LOVE FIRST

First United Methodist Church - Sartell, MN 56377

December 2026 NEWSLETTER





Holiday Meal Kits: Thank you from the Justice & Mercy team for the generous holiday meal kit donations. We shared 50 kits with our 3rd Saturday Meal guests in November.

Kids Hope Shop: Now through December 13th, we are collecting new donated items for Place of Hope's Kids Hope Shop, a special opportunity for children to "shop" for Christmas gifts for their parents and siblings. They are in need of gift items for children, teens, moms and dads.



Oftentimes Advent seems somewhat passive – something that happens to us, or something that will just go by quickly so we can get to Christmas. But for people who are living Advent, like Mary and Joseph and Zechariah and Elizabeth, Christmas was not a foregone conclusion. In fact, when Christmas came, it wasn't cozy and endearing with candles all around. The joy was the baby – which, if you've been a parent, then you know it's both pure joy and terrifying all at the same time. Which is why, this Advent, we are focused on the will to dream. It is a choice, amidst life's fear and sorrow, to choose to dream. The prophet Isaiah chose to dream and shared his dreams so that we will be reading them all of Advent. Mary chose to dream, trusting that God would do wondrous things through her even as the fear caught up with her in the night. Elizabeth and Zechariah, though expressing it differently, chose to dream that one day they would meet Christ. Do you have dreams? Not just for yourself, your family, your future, but dreams for all of humanity? For our world? Come, dream with us this Advent as we strengthen our will to dream God's dream and look for Christ to be born here and now.

Pastor Leah, ***lrosso@fumcscr.org***

Advent & Christmas 2026 Schedule



Advent Begins
Sunday, November 29th at 9:30am

Advent Spiral
Wednesday, December 16th at 6:30pm

Blue Christmas Service
Sunday, December 20th at 4pm

Christmas Eve Services
3:30pm & 5pm

UMCOR
The United Methodist Church

Our December Communion Offering & Christmas Offering will be received by UMCOR

Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) strengthen United Methodist response to humanitarian crises around the world through disaster relief and recovery, migrant and refugee support, environmental sustainability, agriculture, and food security.

In 2025 UMCOR had impact on 115 worldwide humanitarian crises addressed with 454,163 lives directly touched through aid. $10.1 million in 279 grants were awarded.

Communion Offering QR: Use the drop-down menu to select "Communion"

Coming up in worship

Sundays at 9:30am at FUMC
Livestream at lovefirstumc.org

Advent Worship: The Will to Dream

November 29: Vigilant Hope
A focus on the Prophet Isaiah
Pastor Susie preaching
BELLissimo in worship

December 6th: Prophetic Peace
A focus on John the Baptist (Mark 1: 1-8)
Pastor Leah preaching

December 13th: Unexpected JOY!
A Pop-Up Christmas Pageant!
Come experience JOY!!!
Advent Festival afterwards and Holiday Bake Sale

December 16th: Advent Spiral (Walking Prayer) in the Education Wing at 6:30pm

December 20th: Merciful Love
A focus on Zechariah
Pastor Susie preaching

Blue Christmas on December 20th at 4pm

December 24th: Embodied Promise
Christmas Eve Services at 3:30pm & 5:00pm

December 27th: Generational Praise
Lots of Christmas Carols!
A focus on Anna

January 4: Courageous Defiance
Celebration of Epiphany
A focus on Joseph

Call all Bakers
Christmas Cookie & Treat Sale

Calling all bakers and makers to create tasty Christmas cookies and treats to sell to the congregation. Susanna Wesley Circle is sponsoring a Christmas Cookie & Treat Sale on Sunday, December 13th, before and after church service.

Bring your cookies and special holiday treats such as fudge, peanut brittle, caramels, krumkakes, etc. to church before service ready to be sold. Place eight to a dozen cookies or a mix of cookies and treats on a plate. Each plate will sell for $5.00 giving the congregation the opportunity to buy one or multiple plates. Recommend using inexpensive zip lock bags and paper plates. Thank you for your participation as a baker/maker and buyer.

Card Sale - December 6th

The final GREETING CARD SALE of 2026 will be the first Sunday in December -- the 6th. There will not be another sale until the first Sunday in February, so come with a list of cards you might need before that time. We will have Holiday-themed cards as well as those with the usual Birthday, Sympathy, Friendship, and Get Well sentiments.

