...which is contagious! So, the other morning on the way to church they were talking about the first impression that Dan made on his future in laws. He shared that while meeting them for breakfast in downtown Chicago he happened to find an AMAZING parking spot right across from the restaurant where they were eating. To give you a bit of back story, Dan was not from Chicago, not familiar with the area, and not at all clear on how parking in downtown Chicago worked. He parked his car and had a nice breakfast with Michelle’s folks. All went perfectly UNTIL they all came out of the restaurant and Dan could not find his car. He knew where he parked it but it was clearly not there. His to-be-in-laws pointed out to him, that he had parked, unwittingly, in a tow zone and his car had been taken to the impound lot. So, they all walked together to the impound lot where, sure enough, Dan’s car had been towed to. So much for a shining first impression!!! But what a memorable mark he made!

I laughed so hard listening to Dan’s story because we have likely all been there! We have all wanted to make a great impression on someone and missed the mark! Maybe we fell off a chair during a game with the youth group we were meeting for the first time (yes...it happened to me...it was hilarious...and no they never let me forget it). Perhaps you got pulled over for speeding in front of your girlfriend’s church on the first Sunday she was “introducing” you to her church family (yes...that happened to Scott on the first Sunday he came to church at SUMC...and no I never let him forget it...lol).

Whatever your story, we all have one. A time when we wanted so badly to make an incredibly good impression and we blew it. What people remember about first meeting us may not be that we are well-spoken or intellectual ... it may instead be the look on our face when we ended up on the floor. But what is more important than that first impression is what happens next...our recovery!

I was thinking about Mary’s reaction to the angel Gabriel when he came to tell her God had chosen her to be the mother of the Savior. At first, she was afraid (why else would he have said “fear not!”) and maybe Gabriel thought...” why would God pick this scared young girl to be the Messiah’s mom? Why wouldn’t God pick a warrior woman that was fearless and older and wiser?” But let’s look at what Mary did next to recover...after a moment of fear and doubt and questions, she gave herself totally to the will of God and completely surrendered to letting God use her however He saw fit. What a comeback!

And what about Peter’s first shot at being the leader of the disciples after Jesus was crucified. I would not call locking yourself behind closed doors and hiding away great characteristics of the new head of Christ’s church! But it is what comes after that shows Peter’s real moxy ... when he preached the truth of who Jesus was to a crowd and over 3,000 people believed in Jesus that day...now that is something to put on your resume!

And don’t forget Saul...he was chasing down God’s people, throwing them in jail and having them killed for following Jesus...and yet after encountering the risen Jesus, he became a great Christian apostle and the author of most of the letters in the New Testament.

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*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Psalm 150:6*

The book of Psalms concludes with a challenge and command for us to praise the Lord. As 2025 draws to an end, the worship committee hopes that you have been led to worship and praise the Lord each Sunday morning through His Word and music.

2025 was a year of transition. We were excited to welcome Pastor Aimee and we quickly adapted to individual ways of worship. We hosted 9 Ohio Light Opera musicians, several guest ministers and both a high school and college musician. We are grateful for all those who shared their talents with us.

A smooth Sunday morning requires many “behind the scenes” servers. We enjoyed seeing several “new” faces as liturgists and appreciate Cindy Mullet who organizes that ministry. Debbie Morrow faithfully prepared communion and Shelly Spade provided the altar’s seasonal visuals. Thanks too to Connie Shallenberger assisting me with accompaniment, Tom, Beth and Ron working the knobs and buttons in the back, Charline for creating Pro presenter slides and transitioning us to a trifold bulletin (saving trees! lol), Pastor James’ expertise in all things techy, and Lauren and Cindy’s vocals.

Five COTC bell ringers with 7 ringers from other churches are busy preparing for the upcoming Christmas concert. Don’t forget to mark your calendar for Saturday, December 13 at 1:30. Ringing and singing will fill the Lincoln Way Vineyards and people will be bustling to bid on over 40 silent auction baskets! All donations will benefit The Caring Closet and the West View Benevolent Fund Foundation.

Janet Borton, Director of Music

It is such a good thing that God does not judge us solely on the first impressions we make. He looks past our flaws and failures and sees His beloved children...full of potential, love and capable of courageous acts of faith. He breathes His life and His Spirit into us and leads us down paths we never could have dreamed of for ourselves...and that same Spirit changes us into bearers of hope, love, and faith that He can use to grow His kingdom.

