

LOVE FIRST

FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

STORIES THAT MATTER

Come and be changed.

Lenten sermon series begins

◆ Ash Wednesday, February 18th

Imposition of Ashes Services at noon & 7pm

◆ Palm Sunday, March 29 at 9:30am

◆ Holy Wednesday Service & Meal at 6pm

◆ Good Friday Service at 7pm

◆ Easter Sunday Services at 8:30 & 10:30

with Sacrament of Holy Communion

St. Cloud Area Faith Communities
invite you to a...

Multi-Faith Vigil

*Praying for our Community, Seeking
Unity with our Siblings in Faith*

Donations of canned goods & hygiene products accepted.

Sunday Feb 1st, 3:30pm

South Junior High
1120 15th Ave South, St. Cloud, MN

Participating Faiths:

Church of God in Christ, ELCA Lutheran,
Islam, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Methodist,
Unity, Unitarian Universalist



STORIES THAT MATTER



Come and be changed.

One of the greatest problems of history is that the concepts of love and power are usually contrasted as polar opposites..What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and love without power is sentimental and anemic.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



What stories have mattered in your life? Each time one of my daughters has a birthday, we take some time to re-tell the story about their birth. Each one was different, each one surprising us in a variety of ways, each one speaking to the resilience, hope, and belovedness of our girls. We do this because these stories matter - they remind my girls of who they are and where they come from. What stories remind you of who you are?

This Lent we will be reading some amazing stories from our faith – stories of the ways Jesus

interacted with people; of the surprising way that God sneaks into our lives; stories of questions and hesitation and missteps that we often make in this dance of faith. And I suspect that as we hear these stories, we will remember who we are; we will be surprised by this mysterious One that we worship; we will have our hearts broken again as we allow the Holy Spirit to enter our lives and transform us. That's what every good story does - lead us into transformation and liberation. I hope you'll come and be changed by these amazing stories.

Pastor Leah

lrosso@fumcscr.org



REGISTER FOR WINTER RETREAT BY FEBRUARY 8th!



It is time to pull out your cozy socks, pack a journal and your favorite board game, and get ready for a wonderful weekend with other women. This year's retreat is called "***Beloved: Be Loved*** as we lean into the love of God, self & others. This year we will be staying at ***Koronis Ministries in Paynesville, MN from Feb. 20 - 22, 2026***. Your registration includes dinner on Friday through breakfast on Sunday with two nights of accommodations, and as always, delightful retreat content.



Use the QR code or go to lovefirstumc.org/winter-retreat

Coming up in worship...



Sunday Worship at 9:30am and
livestream at www.lovefirstumc.org

OUR COLLECTIVE CALL

February 1st - Influence

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Matthew 5:13-20; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

February 8th - OUR COLLECTIVE CALL:

Celebration of Mission & Ministry

Matthew 17:1-9

February 15th -

UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH SUNDAY

Guest Speaker, Rev. Dawn Houser

STORIES THAT MATTER

February 18th - Ash Wednesday

Imposition of Ashes at noon and 7pm

February 22 - 1st Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11



Prayer Station Available

The sanctuary is available during office hours during the week for prayer time (Monday - Thursday 8:30am - 2pm and Friday 8:30am - noon). Occasionally, you will share space with musicians! We have a votive table on the northeast side of the Sanctuary for people to light a candle of prayer. It can be to honor someone, a prayer for healing, forgiveness, or a prayer for our world & our church.



