

The Window into the heart of

Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church

Volume 12, Number 4, Holiday 2026

Join us in celebrating the Christmas season at Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church! We warmly invite you to experience the cheer of hearing the Nativity story, singing beloved Christmas carols, and lighting candles of joy. With a variety of worship services to choose from—including Candlelight Traditional Services, a Service for Family and Children, and The Gathering's modern Christmas service—you can find one that suits you. Come and share in these special moments of worship and reflection with us.

Join us for our Christmas worship, which begins with a Traditional Candlelight Service on the evening before Christmas Eve. Pastor Tom Strandburg will be officiating on Wednesday, December 23rd, 2026 at 8 pm while Director of Music & Liturgy, Mitchell Stecker leads the music in the Sanctuary. The liturgy, candle lighting, music, and atmosphere will be the same as our Christmas Eve traditional Candlelight Service.

For younger attendees, we invite you to join us for the family-friendly Service for Children & Families at 3 pm on Christmas Eve. And if you prefer upbeat Christmas music, you won't want to miss The Gathering at 5 pm on Christmas Eve.

If you find yourself unable to attend a Christmas Season service in person, there's no need to worry. MLUMC has got you covered. You can still worship and celebrate with us virtually through our livestreamed Christmas Eve services, including The Gathering and the Traditional Candlelight Service. Additionally, we will be livestreaming Christmas and Sunday services on December 24th, 2026 and December 27th, 2026, so you can stay connected with our community during the holiday season.

CHRISTMAS SEASON WORSHIP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23RD
TRADITIONAL CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
8:00 PM IN THE SANCTUARY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24TH
SERVICE FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES
3:00 PM IN THE SANCTUARY

THE GATHERING CHRISTMAS EVE
5:00 PM IN ASBURY CENTER
LIVESTREAMED & RECORDED ON FACEBOOK

TRADITIONAL CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
8:00 PM IN THE SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAMED & RECORDED ON THE MLUMC WEBSITE, FACEBOOK & YOUTUBE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27TH
MORNING WORSHIP
10:45 AM IN THE SANCTUARY
LIVESTREAMED & RECORDED ON THE MLUMC WEBSITE, FACEBOOK & YOUTUBE

NO 8:30 AM MORNING WORSHIP OR 9:30 THE GATHERING SERVICE FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27TH

THERE WILL BE NO CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL OR KIDS' PRAISE ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20TH OR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27TH

Walking the King's Highway

"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3)

Like many of you, I love this time of the year. As a local church pastor, I really love this time of the year. The Season of Advent will soon be upon us. I love its competing themes of "the already" and "the not yet." Christ has come and Christ will come. From the standpoint of our Christian faith, these two assertions can both be true at the same time.

Traditionally, in the second week of Advent, the person of John the Baptist comes into focus. He fulfills the prophet Isaiah's vision of a voice calling out in the wilderness "prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Anthem number one hundred in our church's extensive choral library is a stunning piece from the 1930's entitled The King's Highway by composer David McKinley Williams. The lyrics for the piece include the line, "I know not where the road will lead—I follow day by day—or where it ends: I only know I walk the King's highway." The sentiment expressed in this line is certainly true for our lives as individuals, but it is also true for our life together as a church. We all walk the King's highway. The imagery in Isaiah 40 continues with verse 4: "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain." There is transformation going on in Isaiah's vision, and "all flesh will see it together."

This year has been one of casting a new vision for the future of our church. You can read about that elsewhere in this newsletter. As we work to fulfill God's vision for our church, may the many rough places in life be made level and the rugged places a plain for all of the people whom God loves through our efforts!