Cards will be available both before and after the church service. Buy any five cards and get a sixth, $2.00 card, free. (Browsers and chatterboxes are welcome to check us out, too.)

Thanks to your terrific support, our group recently donated $1000 to the Solar Project.

Conversations on Grief
2nd Sunday each month
after worship in Ed Wing

This informal discussion group meets to share stories of grief in all its many forms. Monica Peterson is the peer leader.

Love First KIDS



A Look Back at Fall: Family Faith

Thank you to all the kids, youth, parents, caregivers, and volunteers who brought so much joy and energy to our Family Faith Experiences this fall!

Over the past few months, more than a dozen families gathered to sing, create art, and build faith side-by-side. Through music, hands-on crafts, activities and quiet moments of reflection, our kids practiced new ways to pray and experience God's love. At the heart of everything we do is a simple hope: that the faith we practice here at church carries right into the rhythm of our daily lives.



Parent Pause: As the calendar year winds down, we invite parents and caregivers to pause and consider two quick questions:

- These past few months, when did my child seem most connected to God's love?
- Where in our daily routine (in the car, at the dinner table, or before bed) is there a natural opening to pray together?



Looking Ahead: Advent Festival

Join us for our **All-Church Advent Festival on Sunday, December 13th, right after worship** in the Fellowship Hall. Bring the whole family for holiday treats, ornament making, crafts, games, and warm fellowship as we celebrate the season together.

Also - be sure to stop by the table in the church lobby over the next few weeks, too. There are free Advent resources designed to help your family bring the story and peace of the season straight into your living room.







It has been a meaningful fall season for our middle school and high school students! Over the past few months, our youth leaned into spiritual practices that deepened their faith and connected them with our wider community:

- **Honoring Those Who Came Before Us:** In the tradition of All Saints, students shared the names and stories of beloved ancestors and lit candles together to remember and honor their lives.
- **Practicing Gratitude:** Youth spent time reflecting on where they see God's love at work in their own lives and across our community, lifting up prayers for one another.
- **Serving Our Neighbors:** Our high schoolers put their faith into action by assembling holiday meal kits for local families. A big thank-you to the Justice & Mercy ministry team for inviting our students to partner in this work!

Upcoming Youth Group Dates:

- **Final Fall Gathering:** Wednesday, December 9th
- **New Year Kickoff:** Wednesday, January 13th

Thank you for continuing to pray, encourage, and support the young people of our congregation!

If you are interested in volunteering or getting involved with youth or family ministries, email Neddy at **nyong@fumcscr.org**.





Advent Event Calendar

29 **9:30am** Advent 1 worship *"The Will to Dream"*

30

1

2 **5:45pm** Gates of Grief Group

3

4

5

6 **Before & After Worship** Card Sale **3:00pm** Grief & the Holidays

7 **6:30pm** Exploring Our Nightly Dreams

8

9 **5:45pm** Gates of Grief Group

Last Night of Youth Groups for 2026

10

11 **11:30am** YAH & UWF Christmas get-together at Country Manor

12 **10:00am** Playdate Meet Up

13 **Before & After Worship** Xmas Cookie & Treat Sale

After Worship Advent Festival

14

15

16 **6:30pm** Advent Spiral

17

18

19 **11:30am - 12:45pm** 3rd Saturday Meal

20 **4:00pm** Blue Christmas Service

21

22

23

24 **3:30pm** Choirs & Candlelight **5:00pm** Ensembles & Candlelight

2026 Year-End Gifts:

Your generosity throughout the year is a blessing to our ministry and those we serve. As we prepare our hearts and our community for the year ahead, we kindly remind everyone to please bring **all 2026 donations to the church office by Monday, December 28**. Timely drop-offs help us correctly post your gifts to your 2026 giving statement.

Happy Holidays everyone! - Mary Smith, Your Kitchen Fairy

Fall 2026 has been a busy time for fellowship at Love First UMC. Our November 3rd Saturday Meal was hosted by the Schroeder family, Rebecca, Todd, Clare, Henry and Elise. The pizza hotdish, salad, garlic toast and cookies were enjoyed by our guests and volunteers. We had 46 guests, 10 volunteers and 68 take out meals. We served 122 meals. In addition to meals our Justice and Mercy volunteers gave away 50 holiday gift bags. Thank you to our amazing volunteers Carol Lewis, Sandra Williams, Chuck Kelly, Linda Rolland, Josie ,Diana and Mary Smith.