WEEKLY PRAYER & LAMENT
IN THE LIBRARY DURING

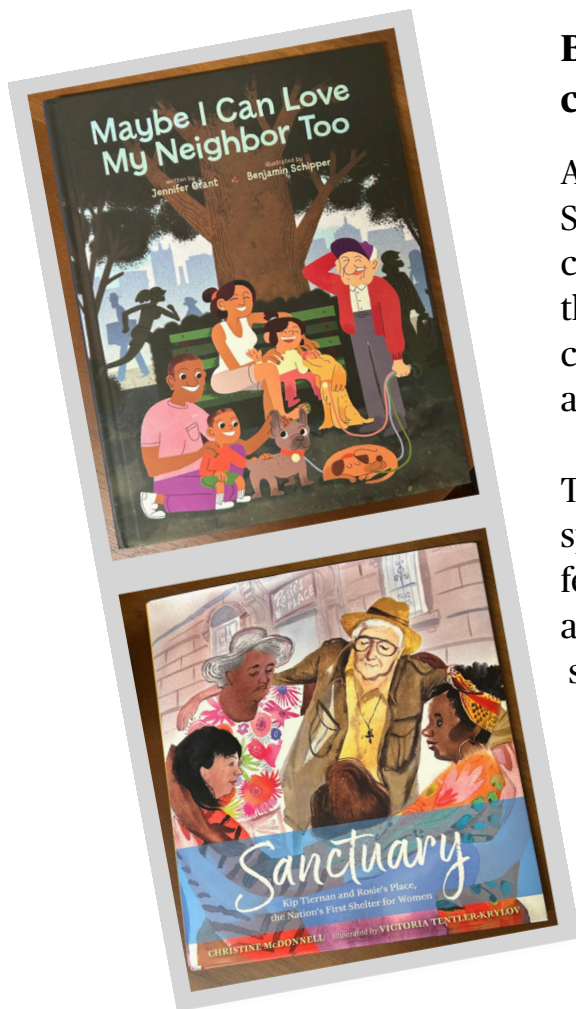
LENT

Wednesdays from 6-6:30pm
led by Pastor Leah

*Come light candles, pray, and join with others as we lament,
grieve and turn towards God.*



Help spread some sunshine and good spirit by sending someone a card. There will be some cheerful reds for February holidays and touches of green for March--as well as the usual nice variety for all occasions. We look forward to seeing you on Sunday, February 1, before and after the service. Most cards are \$2.00. Buy any five and get a sixth, \$2.00 card, free.



Books about big emotions, connection, and diversity.

Amanda put out a few children's books near the Sanctuary from our Trauma-Responsive Church collection. These books support kids (and caregivers) as they navigate big, overwhelming emotions, practice calming strategies, and grow in compassion and care for all people in our community.

There is an online children's book/resource that relates specifically to ICE raids/enforcement activity, along with a few age-appropriate talking points—especially if your kids are asking questions about what they're hearing or seeing. A button to the book is available on the Children's Ministry current event webpage.

Please let us know **if you need additional support**, or what else might be meaningful for you and your family during this season of stress and uncertainty for so many.

Over the past several weeks, junior and senior high youth have spent time **reflecting on the year ahead** and sharing what it means to be a young person in our community at this time. Living amid **uncertainty and change**, youth have named worries and concerns for their classmates, friends, and neighbors. These conversations created space for **listening, empathy, and mutual support** as young people practiced caring for one another.

Some youth have also shown **courage** by stepping into leadership roles within their schools, working thoughtfully to influence positive change and support their peers. Alongside these conversations, we used our **Epiphany star words** to guide reflection, inviting youth to imagine what the year ahead might look like and what they hope to achieve and help create in the world. Through sharing and reflection, youth expressed a desire to bring light, compassion, courage, and hope into the months ahead.




Youth Group February Schedule

Middle School 5:45pm & High School 7:15pm

- Wed, Feb 4 - Youth Group
- Wed, Feb 11 - Youth Group
- **Wed, Feb 18 - Youth to join Ash Wednesday service 7:00pm**
- Wed, Feb 25 - Youth Group

January's Askable Adult group



 To keep up-to-date on Youth Ministry on a weekly basis - sign up to receive emails from Amanda ahodge@fumcsr.org

February Communion Offering will be received by Africa University.

Out of Christ's love for people to be at their best we are supporting Africa University in Zimbabwe, Africa. United Methodists founded the university with the encouragement of our Africa United Methodist Conferences and congregations. The university keeps broadening its academic offerings to meet the needs of the African people which are very similar to our own.

