



The Circuit Rider

The newsletter of First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, Ohio

December 2025/January 2026

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

HE IS COMING!

Will You Open the Door?



CALENDAR

Sunday, November 30

9:00 and 10:30 a.m.

Hope Knocks at the Door

Sunday, December 7

9:00 and 10:30 a.m.

Peace Prepares the Way
6:30-8:00 p.m. *Swing into the Season at Crossroads*

Saturday, December 13

5:30 p.m. at the Gazebo

Downtown Christmas Stroll

Sunday, December 14

9:00 and 10:30 a.m.

Joy Found in Welcome

Saturday, December 20

2:00 p.m. *Blue Christmas*

Sunday, December 21

9:00 and 10:30 a.m.

Love Makes a Home

Tuesday, December 23

7:30 p.m. *Christmas Eve-Eve*
The Savior Welcomed

Wednesday, December 24

5:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve
The Savior Welcomed

Sunday, December 28

10:00 a.m.

ONLY ONE SERVICE!



Christmas Eve-Eve, December 23, 7:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve, December 24, 5:30 and 8:00 p.m.

See pages 4-7 for more information about the events during our Advent journey.

Connect with us online at love-first.org



Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room

“While they were there, the time came for Mary to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.” Luke 2:6-7

“Let every heart prepare Him room...”

The season of Advent usually brims with excitement. I think it's the anticipation of something coming and the hope that fills me as I prepare for the arrival. We observe the Advent Season as a time of preparation to celebrate Christ's birth on Christmas. Simultaneously, we are aware that Christ is already here with us.

I am a person who finds new things and change exhilarating, so I find the Advent vibes of anticipation and preparation exciting. But with all the work that comes with preparing, we can lose sight of the signs of God's in-breaking joy available to us in the here and now. So, I invite you to experience the excitement of anticipation, but also, I invite you to practice being present, as well. In the middle of the flurry of activity, intentionally take time to notice the ways that Christ is already with us. Talk about what you see.

This Advent, our *Seeking Shelter* worship series follows the journey of Mary and Joseph as they search for a place where love can be born. They were away from home in a bustling city that seemed to have no room to welcome them in their situation. They knocked and doors remained closed to them. Their story reminds us that hope is an active kind of waiting. Hope is step after faithful step forward, trusting that God's promise will open doors even when welcome seems out of reach.

The Advent journey teaches us that peace requires preparation, and that joy may involve struggle. But the presence of Christ's promise breaking in is enough to sustain us, even before that promise is fulfilled. As we draw near to Christmas, we will be reminded that love is the open door through which God enters our world. Love can make a home even in the humblest of places, because humility is where God chooses to dwell.

On Christmas Eve, we will celebrate God's choice to make a home with us in Christ. And our New Year's invitation will be to welcome Him into our lives daily.

So, come, be present this Advent. Be present in worship, and in community. Be present to the light coming into the world. As we follow Mary and Joseph's journey, together, we will find that God is already making a home in us. *“Let every heart prepare Him room.”*

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! God loves you and so do I!

Pastor Nikki

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

On October 15, we welcomed fifteen new members into our church family. Look for them at church and welcome them into the life of our congregation.



Dave & Jane Beatty



Tyler & Lindsay Scalf
(Harper, Walker)



Tyler & Kylie Clendenin
(Ainslee, Adlee, Armor)



Paul Hoover



Dan & Abby Giannamore
(Will, Hazel)



Betty Lee



Chris & Christine Marr
(Wesley, not pictured: Caroline)



Cindy Muller
(Mia, Bethany, Allyah, John)

Not pictured
Jeremy & Martha Buckley
Bill Cruse
Kyle Fuller

Come, Walk with Me

Grab your hat and take a short walk with me;
there's something beautiful I want you to see:
God's universe, colored red, yellow and brown,
a beautiful place in Lancaster, my hometown.

We'll climb up Mount Pleasant for a better view
of God's universe, he painted with fall, for you.
On top of the mountain, we'll view our town,
painted red, yellow, and many shades of brown.

Climbing back down, look for deer in Rising Park,
one of my favorite places to visit until it is dark.
Thank you for taking a short walk with me today,
Filling my heart with happiness in a special way.

*A poem by Katherine Bontrager, one of our
members and a published author*

Advent Opportunities



Advent Arrives

The Advent season begins on Sunday, November 30th. Advent is a season of waiting, of longing, and of preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ. In the weeks leading to Christmas, we are invited to step into the story of Mary and Joseph, who themselves were travelers seeking shelter, searching for a place where love could be born.

