



The Circuit Rider

The newsletter of First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, Ohio

February/March 2026

Loving God and Loving People, Making Disciples of Christ for the Transformation of the World

Experiencing Lent

The journey from Lent to Easter brings many opportunities to more fully engage our faith and to more fully connect our daily living to God as we prepare for the glorious time of the Resurrection.



Lenten Sermon Series

Breaking Open: Breakthrough Moments with God

February 22	Breaking Open Our Desires
March 1	Breaking Open Our Questions
March 8	Breaking Open Our Thirst
March 15	Breaking Open Our Vision
March 22	Breaking Open Our Hope
March 29	Breaking Open Our Expectations
April 2	Breaking Open Our Hearts
April 3	Breaking Open Our Silence
April 5	Breaking Open the Tomb



LENT BEGINS February 18

Noon Imposition of ashes in the Chapel
7:00 p.m. Worship service with imposition of ashes.

PALM SUNDAY March 29 9:00 and 10:30 a.m.



Worship services with the waving of palms, breaking our silence and declaring that the Messiah has arrived

MAUNDY THURSDAY April 2 7:00 p.m.



Worship service with Communion remembering the Last Supper and the breaking of bread

GOOD FRIDAY April 3 7:00 p.m.



Worship service, pondering the sadness of our Lord's broken body on the cross

EASTER SUNDAY April 5 9:00 and 10:30 a.m.



Worship services celebrating breaking open the tomb and a fulfillment of the prophecy of eternal life



Friends,

As we step into a new season together, I want to pause and give thanks for all that we have shared through **Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany**. These past months were rich with **beautiful worship**, joyful fellowship at **Swing Into Christmas**, meaningful evangelism through our **Walk-Through Nativity**, and faithful service to our neighbors through **Short East Community Kitchen** and the **Angel Tree gifts with Community Action**. Each moment reflected the love of Christ alive among us.

As we prepare ourselves for a new year in ministry, we hear the voice of the prophet Micah echoing through the ages to ask us, *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8, NRSV). In the new year, we will continue to unify ourselves with others in ministry and mission to love our neighbors, recognizing that every human being is our neighbor, and to remember in humility that we are all sinners standing in the need of God’s grace.

Thank you for the many ways you have given of **your time, your talent and your resources**. Through your faithfulness, we served our neighbors well, and we stewarded wisely to finish the fiscal year **ahead**, positioning us strongly for ministry and outreach to our community and beyond in 2026. That is something to celebrate! Your year-end giving statements have been emailed to you. If you would like a hard copy of your statement, please contact Michael Belt, our Financial Secretary.

In a few short weeks, we will be invited into the reflective and hope-filled season of **Lent**, beginning with **Ash Wednesday on February 18**. This year’s Lenten worship series, **Breaking Open: Breakthrough Moments with God**, will guide us as we explore how God meets us in honesty, questions, thirst, new vision, and hope.

I invite you to deepen your Lenten journey by visiting the **Weekly Prayer Stations** in the Chapel of our main campus, and by joining us for **Soup and Study** on 2/25, 3/4, 3/11, 3/18, and 3/25 from 5:30–7:00 p.m.—a time for simple food, thoughtful conversation, and shared growth.

Thank you for being a community marked by worship, service, generosity, and grace. Wherever you find yourself on your faith journey, there is a place for you here. I look forward to walking this Lenten journey together. God loves you, and so do I.

With gratitude and hope,



TIME CHANGE

Daylight Saving Time begins on Sunday, March 8.

Move your clocks forward one hour so you don’t miss out on Sunday morning worship.

Connect with us online at love-first.org



Scout Sunday

We'll welcome members and leaders of our Scout Troop 165 to our morning worship times on **February 8th**. Our church has a long history of partnering with Scouting in our area, providing resources for young people to develop valuable life skills.

OneBoard

Leadership Model

The new church leadership board (One Board) held a retreat on Saturday, January 10, to begin the new year. The One Board consists of Sam Benham, Chris Burris, Ron Burris, Mike Shafer, Steve Barnett, Tyler Clendenin, Mike Shaner, Cindy Wilkins, Joe Moody, Alicia

Niceswanger, Judy Norris, and Board Chair, Mike Lieber.