Highlights of Africa University:

- \$2M+ invested in scholarships and financial aid.
- College of Engineering and Applied Science most recently launched.
- A 90-bedroom for female students was recently completed.
- 27 African countries represented.
- More than 950 graduates.
12,000+ alumni at work in 32 African countries.

DECEMBER FINANCIALS

	Actual as of 12/31/25	2025 Budget	% of Budget
Revenue	\$695,829.58	\$685,726.00	101.47%
Expense	\$657,192.17	\$693,404.81	94.78%
Difference	\$38,637.41	(\$7,678.81)	

JANUARY COMMUNION OFFERING

3rd Saturday Community Meals
will receive our gifts of \$750

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



Do you have questions about giving at Love First UMC?
Our Financial Administrator, Korynn Ruch can help you!
Call the church office or mail her at kruch@fumcsr.org



**We have much to celebrate!
Currently we have 167 Pledges
for a total of \$571,022.
This is an increase of 11 Pledges
and \$44,896 pledged.
We give thanks for all of
your generosity as costs
continue to increase
and as our ministry increases!**

*The 2026 budget, along with the
Ministry Reports from 2025,
will be shared in full at a
Celebration of Ministry
on March 1st.*



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Sunday School

Sunday, Feb 1

Sunday, Feb 8

Sunday, Feb 15

Sunday, Feb 22

Interested in volunteering as a Sunday School teacher **ONCE** a month?!

All lessons and materials are provided!


Email Amanda - ahodge@fumcsr.org

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Throughout January, students learned about young **David**. First as a friend to Jonathan, King Saul's son. And then in the heroic story of David and Goliath. The **stories** are great and are always accompanied by **activities** and **games**. These stories were paired with puzzles, jump ropes, rocks, bubbles, and more!

Is your kid thinking about trying Sunday School but feeling **nervous**? Parents, are you always welcome to **accompany** your child and help them feel comfortable. Please let Amanda or one of our **amazing** Sunday School teachers know how we can help your family get started!

Gather by the baptismal font!



Acolyte Training

Sunday, Feb 1 after worship
For Youth in 2-5th grade

**Minnesota Reconciling Congregations
invites you to join us for our
Winter Virtual Learning Event**

Thursday, February 26
from 7 – 8:30 p.m.

**"Gender Liberation is for Everyone:
A Path Toward Stronger Allyship
with LGBTQ+ Congregants"**



Watch party at Love First or
register for Zoom link here:
ttsu.me/nhdyw5

SAVE THE DATE!!

The presenters are our very own
Neak Loucks & Charlie Curtis!

Just as Jesus spoke on breaking down barriers between the center and the margins of society, Neak and Charlie will approach discussions of trans experiences (e.g., gender dysphoria, nonbinary gender identity), to break down “otherness” that is often a part of even well-meaning perceptions of trans experience. We aim to cultivate allyship that effectively translates into more integrated congregational communities.

We will host a watch party at the church - more fun and more interesting if there is a group. But if you can't join us in person, please register for the Zoom link, which will be sent to registrants a few days prior to February 26.

Lenten Book Study:

Redeeming Conflict by Ann M. Garrido
facilitated by Pastor Steve Peterson

Sundays 6:30-8:00 in March: 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

RSVP here: lovefirstumc.org/bookstudy

What do you think of or feel when you hear the word “conflict”? For many people this word makes their stomach churn or become tied up in knots, or it sets our feet to running out the door. In this book study, we will break conflict down in ways that help us deal positively in our daily lives and in our church community and interactions with the realities and dynamics of conflict. We will learn insights and skills to help prevent and deal in healthier ways with toxic, potentially destructive conflict and we will even identify and discover the ways in which conflict can actually be a blessing. Come and join us, in a safe space, to reflect on this sometimes-scary word in ways that are life-giving.



