



A publication of First-Faith United Methodist

THE MESSENGER

Peace to you and praise be to God, who comes to redeem his people! I hope that you are all doing well and had a wonderful Thanksgiving. I can't believe that we are to the end of another year! It seems like the holiday season always sneaks up on me. The month of December has come, and I am so ready for Advent to start and for Christmas to arrive. I am ready for the songs and the festivities that bring such joy and magic to this time of year.

Many years I seem to not be ready for Christmas to come. I've got too much on my mind and I just need a little more time. I need more time to get ready and be fully present in the miracle and world changing birth of Jesus. In the rush to get to Christmas there is a time of waiting. In the church we call it the season of Advent.

Advent is the season that we make ready for Jesus to come. We wait for something that will change everything and turn the world upside down. The journey toward and beyond the manger is one of reversing expectations, encountering what we thought we already knew in brand new ways, and receiving good news in unexpected places. So, with one foot in the prophets and another in the Gospels, we journey together in our Advent series called *Our Spirit Waits*, as we prepare to welcome the Christ child.

We have some special programs also happening this advent season that I hope you will attend. On Sunday, December 17th, we will be blessed by the children's Christmas program, and on Thursday, December 21st, we will have an ecumenical Blue Christmas worship service at 6:30pm here at First Faith. We will worship with members of Messiah Lutheran, First Presbyterian, and United Congregational for this special service.

This year Christmas Eve is on a Sunday. We will have our normal worship on Sunday morning at 9:30am; then later that evening, our Christmas Eve Service will be at 5:00pm. All are welcome as we celebrate the birth of Jesus with singing, candlelight and communion. If you have family or friends that may not have been to church for a while, this is a wonderful service to invite them to. I hope you will make the effort to share the peace, hope, love, and joy of Christmas with your neighbors and family.

The Final Sunday of December is New Year's Eve. As we prepare to begin a new year, we take stock of the blessings that we have for this year and look forward with renewed hearts to the next year. In our worship on the final Sunday we will take part in a Wesleyan Covenant Renewal. We will give thanks for God's blessing and grace in the last year and recommit ourselves to our calling to love God and loving our neighbor. I hope you will join us for this special service on December 31st.

This year has had so many challenges and so many great joys. I am incredibly grateful for your trust, your love, and your grace in this last year. I am incredibly honored to be your pastor and have been blessed by all of you. I am thankful for your amazing faithfulness and hope in a world of despair. I look forward to sharing this Advent and Christmas season with you and look forward to a prosperous and glorious new year. May God keep you and may God's blessing continue to pour out on you and your family's this holiday season.

Pastor Ray



Every Sunday

Worship Service at
9:30 a.m.

Join us in person or
online on our
Facebook page

(First-Faith United Methodist Church)!

Meetings and Circles

**Tues, Dec 5 - Ruth Circle
Dines Out**

Tues, Dec 12 - UMM Meeting at 6:30 pm

Thurs, Dec 21 - SPRC Meeting at 1:00 pm



Blue? Yes, blue as in the blues. As in "I am feeling blue." Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with health issues that puts a question mark over the future, and several other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our congregations and communities. We hope that you will join us for an ecumenical Blue Christmas service on Thursday, December 21st at 6:30 pm as we come together and make space for those who are struggling during the holidays.



The Upper Room is a daily devotional magazine. There are a few copies of the November-December 2023 issue still available in the narthex at the church. The January-February 2024 issue is also available. The daily meditations are written by readers of the magazine and others interested in sharing their faith experiences through writing.

Suggested donation amounts:

Regular Print: \$1.50

Large Print: \$2.00

Better Together Giving

In September we celebrated the ten years of ministry as First Faith United Methodist Church. For ten years we have worshiped and served together, showing the strength that is found in this church and in the unity of two congregations. We have seen the fruits of that faith, showing us that we are better together. But, we did not get here on our own. Through the faithfulness of brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand on the firm foundation the many saints that have helped build us up and provide for us.

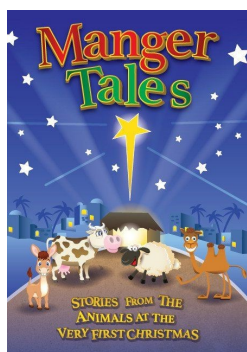
In honor of their faithfulness, and to keep building upon their work, we believe that it is the call of all our church members to build for our future. In honor of our 10-year anniversary we are asking that each member contribute \$10 to our First Faith Savings Fund.