The Board spent a great deal of time getting to know one another along with receiving updates on the current status of the church including personnel and facility issues. The Board elected Mike Lieber to serve as Chair of the Trustees and began the process of transitioning the Trustees to a "facilities team ministry." In addition, the Board authorized the staff to work with the District in getting an appraisal done on the Crossroad facilities.

The One Board was commissioned at both services on Sunday, January 25.

The One Board meetings are open to any church member. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 17 at 6:30 p.m. in Room 22. The Board will meet on the third Tuesday of each month.

WELCOME TO THE TRUSTEES' CORNER...

It has been a very busy and productive season for the Trustees, with several important projects completed in recent months. Repairs to the parsonage front porch are now finished, along with repairs and fresh paint in areas of the sanctuary. Elevator maintenance is currently underway, and we are gathering quotes for new LED lighting in the Crossroads Main Room. Work on the HVAC system at the main church building also continues.

The funds used for these repairs and ongoing upkeep come largely from Endowment Fund income and designated gifts given specifically for the care of our church facilities. We are grateful for this faithful stewardship.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped make the Walk-Through Nativity at Crossroads such a meaningful experience this year.

The Trustees as a stand-alone committee held their final official meeting on Thursday, December 18, 2025, as our church has transitioned to a One Board Model. We are deeply appreciative of the support, dedication, and cooperation of the church staff and congregation throughout 2025!

The Trustees subcommittees are being transformed into the Facility Teams ministry.



Caring Ministries

Contact: Judy Hug, CLM judyhug@love-first.org or 740-653-3330, ext. 1002



“The American Red Cross is teetering on a post-holiday blood shortage this winter that could lead to a disruption in lifesaving care, according to the executive director of the Red Cross of the Ohio River Valley.”
Excerpt from *The Intelligencer.Wheeling (WVa) News-Register 01/07/2026*

January was National Blood Donor Month. All types are needed but the most critical need is Type O blood. During the winter, a combination of extreme weather, holiday schedules, illnesses and a long-term decline in donors (down 40% in 20 years) strains the national blood supply. Shortages force doctors to make difficult choices about postponing transfusions for patients needing treatment for anemia, cancer or trauma.

Donors can schedule online at www.redcrossblood.org or through the Red Cross Blood app or by contacting Judy Hug at the church. Interested in volunteering? Contact Judy.

Dates for 2026 Bloodmobiles sponsored by our church – Mondays, noon-6 p.m. at the Crossroads Ministry Center, 2095 W. Fair Avenue:

March 16

May 11

July 13

September 14

November 9

Care Buddies and Visitation

One of the ways in which we can show God’s love for others is to meet them where they are – literally. Going outside the walls of our lovely church exposes us to the beauty and blessings of connection within our church family and community. There are many opportunities for individuals, couples, or families to become as involved as they choose.

Caring Ministries reconnects members no longer able to physically attend church with their beloved church family, letting them know they have not been forgotten and that their wisdom and stories hold valuable lessons. In addition, our worship services and visitations to local care facilities extends God’s light beyond our membership.

Contact Judy Hug regarding any of the opportunities listed below, or if you have had a nudge from God to reach out in a different way:

- ♥ Cards and Calls – monthly contact with selected person(s) through mail and/or phone
- ♥ Visits/Care Buddies – monthly contact with selected person(s) in a local care facility for social (reading, conversation) or spiritual (serve Holy Communion, deliver *Upper Room* devotionals) connection
- ♥ Hospital Visitations – as needed to visit persons hospitalized locally; training provided
- ♥ Sweet Treats – bake treats, provide fruit cups to be delivered 2nd Saturday monthly to persons unable to physically attend services any longer
- ♥ Sunday Transport Providers – pick up/return individuals who no longer drive to and from church on Sunday mornings; can be group pick up or personal, one-on-one from your neighborhood

Worship and Lenten Study at The Springs at Wyandot Trail

Celebrating the completion of our first year of monthly worship at The Springs, we look forward to continuing and expanding this ministry. In addition to some of our members that reside at The Springs or are receiving therapies there, our worship group has grown with the inclusion of residents/family in our worship which includes Holy Communion.