Pastor Steve Peterson has been involved in ordained pastoral ministry for over 40 years in Minnesota and South Dakota, serving as pastor of congregations, director of a collaborative ministry of mostly small, rural congregations, a camp

director, an assistant to the bishop and as an interim pastor. He is currently employed part-time with the Moses Project as a mentor for pastors. He also does spiritual direction. He enjoys variety in ministry, an action and contemplation approach to ministry, almost all kinds of music (listening and playing guitar), being outdoors (camping, hiking, biking, sitting, eating), sports, reading, spending time with friends. He and his wife of 45 years, Enid, have a daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter in St. Cloud, MN and a son in Minneapolis, MN. Steve and Enid currently live in Sauk Rapids, MN.







Thank you January Community Fellowship Meal Team!

The January team served the third Saturday community meal of spaghetti, garlic toast, salad and sundae bar. They served 97 meals. Many thanks to Paula Tompkins, Barb Rosene, Sue Mischler, Sheila Krogman, Carol Lewis, Dan & Jane Fark, and Mary Smith.

The 3rd Saturday each month FUMC serves a free meal to anyone who stops by. **FUMC serves next on February 21st.** To help financially or through serving, use the QR code or see our website: lovefirstumc.org/3rd-saturday-community-fellowship-meal



Other Community Meal locations and times:

-  Place of Hope (511 9th Ave N) serves 12:30pm and 5:30pm each day.
Breakfast 7 days a week from 7:30am - 8:15am.
-  Salvation Army (400 Hwy 10 S) serves Monday-Friday from 11:30am–12:45pm
-  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

UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH is collecting paper products for Emma Norton Services in St. Paul for the months of January and February.

A table for your donations is in the Gathering Space. Please note what is needed from the list provided. All donations will be accepted until Sunday, February 22. Prayers are also needed for the residents at Restoring Waters and Emma's Place in this time of unrest for families and loved ones.

Join our Play Date Meet Ups!

(Monthly meet ups for families, variety of locations and activities)

February 7th at 10am

Playtime and a craft for kids in fellowship hall at Love First!

All ages welcome, current ages of kids in group range from 0-6.



**Contact Caitlin Hickcox
for more info:
playdate@fumcscr.org**

Board Game Night

Saturday, February 28th at 5pm
in Fellowship Hall for an evening of board games.

*Bring your favorites or games you haven't played yet.
We'll be bringing some new games:
Cats Against Fascism, Beautiful Trouble
and Side Effects.*

All ages welcome!
Bring a dish or snack to share.

**Please questions or RSVPs
to Kathy or Mark at
adult.ed@fumcscr.org**



Small Groups at Love First

Weekly & Monthly Groups

More details at

lovefirstumc.org/groups

Caregivers Support Group

**1st & 3rd Wednesdays each month
at 7pm via Zoom**

New participants must pre-register at:

caregivers@fumcscr.org

Prayer Shawls

**1st & 3rd Wednesdays
each month at 5pm in church library**

The Well

**2nd and 4th Mondays
at 5:30pm church library**

Conversations on Grief

**2nd Sunday each month
after worship in Ed Wing**

Bible 365

Fridays at 10am via Zoom
The Book of God, W. Wangerin Jr.

UM Men's Group

**2nd Tuesdays at 6pm
in fellowship hall**

Delicious Debate & Discussion

**Will continue Sundays after worship
in the library February 8, 15 & 22.**

*Come join us as we continue to explore
progressive Christianity and more!*

Dinner Groups

**Groups are forming. Contact Monica
to join: dinner@fumcscr.org**

Movie Mavens not meeting in February.

Big Questions, No Answers

**2nd Monday at 10am
in church library**

Do you find yourself grappling with deep questions about faith, theology, and the nature of God? You're not alone. Join a monthly gathering of seekers and thinkers as we explore where the Spirit is present, especially in the questioning. This month, we're asking:

How does faith give us hope?

Come with your thoughts, questions, doubts, and insights. All are welcome in this environment of mutual trust and respect.

Young at Heart (YAH!)

**2nd Friday each month
at 10am in fellowship hall**

Our meeting will be Friday, February 13, at 10 a.m. with Jim Towler leading us in the program, Matthew: Gospel for Refugees. Your presence is welcome. Invite someone to join you. Come for coffee, conversation and learning. Bring any stories, readings or jokes you may have to add to our gathering.