Pastor Tom Strandburg

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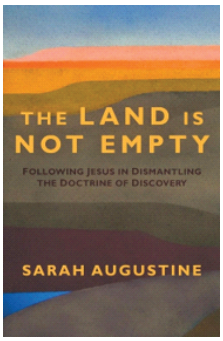
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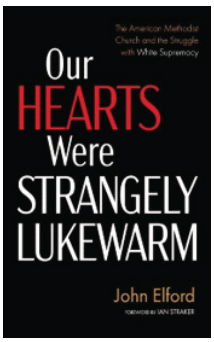
A Year of Peace with Justice

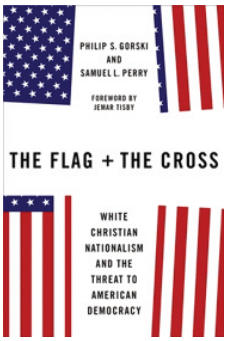
Our Christian Education focus this year is Peace with Justice, an intentionally broad theme that will allow us to explore some of the many ways that scriptures compel us to care for one another. The year will be broken into four parts, with each quarter addressing overlapping topics. For the first quarter we have been celebrating diversity in the United States. First, we recognized Hispanic Heritage month from September 15 to October 15 (selected in part because many Latin American countries celebrate their Independence Days during that time). Our first group event took place on October 26 to discuss Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here by Jonathan Blitzer. This book is a deep dive into the history of immigration from Central America to the U.S., profiles of several individuals who made such journeys, and the foreign policy decisions that influenced them.



For November we will be looking more closely at how the 15th century Doctrine of Discovery was used to justify the colonization of occupied lands outside of Europe, and how this continues to affect Indigenous People today. You'll want to begin reading The Land Is Not Empty by Sarah Augustine in preparation for a discussion on November 30.

The second quarter of the year we will look at the Church and Politics. More specifically, how "political" should the church be? How do we balance following Biblical mandates that seem to come in conflict with secular laws? In December we will address the politics of immigration issues, but with an Advent twist: we will gather December 15 to watch a short documentary called Jesus Was A Migrant, followed by a discussion. Then in January and February we will be reading and talking about white Christian nationalism in the United States, including its history in the United Methodist Church. Two book recommendations for this topic are Our Hearts Were Strangely Lukewarm by John Elford, and The Flag and the Cross by Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry.





Please plan to be a part of the various discussions above, and watch for more opportunities in the spring. You can also follow the Peace With Justice theme with the weekly emails and social media posts – look for a new one every Monday throughout the year! Finally, you can contact Kim Rhoton (krhoton@mlumc.org) with questions or to help with planning.

I pray that the programming for this year inspires you to find new ways to grow God's peace and justice in the world!

A Year of Peace With Justice

Celebrating Diversity (September, October, November)

The Church and Politics (December, January, February)

Growing Justice (March, April, May)

Peacemaking (June, July, August)

Let's SPICE UP Adult Sunday School

Please join all past, present, and future participants in a celebration of adult Sunday School on November 22 at 9:30a.m. in Wesley Hall.

Why are we doing this?

Reconnect with old friends and make some new ones! Let's talk about what makes our adult program so unique, and how we can help it grow even stronger in the future.

What should I bring?

Bring yourself and any other adult in the church, along with your ideas for how to revitalize and reinvigorate adult Sunday School programming. Wishing you could be part of a short-term study, a class focused on mission work, or a class that meets at an unconventional time? This is your chance!

Questions?

Contact Kim Rhoton (krhoton@mlumc.org)

Seekers

The Young Adult Sunday School Class has been meeting for well over a decade. As the members have aged into their thirties, forties and fifties, the class name no longer reflects our demographic. Recently, the class agreed to change its name to The Seekers Class. People of all ages are welcome to join us as we seek greater understanding of the scriptures. Each week we study a part of the Bible. Currently, we are completing a study on the Book of Acts. Our class meets on the first floor of the Education Building at 9:30. If you would like more information contact John Esaias at jesaias@comcast.net.

Kerygma

The focal point of the Kerygma group for over 40 years has been the table around which we discuss scripture, social justice issues, and past and present theologies. We have volunteer teachers and guest speakers.

Our members range in age from the 50's-90's. We recognize that we are all on a lifetime spiritual journey, and that we are all in different places of understanding and faith from which we can all learn. We value the concept of the "beloved community" for ourselves and also work to create such a community through mission projects. We enjoy regular social events and an annual retreat.

If any of this appeals to you, visit us on a Sunday morning at 9:30 in the Kerygma room off the balcony, or join us on zoom. All are welcome! For additional information or for the zoom link, contact Martha Clarke (mwc@cs.cmu.edu) or Deanna Baird (fraubaird@aol.com).