Dan and Michelle finished up their story and said that Michelle’s parents just adore Dan. They got married and have children and a great career together. They are building a life together that her parents are proud of. It is a really good thing that they did not go off of their first impression of Dan, or they would have missed out on a wonderful son-in-law. It is an even better thing that God doesn’t give up on us ... even after our millionth mess up! Now the trick, is to not give up on yourself...God has some amazing chapters left to write in your life! May you enjoy living out every word He writes of your story.

Bonnie Circle

Bonnie Circle is a Bible study for ladies who meet on Thursday mornings from 9:30-11:00 here at the Church of the Cross.

Our goal is to explore and study how we can, as women, grow closer to the Lord by interacting with each other and offering support when needed. Prayer time is also a very important instrument for uplifting those in need for healing, encouragement, and strength. Our current study is *Extraordinary: The Life You Are Meant to Live* by John Beveré. This group currently numbers about 14 ladies and is represented by several other local churches. ALL ARE WELCOME!

Prayer Box



Recently the Covenant Team met and discussed the church's ministries. We discussed the needs of the congregation and the need for prayer. We all have a need for prayer- medical problems, financial needs, family, friend or neighbor situations. When we have this in our lives, it comes with various intensity and sometimes needs immediate help. Others will take a little longer.

All are in need of prayer. Sometimes we wonder if God is listening. Sometimes we ask for the same thing over and over again. The Bible has an answer for us. In Philippians 4: 4-7 it says:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We have started a program with your prayers at the heart. So, do you ever wonder if God is listening? or if He is busy and will catch it later? Now we would like to present a way for you to feel confident that your prayer has been given to God. There is a Prayer Box at the back of the sanctuary with prayer forms next to the box. Fill one out. You can sign your name if you wish. But it is not necessary. The prayers will not be read. Place the prayer in the Prayer Box. Now rejoice, because your prayer is in God's hands and will be prayed for each Sunday.

As Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, take anxious thoughts and problems and give them to God in the form of a prayer. Know that God has it and He will answer it. Then praise God, be at rest, for He is answering your prayer.

For those of you who are at home, do you have need for prayer for whatever you're anxious about? Do you live within 25 miles of the church? Come to church! Or, call the church and the prayer box will be brought to you. Then you can give your prayer to God and be at rest. Certainly, if you send it to the church, it will be placed in the prayer box.

If you're not praying, you should be! God is waiting. If you pray for others, be mindful of them for God's mercy is great.

2025 One Board Report

Income is meeting expenses. Thank you for your continued generosity.

The One Board is planning to meet in January with a financial investment advisor from the Conference to discuss investment opportunities.

Ron Borton, One Board Chair

Christmas Eve Service December 24, 7 PM



Meetings

Meetings:

Covenant: December 2
Covenant: January 6
Trustees: January 13
One Board: January 20



Food, Fun & Fellowship:

December 6th and 20th
January 3rd and 17th

2025 Covenant Team Report

Covenant is the formal church outreach committee at the church. Many church members donate time and talents to other organizations locally and globally. The church formally supports Salvation Army-Wooster, Pregnancy Care Center, People to People Ministries, Wayne County Chaplains, Christian Children's Home of Ohio, Central American Medical Outreach, a Christian representative in a former Soviet Republic, and United Methodist World Service.

Food, Fun & Fellowship started 7+ years ago. Twice a month church members and other friends prepare tasty and nutritious meals for the benefit of home bound church members and other community members. We make, on average, 30 meals on the 1st and 3rd Saturday mornings. A bonus joy of the program is the fellowship with the recipients at delivery time ! Sue Parris is the best contact person.

Hygiene Ministry - Reaching out beyond our doors is the goal of this ministry currently to the attendees of the breakfast at Trinity UCC - Wooster. We started in the Fall 2024 with offerings of essential hygiene items for the male and female guests. Through conversations with these guests, we have learned of needed items that we have added to our offerings. Being ever adaptive, our initially named program has changed from Hygiene for the Homeless to the Hygiene Ministry because many of the breakfast attendees do have a roof over their heads but are very financially challenged. Between 20 - 30 attendees take advantage of our monthly outreach. Larry Ouwerkerk and Leslie Garst are contacts for this needed outreach. Debbie Huttie is the contact for the inventory needs / additions.

Liberty Preparatory School - In May 2024, the church initiated outreach support for the Baccalaureate service and Graduation ceremony of this public charter alternative school for Wayne County students in grades 9 - 12. The school is located on the property of our sister church - Smithville United Methodist Church. We have expanded our support in 2025 by providing a full breakfast on the first day of classes for students and staff. We plan another breakfast for a welcome back in January 2026 and plan to provide end of year support as we have the last two years. We are continuing to seek out other ways to support the success of the students. (about 60 in the 25 - 26 school year.) FYI in May 2025 ALL 18 seniors graduated with high school diplomas - Special Students, Special Teachers and Special Administration !!