This year, our Advent journey is shaped by the tradition of **Las Posadas**—a beloved practice in Mexican and Latin American communities. Each night of Las Posadas, neighbors reenact

Mary and Joseph's search for lodging, knocking on doors, asking for room, and experiencing both rejection and welcome. At last, the journey ends in celebration when the "inn" is opened, and the Christ child is joyfully received.

In our worship series, *Seeking Shelter: An Advent Journey*, we will bring this imagery into our sanctuary each week. We will "go to a home" together, standing at closed doors, hearing the knocks of hope, peace, joy, and love. Week by week, the journey will remind us that God comes to us, seeking welcome in our hearts and in our world. The series builds toward Christmas Eve, when the doors of welcome are finally opened, and we encounter the Savior who has come to dwell with us.



Join us for an evening of joy and celebration at **Swing into the Season at Crossroads!**

When: Sunday, December 7 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Where: Crossroads Ministry Center

Come experience the magic of the season with **Rollicking Big Band Holiday Music** by the **Big Walnut Big Band** with an open dance floor.

So much to do:

- Opportunity to take a photo with Santa
- Children's take-home craft activity
- A leisurely walk through our **Traditional Indoor Fontanini Nativity Display**
- A half hour of carol singing at the end of the evening
- Cookies and punch and pretzels to munch

Bring your friends, family, and neighbors—**everyone is welcome** to share in this **free**, festive evening of fun as we ring in the holiday season together!

Do you want to help make this event successful? Call or text **Lindsay Scalf at (614) 369-7254**.

Walkthrough Nativity

Once again, the Walkthrough Nativity at Crossroads will be on display during Advent and Christmas. Enjoy the sights and sounds of Bethlehem with Fontanini figures. This free display is open Sunday, Wednesday and Friday from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. starting December 7th and ending January 4th. Special viewings may be requested. To assist with this ministry or for more information, contact the church officer.

December 13 – Downtown Christmas Stroll



A new twist restarts a tradition! Our own Christa Moody, along with Alan Browning, have reimagined and updated the former Candlelight Tour, and First UMC is happy to join in.

The Downtown Christmas Stroll will happen on Saturday, December 13th, at 5:30 p.m., with all participants starting at the gazebo downtown. From there everyone will come to First UMC. Organist Parry Norris will provide celebrative music of the season for all as they arrive. Our Chancel Choir will offer a musical program, as we share our worship space with the community for this event. Afterward, the groups will visit St. John's Episcopal, St. Peter's Lutheran, and First Presbyterian, before all travel to St. Mary of the Assumption to end the joyous evening.

More information is available at the Downtown Christmas Stroll Facebook page. Tickets are \$15 (free for children 10 and under) and can be purchased through their Facebook page. Questions: downtownchristmas2025stroll@gmail.com.

Christmas Stroll Ushers Please consider providing hospitality for our guests during the Downtown Christmas Stroll by being part of our usher team for the evening on Dec. 13th. Provide a smile and a welcoming presence, distribute our bulletins, help people find seats or facilities, and just represent First UMC with our usual high level of friendliness. You will arrive before 5:30 p.m. and be finished around 6:45 p.m. Contact Clarence McCoy to be a part of this valuable service.

December 20 - Blue Christmas

Sometimes, preparing for Christmas is difficult. The loss of a loved one, changes in health, of a family member who cannot be present might make it challenging to approach the season with joy. "Blue Christmas" is a worship service which acknowledges grief and reminds us of the hope of the Christ child. This year, the worship service will be held on the longest night of the year, December 20th at 2 p.m. in the sanctuary. Come, experience the peace of Christ in the midst of the holiday chaos.

Christmas Worship

This year we will again celebrate the gift of the Christ child through our times of candlelight worship, as has been our longtime tradition. We will keep the same schedule, offering a time of worship on Christmas Eve-Eve, December 23rd, at 7:30 p.m. On December 24th, Christmas Eve, we will offer worship times of 5:30 and 8:00 p.m.

These options allow the choice of the day and time that work best for you and your family, and also provide flexibility for all of those that you can invite to be a part of our celebration. Please share the information about our services wherever you can. People need to experience the joy of Christ during this holiday season!

All three candlelight services on both nights are similar to one another. On Christmas Eve at the 5:30 p.m. worship, we are planning an especially family-oriented worship experience, with the praise band leading music and Pastor Nikki sharing the message. Pastor Nikki will also provide the message with pipe organ and Chancel Choir leading music at 8:00 on Christmas Eve and 7:30 on Eve-Eve. All the services sing wonderful Christmas carols, and all feature the candlelight singing of "Silent Night" that makes this time of worship so special. Choose a day and time, bring your family and friends, and experience the light of the Christ child as we worship together!