Our desire is that on the first Sunday of the year, each member will give to this fund the years of service of First Faith United Methodist. With these gifts we hope to build up savings so that we can guarantee that First Faith United Methodist will be in ministry for generations to come.

We will be collecting this special offering on Sunday, January 7, 2024. I hope that you will join to show our gratitude and our faithfulness in building a firm foundation for our future.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Ray.

Our Children's Program this year is *Manger Tales*. We've all heard the stories of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men, but what about the others who were there when Jesus was born? *Manger Tales* will introduce you to the animals that were there, from the residents of the stable to visitors from afar. The program will be during church on Sunday, December 17th, starting at 9:30 a.m. We hope you can join us!



Here are the Christmas program practice dates and times for all children ages 4-years-old through 5th grade:

Saturday practices from 10:30 to 11:30 am - Dec. 2, 9 and 16
Sunday practices from 10:45 to 11:15 am - Dec. 3, and 10

You can come to the Sunday practices or the Saturday practices. The Youth Group is invited to come and help, read, sing or play instruments.

If you have any questions, please ask Randi Pennell (308-920-0462) or on Facebook Messenger.



Handbell Choir Practice
On Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m.
November 1, 8, 29 (6-6:30 pm)

Choir Practice on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. on Nov. 1, 8 and 29 (6:30-7 pm)
Come and join us!



2 - Stephen Hayes
 8 - Erick Schwartz
 10 - Sandy Engel
 11 - Meghan Pennell
 15 - Penny Shultz
 19 - Julie Berggren
 Jan Wells

20 - Deb Trosper
 23 - Colette Sorensen
 27 - Larry Lucas
 28 - Riverlynn Obermeier
 29 - Dixie Codner
 31 - Karleen Beckman

DECEMBER WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Floyd and Sharon Sorensen - December 17, 1966
Warren and Randi Pennell - December 18, 1993
Larry and Gloria Craven - December 28, 1963
Dick and Leola Harlow - December 31, 1956



California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

We received the following letter from the Resident Bishop of the Los Angeles area:

Dear First-Faith UMC of Grand Island,
 Thank you for your generous donation of \$750 to the Lahaina Relief Fund.

Your gift will provide immediate physical and spiritual support to our church and the Lahaina community. Every dollar will go towards the rebuilding of this historic part of Maui from the heartbreaking devastation of the fires (back in August). It will take all of us coming together to pray and work for their healing.

Our connectional system shows the best of us, and my heart is warmed by your gift and your heart of giving.

"Thank you" only begins to express our gratefulness. And so, I will say in a deeper way, Mahalo, and Aloha!

Grace y paz, Bishop Dotte Escobedo-Frank

HELPING ONE ANOTHER

FREE TO GOOD HOME: Currier Spinet Piano; must pick up; in great shape; call Sharon Sorensen at 308-382-7543.



VOLUNTEER SERVICE OPPORTUNITY

Our church, along with 4 other churches, help serve dinner to those in need at the Salvation Army 9 times per year.



We are in need of some volunteers that would be willing to help in 2024. It would be from 4:45 to 6:15 p.m. on a Thursday night.

Our dates for 2024 are:

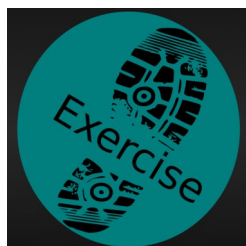
March 7	April 18	May 23	June 27	Aug. 1
Sept. 5	Oct. 17	Nov. 21		

If you can help, please call the church office and let Emily know or write the date(s) you are available on the attendance sheet on Sunday morning. We will need 2 to 3 people for each date. Thank you!

EXERCISE CLASSES

Strong Women
 Every Monday and Wednesday at 3:00 p.m.

Chair Yoga
 Every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.
 No 6:30 pm class on Dec. 21st.



Step Aerobics
 Every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday at 5:15 p.m.

There will be no classes on Christmas Day.

Wear comfortable clothes & come and join us!

Community Soup Supper

(this is a fundraiser for the church)
 Tuesday, January 16, 2024 from 5 to 7 p.m.

Cost: \$8.00 per person

This includes your choice of Chili, Chicken Noodle or Cheeseburger soup and dessert. See Sharon Sorensen or Mary Jo Mowinkel to help on the committee or donate supplies.