Homebuilders and Mixers Sunday School

Several years ago, the Homebuilders and Mixers classes merged to form a new group where senior adults may find a spiritual home in which to continue growing and learning. We are a speaker based class covering a wide range of topics, from Methodist history and other religious faiths to current social issues.

Please join us on Sunday morning at 9:40 a.m. in Wesley Hall. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Joanne Dempe at joanne.dempe@gmail.com.

POINSETTIA & FOOD PANTRY FUND CHRISTMAS MEMORIALS

Early poinsettia purchase deadline because of supply issues!

It is early, but time to order your Christmas poinsettias in honor or memory of family, friends, and loved ones. The red poinsettias cost $12.00. Because of greenhouse supply issues, orders must be early and on time.

THE FIRM CUTOFF DATE TO ORDER POINSETTIAS IS SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2026.

Also consider making a donation to the Food Pantry in honor or memory of your loved ones. The deadline for the Food Pantry donation memorial will be in December.

The poinsettias will be on display Sunday, December 20, 2026, and at the Christmas Eve candlelight services. You may pick up your plant after the 8 pm Christmas Eve service or after Christmas Day. Spread the cheer by volunteering to deliver the poinsettias to shut-ins, or ask the church to deliver.



Christmas Memorials 2026

FIRM Poinsettia Order Deadline: November 22, 2026

Make check payable to MLUMC. Mark the memo line *Poinsettia* **or** *Food Pantry*.

# of poinsettias _____ @ $12 each = _____ Given in (circle) *memory* or *honor* of:

_____

_____

Donation to MLUMC Food Pantry $_____ Given in (circle) *memory* or *honor* of:

_____

_____

I will pick up my poinsettia I will deliver to a shut-in Church to deliver to a shut-in

Donor Name: _____

Phone: _____

FALL IN A DAY'S WORK

FALL FESTIVAL – A GOOD TIME FOR ALL



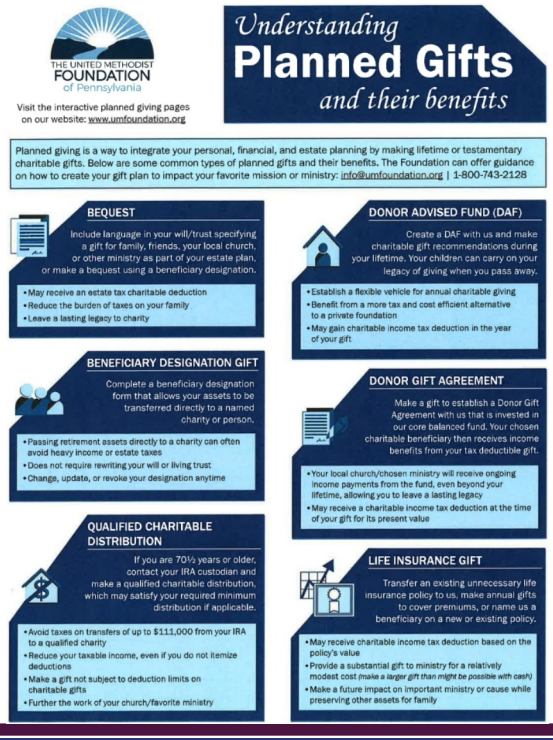
Saturday, October 3rd was the date of our Church's annual Fall Festival in the upper parking lot. Sponsored by the Missions and Outreach Committee and organized by Donna Chesleigh, the festival featured food, fun, and most importantly fellowship. Attendees included Church members and friends as well as community neighbors. Food highlights included cotton candy, popcorn, flavored ice balls, and s'mores, along with more hearty items such as hot dogs, hamburgers, and walking tacos. Many games and activities took place, including the ever-popular bounce house. As if the preceding was not enough, the delightful afternoon weather put the "icing on the cake." Many thanks to Donna and her team for putting on such a great event. And look for a repeat performance in 2027!



Rob Spicher, Missions and Outreach Committee Chair

Mum sale nets funds and friendship!