Serve As a Christmas Usher Please consider being a part of one of our usher teams at one or more of our Christmas Eve and Christmas Eve-Eve services this year. The usher teams help to provide a welcoming environment as we share the light of Christ with all who come to worship during this wonderful season. The work involves arriving 45 minutes early for the service, greeting worshipers with a smile, handing out bulletins, collecting offering, distributing candles, and staying for a few minutes after the service to help straighten up for the next group. That's all there is to it. It's simple and easy, but it's so important! Benefits include no traffic hassles because of your early arrival, easy parking, and helping your church family during important and meaningful times of worship.

Contact Clarence McCoy by Dec. 14th at clarencemccoy@love-first.org or 740-653-3330 (ext. 1004), and let him know which worship time or times you would like to serve.

Christmas Candlelight Communion As has been our tradition, we will offer Holy Communion upstairs in the Chapel, beginning 30 minutes before each of our services on the 23rd and 24th. Bring friends and family and experience the Holy Meal together as you prepare to celebrate the birth of the savior.

Last Sunday of 2025 On December 28th, the Sunday after Christmas, we'll change our Sunday schedule. We'll have only one service at 10:00 a.m., and we will worship with the reading of Scriptures and the singing of Christmas Carols. January 4th will return to our usual Sunday worship schedule.

And More Opportunities...

Children's Ministry Family advent calendars will be available starting November 30 in the Children's Sunday school classes. They will also be available in the parlor. The calendar will help families stay focused on the reason for the season, our savior.

Nativity Collections Needed Do you have a favorite Nativity set? Or 2? Or more? Share your collection in the display case by the parlor. Each week, a different family can share their nativities would the church and community. If you would like to participate, please contact the church office.



Christian Pathfinders

Christian Pathfinders adult Sunday school class will be doing an Advent study beginning November 30th. It is entitled, 'What Do You Want for Christmas This Year?' It is written by James W. Moore, a noted theologian. We will be studying this titled question at deeper level. What do we **really** Want for Christmas? Advent has so many gifts to give us from God; hope, peace, joy, and love and the ultimate gift of Jesus Christ. Please invite your friends from FUMC to join us at 9:00 a.m. each Sunday beginning November 30th for the four weeks before Christmas week in Room 22. There will be a video to whet your appetite for a spiritual and rewarding discussion. If you have any questions, please call Joe Clark at 740-654-8766. Hope to see you then.

Additional Adult Discipleship Advent Studies

The following studies are available during Advent:

- *Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph*; Faith Matters (10:30 am Sundays, Room 22)
- *A Child is Born*; Crossroads Community (6:30 pm Wednesdays, Crossroads Conference Room)



Start the New Year Off Right

As you are making your list of New Year's resolutions, consider adding your activities at First UMC into the mix. Now is a great time to consider becoming part of a new ministry at church, increase your commitment to attendance, or add to your own time of devotion and prayer. Start the new year off right by focusing on your relationship with Christ! You will benefit, the church will benefit, and, most importantly, God will be glorified!

Angel Tree Giving

We want to share the love of Christ generously with our neighbors this Christmas, so we have partnered with Community Action to support five area families. The Angel Tree will be set up in the parlor on November 23 with gift wishes for eleven children. Take the tag/s you choose, purchase only what is listed, to ensure each child is provided for equally, and sign your name by the matching number in the binder by the tree. Return your gifts, or the items you chose to purchase to the parlor in a bag or box with the tag attached by December 10 at noon. We will be delivering the gifts to Community Action along with wrapping items like paper, bows, scissors, boxes, tags, and tape on December 11.



OneBoard Leadership Model

On November 2 in a church conference meeting, FUMC voted unanimously to adopt the One Board model of leadership for this congregation. Starting January 1, a new 12-member leadership board will begin work. This board will be composed of 3 people representing Staff-Parish Relations, 3 people representing Finance, 3 people representing Trustees, 2 members at large, and 1 person acting as

chairperson. Under our current structure, there are multiple committee meetings that often require decisions to be filtered up through other committees before a decision can be made. Under the One Board model, a decision can be made in one meeting since the key committees are all represented in the group.

During the first year, Rev. Bill Lyle from Peace United Methodist Church in Pickerington will serve as our mentor in the One Board process. He has over 20 years working under this format in two different churches. The One Board model will cut back on the time spent in meetings and will free people up to serve in ministry in other ways. The model does not get rid of all committees. For example, the Trustees will still have subcommittees that focus on each of our structures. Their recommendations go directly to One Board instead of channeling through a big Trustees meeting, finance, administration, etc. before a decision is made.