We provide worship each month on the second Sunday, 1:00 – 1:30 p.m., with a variety of worship leaders and practices. Leaders as well as helpers are needed as we continue to create a relational community grounded in God's love and grace. Upcoming events include:

Sunday, Feb. 8	Worship with Holy Communion, 1-1:30 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 18	Session 1 of Lenten Study* followed by Imposition of Ashes, 1-2 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 25 – April 1	The remaining sessions of Lenten Study, 1-1:45 p.m.
Sunday, March 8	Worship with Holy Communion, 1-1:30 p.m.

The Lenten Study will be centered around *The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life* by Adam Hamilton – no book, no cost involved; ALL are welcome!



PRAYER MINISTRY

Did you know that this church, its members, our community, our nation, and our world are surrounded in prayer? Prayer is an essential spiritual practice for Christians, whether from the pulpit, in unison during worship, offered around a family table, or whispered in the outdoors. There are several ways in which you can be involved:

- We have almost 100 Prayer Partners in our congregation who receive prayer requests from other members and from those within our community and beyond. Requests are collected from Connect Cards, our website or other contact with a staff person.
- We have a Prayer Table with resources in The Chapel on the second floor, where individuals or families can gather to pray together. The Chapel is also available for people requesting prayer – talk with a staff person if you want someone to pray with you.
- Prayer Walkers individually or in small groups walk through areas of their community choosing to pray for the people and situations of that area. It could involve walking through the aisles in the empty Sanctuary for people that will gather there for worship, or at Crossroads before community events are offered, or within your own neighborhood, workplace or school.

Have an additional idea for prayer ministry? Contact Judy Hug ☺



SWEET TREATS

Whether you're a cookie baker, bagger, or deliverer, we would love to have you join us **February 14 and March 14** at 8:30am in the Fellowship Hall at the church Main Campus.

Caring Ministries Needs Your Help

We can use your help in acquiring some supplies that are needed to facilitate our various caring ministries.

Postage stamps
Quart size Ziploc bags
Blank greeting cards with envelopes
Birthday greeting cards with envelopes
Large print puzzle books
Large print Bibles, gently used

Funeral Care Meals

Following the funeral service of a church member, our church offers a meal to express our ongoing love and care for the family. Donna Waugh has coordinated this ministry for many years, yet it takes many hands to prepare the room, fix the food, serve the meal and clean up after the meal.

Can you spare some time to...

- ...put tablecloths, napkins and centerpieces on the tables?
- ...prepare a vegetable dish, salad, or dessert, maybe one of your family favorites?
- ...arrange food items and drinks for folks to serve themselves?
- ...clear dishes, other items from the table as people finish?
- ...wash dishes with our industrial dishwasher (training provided)?
- ...take the soiled laundry home to wash and return them to the church?

A home-cooked meal served cheerfully amid a time of grief and loss is a great way to share God's love! Come, be a part of this Caring Ministry!

We express our sincere sympathy to the families of those who have lost loved ones:



Jerry Benson

Evelyn Palmer

Edward Figgins

Baptisms

Phyllis Kuhn

Joan Wedge

Ray Earl Rawlins

Parents: Jodi and Tyler Rawlins

Grandparents: Connie and Dale Roush



CONTACTS:

Ann Cherry (740) 215-0563

Jeff Cherry (740) 503-1630

Blessings to you from Short East Community Kitchen!

“Community” is definitely alive at Short East Community Kitchen! Our monetary as well as our food contributions are thriving! Thank you! Our much-needed mission continues right here in Lancaster. As God told Moses, “I will be with you”. We feel God is with us as we lead this valuable ministry.

Donation needs for February and March

FEBRUARY

Small paper plates

Plastic cutlery (forks, spoons, knives)

Canned fruit (mandarin oranges, fruit cocktail, pineapple)

MARCH

Hot Chocolate packets

Pam cooking spray

9" x 13" foil pans

If you have any extra plastic grocery bags laying around, we can always use them. Just add them to the donation bins in the Parlor.