The next night we hosted our Sartell Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service and fellowship time. We had over 100 at the service and nearly 80 stayed for apple crisp and conversations. It was a wonderful night. Thank you to all our kitchen volunteers and everyone who donated apple crisp. It was a fun and tasty way to end the evening .

Next month Tom Sibley is coordinating our Christmas 3rd Saturday Meal and has plenty of volunteers.

Please consider signing up to donate or volunteer for Fellowship time or 2027 3rd Saturday Meals on the sign up board by our volunteer opportunity wall in the entry.

I'm hosting January 3rd Saturday Meal and would love your help. We're serving Walking Tacos.

Questions? kitchen@fumcscr.org

Signup QR

Donation QR

Other Community Meal locations & times:

- Place of Hope (511 9th Ave N) serves 7:30am, 12:30pm and 5:30pm each day.
  Salvation Army (400 Hwy 10 S) serves Monday-Friday from 11:30am–12:45pm
- Salem Lutheran (90 Riverside Dr SE) serves the 1st Saturday each month from 11:30am–1pm
- Newman Center (396 1st Ave S) serves the 2nd Saturday each month from 11:30am–12:45pm
- Bethlehem Lutheran (4310 CR 137) serves the 4th & 5th Saturday each month from 11:30am-12:45pm
- St. Augustine's (443 2nd St SE) serves the 3rd Sunday each month from noon–1pm.
- St. Mary's Cathedral (823 1st S S) serves the last Sunday each month 4:30-5:30pm

EXPLORING OUR NIGHTLY DREAMS

Join us at 6:30 pm, Monday, December 7th in the Love First Library for a group dreamwork session where we will explore the meanings and insights of our dreams together. This collaborative environment encourages sharing and understanding, helping us connect with our sometimes perplexing nightly dreams. We look forward to seeing you there!

What to Bring: a notebook and a recent dream you'd like to share.

If you have questions or would like to reserve a space, contact Janet Ruth, dreamwork facilitator, at **fumc@fumcscr.org**. There is no fee for this session.

thank you

THANK YOU for filling out your Estimate of Giving Cards for 2027. Your generosity helps us to plan for the future and live into putting Love First!

THANK YOU for giving so generously to the Leading Capital Campaign. So far we have been able to pay off our mortgage (2025) install the LED Wall (just this fall) and by the end of the year, transition all of our lighting in the Sanctuary over to LED. This project is almost fully funded once people who pledged to it fulfill those pledges by the end of June 2027.

THANK YOU for giving to the Solar Project. The plan is that the panels will be installed by the end of 2026. We have had several donors step forward to begin this project and a member generously is loaning the church the money to pay for the remainder of the balance at a low interest rate. All gifts given at this point will pay off the loan sooner and keep us from paying more interest.

If you have yet to turn in your Estimate of Giving card for 2027 or you would like to give to the church budget or to one of the campaigns above, go to: **lovefirstumc.org** or use the QR code.

As we receive estimate of giving cards and gifts for the end of the year, we will communicate what is possible in 2027. Thank you!

Why I Give - Linda Caird

It was 40 years ago that I became a member of First United Methodist Church. My 3 sons grew up surrounded by friends from Sunday School to Mission Trips and on through Confirmation and it was wonderful to see them grow in their faith. Coming from a small church, I have enjoyed being a part of many small groups where friends are made and relationships deepen. Prayer shawls are great to make for someone special but the joy and laughter in the group keeps me coming back. I continue to work on my faith journey at The Well and feel blessed to have a church with wonderful space, great staff, inspiring worship and many committees! I give to support the present expenses of our church and to provide for the future of us all, as a blessed and grateful member.



OCTOBER FINANCIALS

	Actual as of 10/31/26	2026 Budget	% of Budget
Revenue	$520,152.41	$718,859.00	72.36%
Expense	$559,107.53	$726,531.55	76.96%
Difference	($38,955.12)	($7,678.81)	

NOVEMBER COMMUNION OFFERING

Emma Norton Services
will receive our gifts of $1,010.00

The QR code is available if you would like to donate to the on-going budget or communion offering.

United Women in Faith

United Women in Faith

Acting boldly, showing up and making a difference!

At our heart and in our soul, we are a faith-driven organization. Our beliefs bring us together. And our spirituality pushes us to do more. We boldly live our faith as we connect to something bigger. We believe love in action can change the world! Learn more at **https://uwfaith.org/**.

Connect with a Circle - become part of a sisterhood in faith!