As of October 1st we have a new cleaning person. Her name is Jacinta Osantowski and she is originally from New Zealand. She is a wonderful person and has a lovely accent. If you see her around the church on Wednesdays, be sure to say hello and introduce yourself.



PARTNERS IN EDUCATION WITH ENGLEMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

We would love to have you join us in this ministry. This month, we will meet at Engleman on Thursday, December 14th, at 8:30 a.m. If you have questions, please contact Glenda Vetter at 308-383-1716.

Ladies' Sewing Group

December 12 and 26 at 9:30 a.m.

We meet at the church and all are welcome!



Men's Fellowship and Cornhole



Even if you've never played before, come on out and join us for some fun. We'll be playing every Thursday night (except for December 21st), at 7:30 pm, in the church sanctuary.

Please enter through the kitchen door.

MEN'S COFFEE TIME

Come and join us every Tuesday at 9 a.m. for some coffee and great fellowship at the church!



WHAT IS LUNCH BUNCH?



It's a monthly gathering of old and new friends. We gather to share a potluck meal (bring a dish to share) and have lots of good conversation. Then, we play a game or cards.

Come and join us on **Wednesday, December 13th, at 12 noon**. Then, save the date on your calendar for the second Wednesday of every month.

It will be at the church and everyone is welcome!



The Church Office will be closed on Monday, January 1st.

Trustee's Ministry

Definition: Effective Trustees will function as Christian stewards of property God has entrusted to the congregation.

Here are a few things that the Trustees have been working on in the past few months:

- 1 - The church switched from Spectrum to Allo for their internet and phones (to save money). But, when they came out, they cut the wiring and water line to the pump and we were without sprinklers for a month. They worked tirelessly to get it figured out and have the right people come and repair it.
- 2 - They have been working on spraying the weeds on the ball fields.
- 3 - Completed the process of selling a very small corner of the property to a neighbor.
- 4 - Had a roof leak repaired in the narthex.
- 5 - They moved the Scouts shed to a different location.
- 6 - The Food Pantry shelf was moved and bolted to the wall.
- 7 - The Prayer Path was mowed and weeds sprayed.
- 8 - They have been working with contractors to begin the installation of the new digital sign.
- 9 - They made the decision to replace one of our air-conditioner/heating units that was 21-years-old. The new one was installed on September 5th.

Thank you to our Trustees for faithfully working hard to keep the church in good repair!



S SINGLE
P PEOPLE
A ACHIEVING
R REAL
C CHRISTIAN
C CONNECTIONS

**What the Dickens?
Tea, Sweets and Treats
Saturday, December 9th
Meet at the church at 11 a.m.**

What the Dickens? is a locally owned British bakery founded by Beth Funkey and Caroline Kemp to bring a little bit of Britain to Hastings.

If you are single, we would love to have you join us!

Please RSVP to the church office by Wednesday, December 6th, so that we know how many to plan for. Everyone is responsible for their own costs.



CRAFT FAIR AND BAKE SALE UPDATE

Wow...wow...and wow! The people at First-Faith are truly amazing!! They came together and sewed, crafted and made beautiful and fun things to sell at the Craft Fair on Saturday, November 18th. And, for the Bake Sale, 11 people signed up to bring baked items to sell and probably 50 people brought things. It was quite fun to see everything being brought in the week of the event. And what a success! They brought in \$6,229 that will go towards meeting the budget for 2023.



2023 Noodlemaking

On November 1st, we all got together to make homemade noodles. Thank you so much to all those who came out to knead the dough, cut the noodles and spread them out to dry. Also, a big thank you to those who came to package the noodles and the people who helped set up and take down the tables.

We were able to make 23 bags this year :)



For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
Luke 2:11



The Church Office will be closing at noon on Friday, December 22nd, and will be closed on Christmas Day, December 25th. A very Merry Christmas to you all as we stop to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

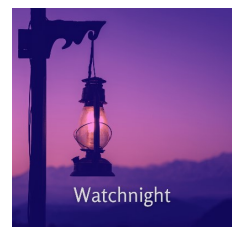
December 31, 2023 at 9:30 am
New Year's Eve—Luke 2:22-40

Watchnight

This year, the calendar gives us the opportunity to gather for Sunday morning worship on New Year's Eve. Historically New Year's Eve has held great significance for Methodists. Thus, this Sunday offers an excellent opportunity for our church that are not used to gathering on New Year's Eve to live into a piece of our heritage.