The UWF's annual September mum sale raised approximately $325 for organizations that support women, children, and youth. Thank you to everyone who bought mums and made donations! It was a beautiful morning and we enjoyed the fall fellowship! We hope to see everyone again soon at our Christmas Cookie Sale on Dec. 12.



PLANNED GIVING SEMINAR – IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL

On Tuesday, September 15th, the United Methodist Foundation of Pennsylvania gave a seminar at our Church on Planned Giving. The seminar began with a light meal at 5:30pm followed by an informational program. Program content focused on topics such as charitable giving, bequests, and providing for beneficiaries. Many thanks to Ed Bailey (Foundation Executive Director) and Jessica Tomsic (Foundation Executive Assistant) for their time that evening. Please contact Rob Spicher at robert.spicher@pnc.com if you would like further information on this seminar.

HOLI-YAY!



Christmas Cookie Sale returns Dec 12th

Fellowship returns in its finest, festive form on Saturday, Dec. 12 from 9 am to noon when the UWF holds its annual Christmas Cookie Sale. Come early for the best selection of delicious homemade Christmas cookies sold by the pound. All proceeds benefit women, children, and youth! We hope you'll join us for this time-honored event.

NOTE: The British tea room will be held as a separate spring event. Look for more info soon!

Community Christmas Caroling

Please join us for Christmas caroling in the neighborhood surrounding the church on Sunday, December 13. This is a fun event that requires no special singing talent, just the willingness to spread good cheer to those who live near MLUMC! We will meet in Asbury Center at 6p.m. for a light dinner, followed by caroling, and then back to the church to warm up with cookies and hot cocoa. The entire evening will wrap up before 8p.m. Please dress for the weather and bring a flashlight; caroling booklets will be provided. Register with Kim Rhoton, krhoton@mlumc.org

Calling all helpers!



To make the UWF's annual Christmas Cookie Sale a success, we need your help in two ways:

1. Donate delicious, homemade cookies. In the weeks leading up to the December 12th event, please consider baking a batch or two of your favorite cookies and freezing them in sealed bags. You may even want to bake with a friend or host a cookie-baking event in your home or at the church.

Please drop off cookies in the church kitchen anytime on Thursday, Dec. 10th or Friday, Dec. 11th before noon.

2. Volunteer at the event. Please join us on Friday morning at 9 am in Asbury kitchen to tray cookies. Or stop by on Saturday and volunteer an hour or two in the cookie area or in the kitchen for cleanup.

If you have questions, text or call Sandy Waters at 412.996.0502

Mission Sale

The Sunday school children work together throughout the year to support an orphan in Zimbabwe named Moreblessing, who lives in the Home of Hope Orphanage. Moreblessing is approximately ten years old (in many cases children come without any documentation such as a birth certificate, so exact ages are unknown). Our sponsorship helps to provide for all the necessities of life, including food, medical care, and education expenses.

On December 6 the children will offer for sale a variety of small treats and crafts they have made. Please plan to stop in the Narthex after both services to help support this mission. All proceeds will go to help support Moreblessing and the Home of Hope Orphanage in Zimbabwe. For more information about Nyadire United Methodist Mission, please go to www.Nyadire.com

COMMUNITY THANKSGIVING DINNER – HELP REQUESTED!

On Thursday, November 26th, MLUMC will be the place for the annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner. Eat-in, take-out and delivery will be provided. Over five hundred meals will be served, along with a generous amount of hospitality and fellowship.

Hosted by the Missions and Outreach Committee, this dinner has been a fixture in the South Hills for over 40 years. Originally started by our friends at Bethany Evangelical Lutheran, MLUMC took on an increasing role over the years and is now managing the entire event.

There are four ways that you can make this dinner a success, as follows:

1) **Donate a turkey (roasted and carved)** – Turkeys should be dropped off at the Church on November 24th (Tuesday) and November 25th (Wednesday) of Thanksgiving week.

2) **Donate a pie** – Apple, cherry, or pumpkin are preferred. Please drop them at the Church on November 24th (Tuesday) and November 25th (Wednesday).

3) **Donate your time** – We will need volunteers for set-up on November 25th (Wednesday) and for cooking, serving, and delivering on November 26th (Thanksgiving Day).