The Afterlife of a Poinsettia

Did you ever wonder what happens to the leftover flowers in the sanctuary after Christmas services are over and we begin to look forward to Lent? For the last several years, all the poinsettias not taken have been composted and placed back into the earth. The plant is separated from its potting soil, broken into small pieces, and then added into a compost pile along with vegetable peelings, eggshells, coffee grounds, and other compostable materials. These items will break down over time to produce a rich soil, full of nutrients to grow other plants. This new soil is often used to sow seeds in the winter for future spring gardens or it can be tilled into your garden to enrich the existing soil.



Spreading Seeds of Hope – A New Garden Ministry

Springtime is coming and a garden project with it. Be a part of helping people through the Jackson Area Ministry (JAM) Green Thumb Garden Project. We will be collecting packets of garden seeds (see list below) during the month of March. The seeds will be going to senior citizens, families on low or fixed income, and persons who have lost their jobs so that they might plant their own gardens or participate in community gardens. Collection baskets will be available in the parlor for seed donations, as well as a list of the types of seeds being requested. Thank you in advance as we serve Christ by serving others. If you have any questions, please contact the church office.



Beets	Lettuce
Broccoli	Melons
Carrots	Peppers
Cauliflower	Radishes
Corn	Spinach/Greens
Cucumbers	Squash/Pumpkins
Green/ Bush Beans	Turnips
Herbs	Corn & Bush Beans in Bulk

FLOWER CHILDREN NEEDED

Are you someone who appreciates a good flower arrangement? Our team of people who take turns putting together our altar flowers each week would love to have you join in. If you have experience, great! If you don't, we'll show you how! Contact Mary Jo Bowen or Clarence McCoy if you're interested in sharing your talents and helping your church with flowers.



TIME TO ORDER EASTER FLOWERS See Page 10 for an Easter flower order form.

♪ Give Choir a Try ♪

As we are about to start the season of Lent and the journey toward Easter, often people choose to give up something for Lent. Here's a suggestion... maybe this year you can consider instead adding something for Lent! More specifically, how about adding yourself to our Chancel Choir for the Lent and Easter time?

You can Give Choir a Try from now until Easter Sunday and add your voice to our worship music throughout this important time in our church life. Choir practices on Thursday evenings, 7:30-8:45 p.m. upstairs in the main building in the Music Room.

If you've been a singer in the past, have considered it before but haven't worked up the gumption, or if you're considering it for the first time, NOW would be a great opportunity to give it a try. You might just find the Holy Spirit has been leading you there and you really enjoy it!

If you have any questions or just want to Give Choir a Try, talk to Clarence McCoy.

~Thank You~

*To All the Funeral Meal Committee,
Thank you so very much for providing the funeral meal for family and friends
following the passing and funeral of my beloved husband, Ed Figgins - he was
always my "Sweetie". What you do is so comforting during this tough time. God bless
you for what you do helping others in their time of sorrow.*

Janice Figgins and children Heidi Tootle and Doug Figgins

Dear FUMC,

*Wow! The care package and birthday wishes card were amazing! The Lord has truly
been working in and through me here at Iowa! But receiving these gifts reminded
me just how faithful my community back home is!*

Love and miss y'all, Peyton Wilson



CIRCLE MEETING DATES

Elizabeth Circle No meeting in February.

March 19 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 22. There will be a speaker. New members are always welcome.

Trinity Circle **February 11** and **March 11** at noon in Room 22 to make Thinking of You and Easter greeting cards for our homebound church members. If interested in making cards, contact Marty Cyrus (740-407-7909).



Resumes at
3:30 p.m.
February 4th
in the Tower
Hall at
Crossroads.

New players are always welcome.
Everyone is encouraged to build their strength and enjoy a fun time of fellowship.

Sunday School Opportunity The **Faith Matters** class meets in Room 22 at 10:15 a.m. each Sunday. On Sunday, January 18, the class began a five-week series on *Unafraid* by Adam Hamilton. This book is about living with courage and hope in uncertain times. All are welcome to join us.