Beginning in 1755, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, encouraged gathering for worship on New Year's Eve for a Covenant Renewal Service. Central features of this service are remembering the past year—something of a communal examen—as well as recommitting to following Christ, often using the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer (*United Methodist Hymnal*, 607).

We hope you will join us as we remember the joys and struggles of the previous year and recommit ourselves in hope and love for the work of the coming year.





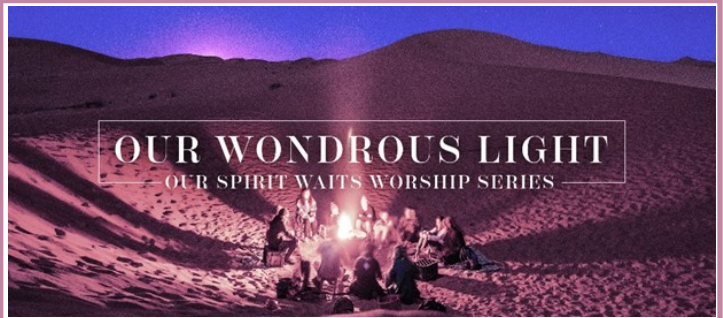
Our Refresh "Grandmas" would love to give you a break. We provide FREE quality childcare for ages 6 and under. If you need a few hours to get things done, bring your little ones by the church and our ladies will take great care of them! They will have fun during play time, reading, having a snack and making a craft.

We will be open on Wednesday from 9 to 11:30 a.m. - November 8th only

Please feel free to invite friends and family to use this service.
Questions? Call Sharon Sorensen at 308-382-7543.



A BIG THANK YOU to Heartland Shooting Park, Judy Jones and Floyd and Sharon Sorensen for providing some great greenery we used in our fresh arrangements for the Craft Fair and also some from in front of the church.



Sunday, December 24, 2023 at 5 p.m. — Christmas Eve Service
Luke 2:1-20

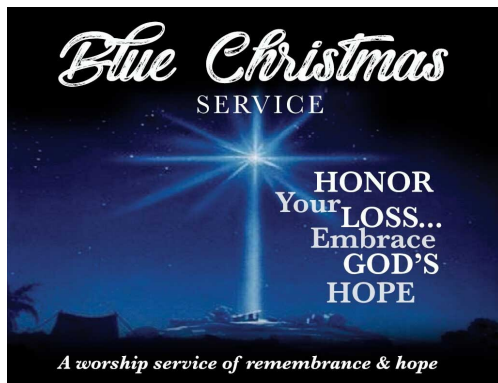
Our Wondrous Light

This year Christmas Eve is on a Sunday night, and our service will be at 5:00 pm. After a long season of Advent, and now making it to Christmas Eve, we may already be tired. It may seem silly to say it, but this is an amazing moment, Jesus has been born! A light in our darkness is shining. A light that will never leave us has arrived. We must lean into the light. We must make room. In our busy lives, we must make room. Because this baby, this Savior is polite; he has the manners his mom taught him. He'll wait.

He won't force himself on you, won't push his way into your busyness and demand attention. He'll wait. He'll wait until you turn, until you stop running. So, let us make room. The light is here shining bright and we get to make room in our lives for Jesus Christ.

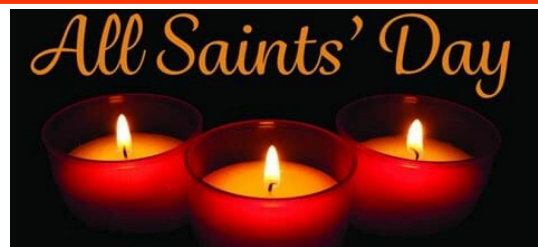
We hope that you will make Christmas Eve worship service a part of your Christmas experience. This is a wonderful service to invite family and friends, those who may have stepped away from church, those who need a boost for the season. Please invite those whom you love to be a part of this special night as we come together and make room for the Christ child.

Blue? Yes, blue as in the blues. As in "I am feeling blue." Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with health issues that puts a question mark over the future, and several other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our congregations and communities.



We hope that you will join us for an ecumenical Blue Christmas Service on Thursday, December 21st, at 6:30 p.m. as we come together and make space for those who are struggling during the holidays.

We will be worshipping with members of the Messiah Lutheran, First Presbyterian, and United Congregational churches for this special service.



On Sunday, November 5th, the names were read and the bell was rung for each of our loved ones who passed away this year. This is a way of honoring the impact their lives have had on us.