- ❖ Sarah Circle - Meets the third Sunday of the month at 10:30am in the office off the Multipurpose Rm
- ❖ Susanna Wesley Circle - Meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:00pm in the Library.
- ❖ Fellowship at Drake's - Meets the third Wednesday of the month at 11:30am at Drake's Café, 520 1st St NE, Sartell. Call Kathy Hulsebus at **rsvp@fumcscr.org** for reservations.

UWF Calendar of Events

December 6 - Sarah Circle serves coffee hour
December 7 - Executive Team Meeting, 1:00pm in Library
December 11- UWF/YAH Christmas Gathering, 11:30am, Country Manor
December 13 - UWF Christmas Cookie & Treat Sale, before & after service
December 16 - Fellowship at Drakes, 11:30am at Drakes Café, Sartell
*No Sarah or Susanna Wesley Circle this month.

United Women in Faith & Young at Heart Christmas Gathering at Country Manor

The UWF and YAH will co-host a Christmas Gathering on Friday, December 11, at 11:30am in the Country Manor Oak Room, 520 1st St N, Sartell. (Guests should park in Lot 9 and enter through Door 9 for easiest access to the Oak Room.) A soup and salad luncheon will be provided and everyone is asked to bring XMAS treats to share. Be sure to join us for a holiday program, games, singing, and fellowship with our church friends at Country Manor. Spouses and friends are welcome!



Christmas Cookie & Treat Sale - December 13

United Women in Faith's Susanna Wesley Circle will hold its annual Christmas Cookie and Treat Sale on Sunday, December 13, before and after the service. We invite the whole congregation to donate home-baked cookies and treats. Plates of 8-12 items will sell for $5.00 each, and all proceeds will support missions for women, children, and youth locally and worldwide. Please help support United Women in Faith's mission programs by baking and buying sweet Christmas treats on December 13!!

UWF Advent Reflections for Racial Justice

The United Women in Faith 2026 Advent devotional, "Such a Time as This: Advent Reflections for Racial Justice," is now available as a free PDF download at Collective-Advent-Devotions-2026.pdf. The devotional is a collection of voices, each of whom has shared reflections on Scripture that are both grounded in personal experience and engaging urgent questions of racial justice. May this Advent season be a blessing for you—and may you, in turn, be a blessing for your community.



Young at Heart

Friday, December 11, 11:30am-1:30pm

On December 11, Young at Heart and United Women in Faith Circles, Sarah and Susanna Wesley, will be hosting a Christmas get-together with residents from Love First at the Oak Room at Country Manor. The time is 11:30-1:30. A meal will be served with carols, games and visiting to follow. Those driving should come to Lot 9, Door 9 for access to the Oak Room before 11:30.

Grief and the Holidays Discussion Group with Judie & AnnElise

Sunday, December 6 at 3pm, Adult Education Room

Holidays mark the passage of time in our lives. They are part of the milestones we share with each other and they generally represent time spent with family. For many people, this is the hardest part of grieving, when we miss our loved ones even more than usual. Join us for a time together in which we name the aspects of the holidays that feel heavier with the absence of someone we love.

Gates of Grief

Pastor Susie will be leading a *Gates of Grief* group for two more sessions in December on the 2nd and 9th, offering a welcoming and supportive space to explore the experiences of loss, grief, and mourning. Together, participants will have the opportunity to share, reflect, and consider the many ways grief shapes our lives, our faith, and our relationships. Whether you are grieving a recent loss, carrying grief from the past, or seeking a deeper understanding of how grief moves through our lives, you are welcome.

Delicious Debate and Discussion invites you to join us for an after-worship class discussion on November 29 on the article "The Promise of the Interspiritual Movement."

On December 6 we'll be discussing Christmas traditions and where many come from using Where Did Christmas Come From by Al Remson. It's available used through Amazon and other sites but you don't need it for the discussion.

On December 20 well be doing an interactive reading and discussion of A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

Planning ahead beginning January 10, we'll be reading and discussing the book Building Beloved Community: The Courage to Love in the Face of Tyranny. It's written by the United Council of Bishops and is available through Cokesbury and Amazon.

For questions please contact either Mark Jaede or Kathy Bies-Jaede. Email: **adult.ed@fumcscr.org**

LOVE FIRST
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of the St. Cloud Region
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The church office is open Monday thru Thursday: 9am - 4pm
Office Closed: December 25 and December 29-January 1

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