4) **Donate funds to cover costs** – We provide a full course meal. Your financial support will ensure that recipients get a hearty meal with all the trimmings.

If you would like to donate a turkey(s), pie(s), time, and/or money to this important outreach effort, please contact Rob Spicher as soon as possible at robert.spicher@pnc.com or 412-720-4589. Thank you in advance for your support of this long-standing outreach ministry.

FISH, FISH, AND MORE FISH: MARK YOUR CALENDARS AND READY YOUR TASTE BUDS!

The Missions and Outreach Committee will once again be hosting Community Fish Fries during the 2027 Lenten Season (which will have an early start compared to recent years). These Fish Fries will take place on Friday, February 12th (1st Friday of Lent), Friday, March 5th (midway through Lent), and Friday, March 26th (Good Friday). Eat-in as well as take-out will be offered. There will also be limited delivery to shut-ins and Food Pantry clients.

The tradition of Lenten Fish Fries at our Church started in 2016. Covid 19 limited us for several years to only having one Fish Fry (Good Friday), but we were back with 2 in 2023 and 3 in 2024, 2025, and 2026 (with over 2,000 meals served each year).

The menu for the February 12th and March 5th Fish Fries will include:

- Fried fish
- Baked fish
- Chicken nuggets
- French fries
- Hush puppies
- Macaroni 'n cheese
- Cole slaw
- Buns
- Fruit
- Desserts



The March 26th (Good Friday) Fish Fry, in addition to the preceding, will include a few additional items as well as Communion elements offered by Pastor Tom.

As is our practice, there will be no charge for the Fish Fries, although donations will be accepted. To paraphrase Pastor Tom, those able to donate will help ensure that those unable to do so can still eat.

These Fish Fries have proven to be extremely popular, not only for our Church members but also neighbors in our surrounding communities. They are a terrific way for us to provide hospitality and all to share food, fun, and fellowship.

Please mark these dates on your calendar and plan to attend. And, if you would like further information on these Fish Fries or wish to help in some manner with them, please contact Rob Spicher, Missions and Outreach Committee Chair, at 412-720-4589 or robert.spicher@pnc.com.

MISSIONS AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE –

FINANCIAL PARTNERS NEEDED AND APPRECIATED!

Many of the events (such as large community meals) hosted by the Missions and Outreach Committee are self-sustaining, with free will donations from attendees covering event costs. Relative to activities organized by the Committee, however, such is not always the case. Fortunately, several members of our congregation have become regular financial supporters of these activities, sparing the general church budget from taking a financial "hit" to cover them.

As the Missions and Outreach Committee continues with its 2026 activities and starts making plans for 2027, there is an opportunity to provide financial support. By becoming a financial partner of this Committee, you will not only help to underwrite the cost of these activities but also have the opportunity to assist with them.

The Lenten Fish Fries, the annual Back-to-School Backpack Drive, a Sunday afternoon picnic at the Daily Bread Mission, the Fall Festival, and the Community Thanksgiving Dinner are some of the Committee's recent and upcoming activities. Although one-time donations play an important part in covering the costs of them, funds provided by "financial partners" help guarantee their success. Having "financial partners" in place will ensure that activities such as these continue to flourish in 2026 and beyond.

If you are interested in becoming a "financial partner" of the Missions and Outreach Committee, please contact Rob Spicher (Committee Chair) at either 412-720-4589 or robert.spicher@pnc.com. Thank you in advance for your financial support.

2026 TRUSTEES REPORT

Greetings, church members, I wanted to catch everyone up on what the Trustees have been up to this year so far. This year we have been very busy maintaining our beautiful and historic church structure. Huge thank you to all the Trustees this year and to Alan & Donna Chesleigh who go above and beyond making sure that our building is in great shape.