Jack Carroll, Covenant Team Chair

Report from One Board Member

We have gone through big changes this year and I believe we have embraced the changes. We welcomed Pastor Aimee with open hearts. Having Pastor James and Pastor Aimee sharing the leadership role is good for our church. They each bring their own strengths and passions and I think we, as a congregation benefit. Pastor Tom as part of the team brings its own special support. Our heart is for mission- we may be small, but we are strong together.

Ginna Phillips
One Board Member

sermon CORNER

December 7 (Pastor Aimee)

Second Sunday of Advent

"To Love like Christ"

Isaiah 11:1-10 and 1 John 3:11-24

December 14 (Pastor James)

Third Sunday of Advent

"Joyful, Joyful"

Isiah 35:1-10 and Isaiah 40:25-31

December 21 (Pastor James)

Fourth Sunday of Advent

"Peace on Earth"

Isaiah 42:1-9 and Isaiah 9:6-7

December 24 (Pastor James)

Christmas Eve



7:00 PM Service

"The Birth of Our Savior"

Luke 2:1-14 and Isaiah 9:2-7

December 28 (Pastor James)

"What would it mean to be the year of our Lord?"

Isaiah 61:1-6, 7-11

January 4 (Pastor James)

"Epiphany!"

Matthew 2:1-12 and John 1:1-9

January 11

Guest Preacher: Rev. Erin Guzman

January 18 (Pastor Aimee)

"Is it time to clean house?"

John 2:13-25 and Daniel 9:20-27

January 25 (Pastor Aimee)

"How are we reborn?"

John 3:1-21 and Deut. 6:4-15

2025 Trustee Report

This past year has been one where general maintenance was done in both the church and the parsonage. No serious problems have been discovered.

Church

The windows in the sanctuary were washed. Lights in the sanctuary, office and the hallway between the fellowship hall and the church were replaced as needed. Several pot holes were filled in the parking lot. There was a work day in July where 18 yards of mulch was spread around the church. If you will recall we installed a new boiler system to heat the church. This has done a great job this past year. All state and county inspections were made without any serious problems uncovered.

The church was used by others this year. In addition to use for elections twice, there were two family gatherings, a baby shower and a graduation party. The County Sewing Guild used the church twice and the Canine Therapy Dogs group have used the fellowship hall. Our streaming mission is very important to our shut-ins and others. Last year we upgraded the computer and live-stream cameras. This year we upgraded the sound system in the sanctuary.

Parsonage

The house on Oak Hill Street was power-washed last Spring and the deck was stained. The building inspection for Conference was completed. A large tree fell at the back of the property. It was cut up and the wood was stacked along the back fence. Minor repairs were made inside the house.

Steve Dietrich has joined the Trustees and was welcomed to the team.

Because everything is going well, the Trustees now meet every other month. PTL

Larry Ouwerkerk, Trustee Chair

2025 SPRC Report

2025 has been a busy year for Church of the Cross, with several positive changes occurring. Early in the year the One Board was presented with several options to vote on. The church attendance was down and we needed to decide if we wanted to stay in our church until we could not financially support it any more, merge with another church, or sell our church and meet together somewhere else. The One Board voted to stay in our church. We had a church-wide meeting with the District Superintendent, Kara Schultz, in March. She explained to us that Smithville, Apple Creek and Moreland UMC's also had low attendance. She proposed that all four churches work together and share two ministers. This arrangement would benefit all four churches financially. The pastor that currently served Apple Creek and Moreland was being reassigned. Pastor James would be staying and Rev. Kara wanted us to accept Pastor Aimee as our second minister. Pastor Aimee, who had been at Smithville UMC in the past had also worked with Pastor James. It was decided that this was the best way to move forward.

In April, Pastor James asked the One Board to form a transition team, consisting of three members of each church. The team's purpose would be to share ideas how the churches could do things together. Transition team COTC representatives are Ginna Phillips, Jack Carroll, and Linda Dye. The team met in April, May, June, August and October.

June saw a lot of celebrations as we had a surprise birthday celebration for Sue Parris and also enjoyed honoring Pastor James on his ordination. All four churches celebrated with a carry-in meal that our church hosted.

July welcomed Pastor Aimee Hare and the welcome committee consisting of Ginna Phillips, Deb Carroll and Linda Dye organized a carry-in and "Get to Know You" game to celebrate with all four churches. We hope Pastor Aimee, her husband, Scott and daughter, Grace know how happy we are to have them with us.