Join us on February 22nd 2026, at First United Methodist Church, after church service during fellowship hour (around 10:30am). Bring your coffee and snacks and join us for crafty fun!



United
Women
in Faith

United Women in Faith

Acting boldly, showing up and making a difference!

We are a sisterhood. Connecting together as community leaders, justice champions, and brave changemakers, we are women with more than a cause. We are on a mission to boldly act and transform communities.

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

- ❖ **Sarah Circle** – Meets the second Tuesday of the month at 1:30pm in the Library.
- ❖ **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. RSVPs to Kathy Hulsebus at rsvp@fumcscr.org for reservations.

UWF Calendar of Events

February 1 - Sarah Circle Serves Fellowship

February 2 - Executive Team Meeting at 1:00pm in the Library

February 8 - Valentine's Bake Sale before & after worship service

February 10 - Sarah Circle meets at 1:30pm in the library for a Valentine get-together led by Linda Kotschevar.

February 15 – UWF Sunday & Native American Boarding School Forum

February 18 - Fellowship at Drakes meets at 11:30am at Drakes Café, 520 1st St. NE, Sartell.

RSVPs to Kathy Hulsebus at rsvp@fumcscr.org for reservations by February 13.

February 24 - Susanna Wesley Circle meets at 7:00pm in the Library

UWF Valentine's Bake Sale February 8th

United Women in Faith will be having a Valentine's Bake Sale on Sunday, Feb. 8th, before and after the service. All proceeds will go towards missions. How can you help? Donate baked goods and come buy oodles of "sweets for your sweethearts"! Donations can be dropped off before the worship service--the earlier the better! Any questions email Linda Kotschevar at uwf@fumcscr.org.



United Women in Faith Sunday February 15th



Be sure to join us on February 15th for United Women in Faith Sunday. Our guest speaker, Rev. Dawn Houser, will share about the intersection of intergenerational trauma in the American Indian community and the church. Rev. Houser is a descendent of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa and serves as the lead pastor of Aitkin United Methodist Church. A committed Ojibwe Christian, Dawn lives at the intersection of Christian faith and Native spirituality, working to bring healing, understanding, and cultural restoration to both church and community. She chairs the Minnesota Conference Committee on Native American Ministries, and co-chairs the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Native American Ministries.

UWF Sunday Native American Boarding Schools Forum

All are invited to join us after worship on February 15th as we explore the generational impact of Native American boarding schools with Rev. Dawn Houser. Many would describe the boarding school experience that impacted countless Native Americans as "old history". The impact and effects of this traumatic experience are, however, still present today. Children who attended were torn away from their families and culture, raised in a challenging and difficult environment and then expected to return to society. Looking back, we can now see how that experience shaped their relationships as they formed families and raised their own children.



First United Methodist Church
of the St. Cloud Region
1107 Pine Cone Road South
Sartell, MN 56377
lovefirstumc.org

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First United Methodist Church
of St. Cloud Region



@lovefirstumc.sartell



lovefirstumc.org

The church office is open Monday thru Thursday: 8:30am - 2pm & Friday: 8:30am - noon

Linda Agre,
Office Administrator
320.251.0804 ex. 102
lagre@fumcscr.org

Aaron Carpenter,
Music Ministry
320.251.0804 ex. 111
acarpenter@fumcscr.org

Ken Fruth,
Grounds & Maintenance
320.251.0804 ex. 110
custodian@fumcscr.org

Amanda Hodge,
TRC & Youth Ministry
320.251.0804 ex. 107
ahodge@fumcscr.org

Rev. Susie Putzke,
Connectional Pastor
320.251.0804 ex. 105
sputzke@fumcscr.org

Rev. Leah Rosso,
Lead Pastor
320.251.0804 ex. 104
lrosso@fumcscr.org

Korynn Ruch,
Financial Administrator
320.251.0804 ex. 103
kruch@fumcscr.org

Alan Srock,
Handbell Director
asrock@fumcscr.org

First United Methodist Church of the St Cloud Region

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