Beginning on February 22, we will begin a four-week series on the book *Forgiveness* by Adam Hamilton, offering clear guidance for believers struggling with the practical application of our biblical imperative to forgive.

Fontanini Nativity

The Fontanini Nativity completed another season at the Crossroads Ministry Center in December. The "Swing into the Season" event successfully kicked things off with an evening of big band music, family crafts, visits with Santa, and delicious cookies! The display welcomed over 300 visitors during its eleven-night run.

The tradition started in 2001 with the purchase of a Christ Child figure which was on display in the church parlor. Over the years, contributions given in honor or memory of loved ones expanded the display. Under the long-term direction of John Coen, it was moved to the Crossroads Ministry Center and grew into the largest indoor Fontanini nativity display east of the Mississippi.

This year, Dave Goslin stepped forward to lead the effort to ensure this special tradition continued. He led a team of twelve people who graciously dedicated several hundred hours to the setup process and also led the team of thirteen volunteers who gave over one hundred combined hours to put the nativity display away. Wes and Laura Osborn helped organize fourteen volunteers who welcomed guests and managed the display. Even when weather closed the main church building, volunteers were able to open the Nativity to serve the community. We offer extra special thanks to our first-time volunteers, those who served multiple nights, and those who dedicated their time on Christmas Eve.

As we put the figures away, we urge you to keep the spirit of Christmas in your hearts until we gather again at the manger next year. Thank you for making this season a success! If you would like to help in the future, please contact the church or Dave Goslin at 740-243-5580.

GOD, HELP US

A Poem by Jane Bontrager

God, please help us to understand
the strife and unrest in this land;
is there hope for your people as
they struggle for a better life?

They deserve to be free of constant strife.
Help us understand that they, just like we,
have a right to democracy and be free.
Our sisters and brothers wait over there
for our help, which is needed to care

My heart breaks for the innocent children
who have been left in the rubble to perish.
Their dear little souls we should cherish.
God, please stop all of the evil ways
of those determined to fight for the rest of their days.

Leaning into Lent – Finding Your Breakthrough

Leaning into Lent involves treating the 40-day season as a deliberate, purposeful journey toward Christian breakthrough, leading to the time of Resurrection joy.

Here are some ideas for finding your breakthrough during Lent:

1. Instead of Deprivation, think of Abundance

- **Purposeful Fasting:** Instead of merely giving something up, fast with a specific intention, such as healing, breaking a bad habit, or gaining freedom from something.
- **Create Space for God:** View Lent as an opportunity to remove distractions (e.g., social media, TV, unhealthy foods) to create space to hear God's voice.

2. Practical Ways to "Lean In"

- **Daily Prayer & Reflection:** Set aside 5-10 minutes daily for Scripture reading and to focus on Jesus's teaching.
- **Targeted Sacrifices:** Choose specific, manageable, and measurable intentions rather than trying to do everything at once.
- **Service:** Give time, money, or resources to those in need, or perform acts of kindness to shift focus outward.
- **Embrace Community:** Engage in communal activities like worship, Christian education, Weekly Prayer Stations, and Soup and Study.

3. Finding Your Breakthrough

- **Identify Your "Cross":** Recognize that the struggles you face can be opportunities for refinement and intimacy with God.
- **Surrender Control:** Use this time to let go of the need to control outcomes and instead trust in God's timing and plan. Believe that by engaging in deep spiritual work, God can bring about profound personal breakthrough as we journey from Lent to Easter.

TIME TO ORDER EASTER FLOWERS



Traditionally we decorate the sanctuary at Easter with flowers that have been ordered by congregation members to celebrate loved ones. It is now time to place those orders for flowers. This year we will offer tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, and lilies. Please complete an order form for EACH flower that you order. If you need additional forms, they will be available in the Parlor.

EASTER FLOWER ORDER FORM – PLEASE PRINT

Use ONE form for EACH flower you order. Payment must accompany your order.

Make checks payable to FUMC Altar Guild and earmark them "Easter Flowers."