A Nominations Team will present a slate for the 2026 One Board members for the Church Council to vote on in their December 8 meeting. Each year a third of the Board "rolls off" and new members come on board. After the Board has been in existence for a few years, the pattern will be each member serves a term of 3 years.

To promote transparency in this new structure, the Circuit Rider will report major decisions made by the Board. If you have any questions about the One Board model, please contact Pastor Nikki.



Caring Ministries

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



American
Red Cross

Blood
Services

The American Red Cross Bloodmobile visits our Crossroads Ministry Center six times each year, collecting Whole Blood and Power Red Blood (almost double red cells, with plasma and platelets being returned to donor; especially blood types O, A-, B-).

Our next blood drive will be on **Monday, January 12, from 1:00-6:00 p.m.** at Crossroads. Donors can sign up online at www.redcrossblood.org, through the Red Cross Blood Donor app, or by contacting Judy Hug. ALL blood types are needed as the US continues to face a national blood shortage.

Perhaps you are unable to donate, or choose not to do so? Volunteer to help with our Bloodmobiles by contacting Judy Hug. Thank you for your help in giving the Gift of Life!



SWEET TREATS

Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. Romans 12:13

We have a number of members and friends of our congregation that are no longer able to physically join us for church services or activities, and unable to be a part of our community. Each month, on the second Saturday, a small group of people deliver donated goodies – fruit and cookies – with a prayer, doing God’s work among those that are missing us.

Join us at 8:30 a.m. on **Saturday, December 13 and January 10** in the Fellowship Hall to brighten someone’s day and to let them know they have not been forgotten. Donated cookies and fruit can be brought to the church the Thursday or Friday before each delivery date. Help is needed with donated items, packing the delivery bags, and delivering the bags. The blessing is not only to those we visit, but also to each person involved in this ministry. For more information, contact Judy Hug

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



**Gale Barry
Joann Fauble
Robbin Gardner
Patsy Given
David Sheidler
Tracy Thompson**

Blanket Drive

Let’s cover the shelter beds with love again this year. We are collecting blankets for the Lutheran Social Services Shelter on East Main Street. The shelter needs “new”, XL twin blankets to help keep their residents warm.

Please deliver the blanket donations to the church parlor beginning Monday, December 1st through Sunday, December 20th during church hours . Thank you for helping share warmth and love to those in need this winter



CONTACTS:
Ann Cherry (740) 215-0563
Jeff Cherry (740) 503-1630

Blessings to you from Short East Community Kitchen!

To quote Adam Hamilton in his book we are reading for Crossroads Community, *Christianity and World Religions*, "What can I do today to bring healing, hope, help, encouragement, kindness, or justice to my world?" That is exactly what we are trying to do at Short East Community Kitchen!

During the month of October, we served 2,698 meals! That's a lot of meals. Our numbers are increasing. We are seeing new faces each and every day. However, as our numbers are increasing, so food prices have gone up and donations from Mid-Ohio have drastically decreased.

How can you help?

- **Donate these items** in the bins in the Parlor.

DECEMBER

Large Zip-Lok bags

Coffee

Powdered Creamer

JANUARY

Paper towels

Sugar

Beef or chicken stock/broth

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.

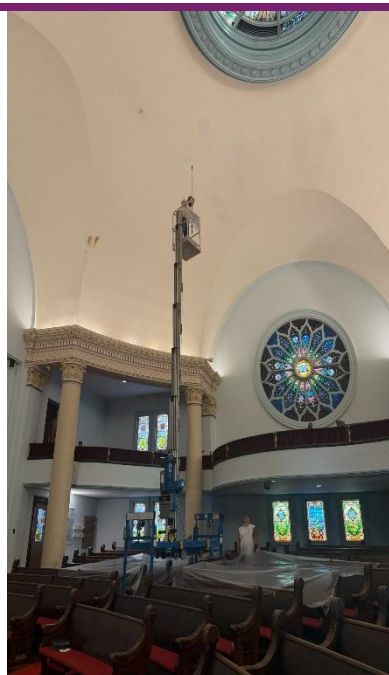
- **Donate money.**

As always, monetary donations can be given to either First United Methodist Church or Maple Street United Methodist Church. Earmark your checks or envelopes with "Short East Community Kitchen."

- **Donate time.**

We can always use volunteers. Contact Ann or Jeff.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!



WELCOME TO THE TRUSTEES' CORNER...