Vera Belle Thiem - December 30, 2022

Raymond Harp - January 8, 2023

Donald Glen Liff - February 25, 2023

Merna Clayton - March 31, 2023

Lela Embree - June 5, 2023

Jane Frances Mitchell - September 5, 2023



Advent is here, and we begin the Christian year anew with a season of waiting. As the days grow darker, we draw closer to the arrival of the Light that turns the world upside down—or right-side up! The journey toward and beyond the manger is one of reversing expectations, encountering what we thought we already knew in brand new ways, and receiving good news in unexpected places. So, with one foot in the prophets and another in the Gospels, we journey together as our spirit waits to welcome the Christ child and carry hope, peace, joy, and love as we live as disciples who anticipate the now-and-not-yet kingdom of God.

[December 3, 2023—First Sunday of Advent—Mark 13:24-37](#)

A Shocking Hope

Jesus comes to remind us that we are not alone. The master is coming, not as a threat, but a reminder that this life that we live, this faith that we have is leading somewhere. We may call it heaven, eternal life, or even the Kingdom of God. That is what we long for in the end, life. Life in all its fullness and meaning, life in all its joy and promise. That's what is coming; that is what is promised. But, for now we are commanded to stay vigilant and awake because Jesus is coming.

[December 10, 2023—Second Sunday of Advent—Mark 1:1-8](#)

A Just Peace

It is the second Sunday in Advent and maybe we need some peace. The hectic schedules are starting to get to us. The family plans, the juggling of so many obligations. The prophet Isaiah calls out “Comfort”, but those are not the words of John the Baptist. He calls for a reminder of our brokenness and our need for saving. John says that he is baptizing in water, but that when Christ comes he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Maybe that is the peace we need, not a peace from the busy calendar but a peace that speaks to our souls. John is confident that the One who is coming will offer true peace. A peace that transforms, equips and unites. A just peace that lifts those who have been pressed down, gathers in those who have been ignored, strengthens those who have been made weak.

[December 17, 2023—Third Sunday in Advent—John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

Manger Tales (Children's Program)

A Fierce Joy

Is it just me, or does the lectionary seem fixated on John the Baptist this Advent season? Of course, he is our Advent icon, all that preparing the way and warnings and baptisms. People get ready! That is the song that is always on his lips, beating in time with his heart. John doesn't just remind us to wait but shows us how to wait. It isn't passive. We must lean into the joy of waiting like John. It may seem like hollering into the darkness, but we are called to act on our hope. To be fiercely joyful in hope. It is the fierce joy in community – the shared fierce joy that enables us to bring light to a world needing to learn to see again.

[December 24, 2023—Fourth Sunday in Advent—Luke 1:46b-55](#)

Love that Transforms Us

Mary is the model for what it means to be a follower. She shows us what surrendering to God is all about. She is the quintessential disciple of the one to whom she is about to give birth if that doesn't mess with your head a little bit. But it wasn't an easy “yes.” She's perplexed, but she knows that this will change things and her forever. It takes faith to say “yes” to God because it changes us forever. It takes faith that comes from a love that is bigger than we are and calls us to know life.



First-Faith United Methodist Church
 4190 W Capital Ave
 Grand Island, NE 68803
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 Grand Island, NE

Worship Schedule

Sunday

9:30am - Morning Service
 10:30 am - Sunday School and Fellowship Time

Office Phone: (308) 384-5620

Office Email:
 firstfaithumc@gmail.com

Website:
<http://firstfaithumc.org>

Office Hours:
 Mon-Fri 8:00-4:30
 (Closed 12-1 pm - Lunch Hour)

Pastor: Rev. Wm. Ray Stone



New Steps Youth Group

Our youth made 3 tic-tac-toe games to sell at the Craft Fair! Thanks to Sharon Sorensen for making our bags for us!

We will be meeting on the following Wednesdays in December:
 December 6 - Update and clean the Prayer Path signs
 (weather permitting)

December 13 - Christmas Party! For our Christmas gathering, please bring a wrapped pair of silly socks for our annual sock game and 5 canned goods for the food pantry. We will play games that night and eat/decorate cookies!

Children will be practicing for our Christmas program during Bible Time for Kids each Sunday in addition to the Saturday practices. Please make sure your child attends to fully enjoy this event!



Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes
 We were able to put together 26 Christmas Child Boxes for Samaritan's Purse. The youth would like to thank ALL in the congregation who helped make this possible!