Orders are due by **Sunday, March 22.**

CIRCLE one designation: **IN MEMORY OF** or **IN HONOR OF**

Name(s) _____

Given By: _____

Select ONE flower: Daffodil (\$6) Hyacinth (\$6) Tulip (\$6) Lily (\$9)

_____ I will be taking my flower home with me. _____ I will NOT be taking my flower home.

More forms are available in the Parlor.

At Crossroads Ministry Center
2095 W. Fair Ave
February 7 & March 7

MENS Breakfast

8:00 a.m.

Call 740-653-3330 to reserve your spot.

Hooked on Books

Contact
Linda
Godenschwager
or Denise
Bennett

10:00 a.m.
Main Building



love first

SOUP AND STUDY

Sign up in the Parlor. Enjoy some soup and discussion
of the scripture journey through Lent.

Wednesdays at 5:30-7:00 p.m. during Lent
at Crossroads



February 25

March 4

March 11

March 18

March 25



Mark Your Calendars

CR = Crossroads, M = Main Church Building

Weekly Meetings

Mondays: 6:30 p.m. Boys Scouts (CR)
Wednesdays: 9:00 a.m. Fellowship Quilters (CR)
Wednesdays: 3:00 p.m. Chair Volleyball (CR)
Wednesdays: 6:30 p.m. Crossroads Community (CR)

Thursdays: 6:30 p.m. Bell Choir (M)
7:30 p.m. Choir Practice (M)
Fridays: 3:45 p.m. Girls Scouts (M)

Additional Events

FEBRUARY

2 10:00 a.m. Hooked on Books (M)
7 8:00 a.m. Men's Breakfast (CR)-
11 12:00 p.m. Trinity Circle (M)
14 8:30 a.m. Sweet Treats (M)
16 6:30 p.m. Staff-Parish Relations Committee (M)
17 6:30 p.m. One Board (M)
25 5:30 p.m. Soup and Study (CR)

MARCH

2 10:00 a.m. Hooked on Books (M)
4 5:30 p.m. Soup and Study (CR)
7 8:00 a.m. Men's Breakfast (CR)
11 12:00 p.m. Trinity Circle (M)
5:30 p.m. Soup and Study (CR)
14 8:30 a.m. Sweet Treats (M)
16 1:00 p.m. Red Cross Blood Drive (CR)
6:30 p.m. Staff-Parish Relations (M)
17 6:30 p.m. One Board (M)
18 5:30 p.m. Soup and Study (CR)
19 9:30 a.m. Elizabeth Circle (M)
25 5:30 p.m. Soup and Study (CR)

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

(740) 653-3330

Nikki Baker (Pastor) nikkibaker@love-first.org ext. 1001

Clarence McCoy (Worship Arts) clarencemccoy@love-first.org ext. 1004

Judy Hug, CLM (Caring Ministries) judyhug@love-first.org, ext. 1002

Sarah Mason (Business Admin) sarahmason@love-first.org ext. 1005

Michael Belt (Financial Secretary) michaelbelt@love-first.org ext. 1007

Chantel Rutherford (Administrative Assistant) receptionist@love-first.org, ext. 1000

Chip Elder (Maintenance) chipelder@love-first.org

It's easy to follow everything happening at Lancaster First. In addition to our Facebook page, we have an X account and an Instagram account. Keep up to date with our events and resources. Follow us at: Facebook: Lancaster First United Methodist Church;

X: LoveFirstUMC;

Instagram: Lancasterfirstumchurch



Articles for the April/May issue of the
CIRCUIT RIDER are **due by MARCH 13**
to **Clarence McCoy, clarencemccoy@love-first.org.**
Janet Gossell, Editor

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is the bi-monthly newsletter of
First United Methodist Church

163 E. Wheeling St.
Lancaster, OH 43130

Sunday

9:00 a.m. -- Worship Celebration

10:30 a.m. -- Praise Worship

Wednesday

6:30 p.m. -- Crossroads Community
Crossroads Ministry Center
2095 W. Fair Ave.

We welcome you to worship with us and to
experience the joy of having fellowship with
other people who believe in the love of God
and the teachings of Christ.

Pastor Rev. Nikki Baker

Telephone: 740-653-3330

Email: receptionist@love-first.org

Website: www.love-first.org

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