The Trustees have been busy! There have been a number of projects completed over the last several months and we greatly appreciate all the help and support that has been provided. In particular, you may have noticed that the sanctuary ceiling has been repaired and painted along with the two main staircases, plus the Crossroads parking lot has been resealed and relined with directional arrows. Our contractors worked around our scheduled events to make these projects happen and to meet our timeframe needs, plus a number of church members gave a helping hand as well. The Trustees would also like to give a special thanks to Mike Shafer, Robert Yates, Kyle Wellman, and Chris Belt (Michael Belt's brother) for their help in making these projects happen. We would love to see YOU and bring your talents too – there's always room for more if you would like to join in on future projects.

Thank you for your prayers and support,

The Trustees

Ministering to Our College Students

Our college students love to get care packages filled with goodies from their church family. On Saturday, October 11th, 20 care packages were made and sent to our college students. Many thanks to all who donated items and to those that gathered to assemble the packages!



Green Team Update



Did you know that the average American throws away 4.4 pounds of trash in a single day? Recycling is one way that we can reduce the amount of trash going into landfills and help care for creation. On November 19th, the Green Team hosted a workshop at Crossroads on recycling. Aluminum and steel cans, #1 and #2 plastics, paper, paperboard, and cardboard are recyclable and accepted items at all 23 residential recycling sites in Fairfield County. The new Hefty Orange Bag Program can help you recycle other items like plastics #3-#7, Styrofoam, bubble wrap, and others. Learn more at <https://www.fairfieldrecycles.org/household-recycling>. Want to get involved with creation care ministries? Contact Renee Benham for more information at tesseract03@gmail.com.



CIRCLE MEETING DATES

Elizabeth Circle December 18 and January 15 at 9:30 a.m. in Room 22. New members are always welcome. Please join us!

Trinity Circle December 10 and January 14 at Noon in Room 22. Come join us in making greeting cards for our congregation shut-ins. At our December meeting, please bring an appetizer to share.

YOUTH NEWS

These are the dates for Youth Sunday School. These are for students in Grades 6-12 and take place on Sunday mornings at 10:30 a.m. in the Youth Meeting Room in the basement of the main church building.

December 7
December 14

January 4
January 11
January 18
January 25

At Crossroads Ministry Center
2095 W. Fair Ave
December 6 & January 3

**MEN'S
Breakfast**

8:00 a.m.
Call 740-653-3330 to reserve your spot.




Save the Date!

New Church Board Leadership Retreat
Stepping Out in Faith
Saturday, January 10
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Room 22, Main Campus
RSVP to Pastor Nikki at
nikkibaker@love-first.org
by December 20, 2025.

Hooked on Books

Contact
Linda
Godenschwager
or Denise
Bennett

10:00 a.m.
Main Building



Sign up in the Parlor

Hooked on Books meets at 10:00 a.m. in Room 22 of the main church building.

Monday, December 1 *Made to Move Mountains* by Kristin Welsh
January NO MEETING

Monday, February 1 *The Help* by Katherine Stockett
Questions? Contact:

Linda Godenschwager 740-503-6026 or Denise Bennett 740-503-7210

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)
Resumes in January
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

DECEMBER

1 10:00 a.m. Hooked on Books (M)
6 8:00 a.m. Men's Breakfast (CR)
7 6:30 p.m. Swing into The Season (CR)
8 6:00 p.m. Church Councils (M)
10 12:00 p.m. Trinity Circle (M)
13 8:30 a.m. Sweet Treats (M)
6:00 p.m. Christmas Walk (M)
15 6:30 p.m. Staff-Parish Relations
Committee (M)
18 9:30 a.m. Elizabeth Circle (M)
5:30 p.m. Trustees Meeting (M)
20 2:00 p.m. Blue Christmas (M)
23 7:30 p.m. Christmas Eve-Eve service
24 5:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Family service
8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service
28 10:00 a.m. Worship

JANUARY

3 8:00 a.m. Men's Breakfast (CR)
10 8:30 a.m. Sweet Treats (M)
12 1:00 p.m. Red Cross Blood Drive (CR)
14 12:00 p.m. Trinity Circle (M)
15 9:30 a.m. Elizabeth Circle (M)
5:30 p.m. Trustees (M)
19 6:30 p.m. Staff-Parish Relations
28 6:00 p.m. Missions Meeting (M)

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 February/March issue of the
CIRCUIT RIDER are **due by January 12**
to **Clarence McCoy**, clarencemccoy@love-first.org.
Janet Gossell, Editor

The Circuit Rider

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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