Some of the projects we have completed or under contract to finish:

Slate roofs repairs partially funded by the Sanctuary Centennial Capitol Campaign and the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Grant | Asbury & Scott Rd wood doors refurbishment funded by the Sanctuary Centennial Capitol Campaign | Addition of 3 new refrigerators and warming box funded by a generous donor | Replacement of the kitchen hood Ansul system funded by a generous donor | Asbury dishwasher maintenance and remedial work | Several parsonage repairs and maintenance | Emergency elevator gasket repairs | Scott Rd Breezeway stonework remediation work and repointing | Gas riser atmospheric corrosion repair work | Asbury ice maker replacement | Table and chair rental policy and agreements | Digital organ rental policy and agreements | Changing the Brookline Parlor's Mens Restroom to a Unisex ADA Restroom

Some projects that we need to tackle in the upcoming year:

Elevator maintenance renewal | Fire alarm cellular upgrade and maintenance renewal | Phone system replacement | Parsonage stonework repointing | Scott Rd parapet wall flashing repair | Sanctuary ridge line roof repair | Messaging and interviews to make our building more accessible

As you can see, there is plenty to do to keep our beautiful and historic church structure in good condition to serve the mission of our church and congregation. Please consider contributing to the building fund and see your contribution at work.

Matt Baker, Trustee Chair

CHURCH FINANCIAL INFORMATION

By Rob Spicher, Finance Committee Chair

Since 2018, every edition of The Window has included financial information on our Church – this edition is no different. Summarized below are the Church's 2025 actual, 2026 budgeted, and 9-month 2026 financial results.

As noted in the table below, the Church's financial performance during 2025 reflected declines in both Church stewardship and Weekday Ministries. Notwithstanding the negative bottom line, special gifts (including several bequests) helped to cover any gaps. Through the first 9 months of 2026, financial performance is ahead of budget on an annualized basis, due primarily to improved Weekday Ministries performance and special gifts (including several bequests). Let us hope such continues through the 4th quarter of 2026.

The Finance Committee would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to all whose pledges, non-pledged gifts, and other financial contributions continue to ensure that our staff is paid, our buildings are maintained, and our ministries flourish.

Any questions regarding the actual and budget information shown below should be directed to Rob Spicher (Finance Committee Chair). He can be reached by calling the Church office (412-531-7131) or by e-mailing him at robert.spicher@pnc.com

Church Budget	2025 Actuals	% of Expenses	2026 Budget	% of Expenses	2026 9 Month Actuals	% of Expenses
Revenue:	$798,298	86.9%	$728,884	82.0%	$712,748	111.1%
Expenses:						
Personnel	$409,970	44.6%	$422,528	47.4%	$305,720	47.7%
Programs & Facilities	$192,321	20.9%	$207,960	23.4%	$138,266	21.6%
Utilities & Taxes	$112,332	12.2%	$106,490	12.0%	$89,674	14.0%
Insurance	$69,580	7.6%	$70,800	8.0%	$47,685	7.4%
Connectional Contribution to WPA UM Conference*	$32,882	3.6%	$70,023	7.9%	$22,500	3.5%
Loan Payments	$11,251	1.5%	$11,251	1.3%	$8,438	1.3%
Capital Campaign	$90,210	9.8%			$29,291	4.5%
Total Expenses	$918,546	100%	$889,052	100%	$641,574	100%
Total Net Income (Loss)	($120,248)		($160,168)		$71,174	

*Payments in 2025 totaled 46% of the requested amount.

Net losses are covered by cash on hand, special gifts, and reserves. Does not include revenues/expenses tied to the capital campaign.

Actuals for 2025 and 2026 have been adjusted to include bequests and capital campaign receipts/expenses.

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Advent Opportunities!

Volunteers are needed to help with lighting Advent candles each Sunday and during Christmas Eve services on December 23 and 24. No special skills are required! Candle lighters can be families (including children), couples, or friends. If you are interested, please contact Kim Rhoton with a service preference.

Volunteers are also needed to assist behind the scenes and to participate in the annual Christmas Tableaux, scheduled for December 20 at the 10:45 service. Children and teens are needed to play the parts of angels, shepherds, and kings. Adults are needed to help the participants get into costumes and enter the sanctuary on cue. Participants and adult helpers must be available for a rehearsal on Tuesday, December 16 at 6:30p.m. in the sanctuary. Please contact Kim Rhoton to volunteer or with questions – krhoton@mlumc.org