In October, Pastor James and Pastor Aimee received a "Survival Kit" for Pastor Appreciation month. The kits must be working because they are still preaching!

On a more serious note, Randy and I feel like the transition to four churches and two ministers has gone very well. We have not received any complaints. Remember, we are here to address any concern you have.

As we head into the end of the year, it is time to collect money to purchase Christmas gifts for the staff. Please see Randy or myself if you would like to donate.

2025 has been a busy year. We can't wait to see what 2026 brings.

Happy Holidays,
Randy and Linda Dye, SPRC Co-Chairs

2025 Financial Report

2025 has been a steady year financially for Church of the Cross. We are only slightly unfavorable year to date, but we have a healthy General Fund and anticipate being favorable by year end. Thank you for being mindful of expenses this year.

Shelly Spade, Finance Chair

Thanksgiving at Liberty Prep

It is a joy to let you know of the good work we were blessed to do!

In November, Church of the Cross UMC and Smithville UMC worked together to purchase, prepare, cook, and serve a hot Thanksgiving Meal for Students of Liberty Preparatory High school and their families. Through your donations, hard work, and love we were able to bless over 40 people. I, Pastor James was able to check in With Liberty Prep on Tuesday. What food was not eaten at the meal on Monday, was boxed up and taken home. Most of the students were asking if they could take a box home for their brother, sister, mother, father, family member, loved one at home!

Liberty Preparatory High School is a drop out prevention high school. Many students that attend are facing hardships we have only heard about. We received an outpouring of thanks and gratitude from them for this blessing. We cannot tell you in words the feeling of the Holy Spirit moving in this mission. We hope to continue to bless so many as we continue in the years forward.

As we look at making disciples of Jesus Christ, we know we do so in relationship. We continue to strengthen that relationship with Liberty Prep and start new relationships with students as new students enter. We have also had the blessing of showing the love of God in our work. While it may not seem like it, these are the seeds we plant so that students may know they are loved, and perhaps one day, believe in God who loves them. We are working to make the world just a little closer to the kingdom of heaven on earth.

This could not have been done without all of you. We want to thank all of those who were there to help with the precooking Friday afternoon! We want to thank all of those who were there and helped cook, set up, serve, and greet the students Monday! We want to thank all of you who helped support this mission through donations and tithing! We could not do this without you!

Thank You and Blessings,
Pastor Aimee and Pastor James

Hygiene Ministry

We wanted to take this opportunity to thank each and every person that has contributed, in any way, to the Hygiene ministry. The impact that you are making on the lives of others is more significant than you can imagine. As our volunteers go monthly to offer the hygiene items, they are showing the love of Jesus to more and more people! The response to this ministry by those who have been served has been one of gratitude. So, we thank each of you for your donations, your prayers, and your support of this incredible ministry.

Pastor Aimee and Pastor James

Preaching Schedule for
Pastor Aimee and Pastor James
November 30, 2025- February 18, 2026

November 30 - December 7
Pastor Aimee- SUMC/COTC
Pastor James- AC/Moreland

December 14 - January 11
Pastor Aimee- AC/Moreland
Pastor James- SUMC/COTC

January 18- February 18
Pastor Aimee- SUMC/ COTC
Pastor James- AC/Moreland



CAMO Benefit Luncheon

January 18, 2026 COTC Fellowship Hall
Proceeds benefit Cindy Mullet's mission trip to Honduras and programs that serve the needs of the Hondurans.

Complete lunch will be offered!

Donations will be accepted

Ministries at Liberty Preparatory High School

Back to School Breakfast- Monday, January 5

Baccalaureate - Thursday, May 21

Graduation - Thursday, May 28



December

- 1 Dan Fagert
- 3 Laura Ouwerkerk
- 5 Debbie Huttie
- 7 Shelly Spade
- 9 Beverly Theil
- 10 Nancy Bechtel
- 12 Joyce Gessel
- 14 Jann Drennen
- 15 Dawn Fagert
- 17 Bob Schubert
- 27 Elaine Baisden

January

- 8 Cindy Mullet
- 21 Tammy Howman
- 26 Michael Law
- 27 Nancy Miler
- 30 George Mullet

Missions

International

TMS Global
CAMO

Local

People to People
Salvation Army
CCHO
Pregnancy Care Center
Wayne United Chaplains



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Charline Engle, Administrative Assistant

Janet Borton, Director of Music/ Organist

Rev. Tom Shaw, Shut-in Minister

Teresa Arnold, Custodian

