



the Media



The Media is produced monthly by First United Methodist Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.

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December & January Office Closings

- Monday, December 26
- Monday, January 2

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
401 S. Spring Ave., Sioux Falls, SD 57104
OFFICE PHONE: 605-336-3652;
WEBSITE: www.sfumc.org

Advent, a time of celebration and hope

Advent is a time of hope and anticipation. It speaks not only of the blessed event of the birth of the Christ child but also of that day when the triumphant Christ shall establish his reign over every heart, when “nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks ...” or as Paul says, “When every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”

One of the great pieces of music that helps many people celebrate this special season is Handel's “Messiah”. Handel's life story is itself a living parable of the meaning of Christian hope. After a brief period of popularity he faded away into poverty. It is said that he felt so defeated that he would wander aimlessly along the darkened streets of London convinced that he was without a friend in the world. To add to his despair he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that severely impaired one entire side of his body. It was at this low time of his life that he was given a manuscript by an amateur poet named Charles Gibbon. Gibbon wanted him to compose a score for his



REV. DICK BOYD

Associate Pastor
First United Methodist Church

new work. Somehow a spark was ignited in Handel's heart. He worked feverishly for days and almost miraculously in those few days he produced the “Messiah” that has thrilled audiences for nearly 250 years.

When parts of the New Testament were written the early church was at the kind of low ebb that Handel experienced before he produced the “Messiah”. Severely persecuted from without and torn by dissension from within the New Testament Church went through several times of crises. Only one thing sustained them during their most trying times. That was the conviction that the Messiah had not forgotten them or forsaken them but that he would return to rescue those who had been faithful, often unto death. There were times when on every believer's lips were those precious words, “Come

quickly, Lord Jesus”.

Advent is a celebration of hope. It is the celebration of people who know what it is to be in darkness and to see a great light. It is far more than tinsel and holy and silver bells. Advent goes right to the heart of the Christian experience. If Christmas is the season of childhood, Advent is the season of maturity.

Isaiah looked forward to his return. I hope that you are not simply looking forward to the superficial elements of this special season. I hope ours is a mature faith that can declare, even when it seems that we have come to the end of our rope, even when everywhere we turn there seems to be darkness, that we are not without hope, for God is alive. With such a faith maybe we can sing with Handel, “And he shall reign forever and ever. King of kings and Lord of Lords.”



Live Nativity, Streets of Bethlehem share Christ's birth

DECEMBER
11

• Live Nativity,
Streets of
Bethlehem
from 5-7 p.m.

DECEMBER
17

• Women's
Christmas Tea
at 2 p.m.

DECEMBER
24

• Christmas Eve
Services at 5, 7
and 9 p.m.

DECEMBER
25

• Christmas Day
Service at
9:30 a.m.

JANUARY
1

• New Year's Day
Service at
9:30 a.m.

The Live Nativity and Streets of Bethlehem is a great opportunity for First Church to reach out to our neighborhood and community by spreading the story of Jesus Christ's birth! The experience will allow visitors to enjoy all of the great sensations of the Christmas season — the solemn beauty and awe of baby Jesus in the stable, the bustling energy and excitement of the Streets of Bethlehem, the fellowship of sharing a meal, and the joy of singing children.

The Live Nativity will be held on Sunday, December 11. Beginning our evening will be the children's Sunday School Christmas program in the Sanctuary at 4:30 p.m. From 5-7 p.m. we will offer:

- A re-creation of the Nativity scene, complete with animals and actors.
- The Streets of Bethlehem and Marketplace, where all will be able to make crafts and participate in activities that were the daily work of



people living over 2000 years ago.

- Versions of the Christmas story, as told by Mary and others.
- Soup, bread and dessert supper.

We need your help! We need donations of bread, cookies and bars. We need large roasters we can borrow. We need donations of nude colored knee high stockings. We need people to help with set up and tear down of the marketplace, and people

to help with the event (greeters, marketplace workers, live Nativity scene characters, inside characters for the "meet and greet" stations) as well as monetary donations.

If you have questions about the volunteer opportunities, please contact Lynne Jones at jonesl@sfumc.org. Please prayerfully consider how you can help. This can be a great outreach opportunity for First Church, allowing us to invite our neighbors and community into our church.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: Christmas holiday, New Year's worship times

The Christ Child's birth is celebrated with three Christmas Eve Services at First Church on Saturday, December 24. The 5 p.m. Christmas Eve Service is designed for families, and along with the 7 p.m. Service will be filled with candles and carols and all the beauty of Christmas.

The 9 p.m. Christmas Eve Communion Service celebrates the Lord's Supper and is led by the youth of our church.

Though the three services are different, amid candle light with Christmas music and the Christmas story, we remember that night so long ago when God became flesh and dwelt among us.

On Christmas Eve the fulfillment of God's promises are realized in the coming of Emmanuel, "God with us."

On Sundays, December 25 and January 1, there will be only one worship service at 9:30 a.m.

UMW invite all women, girls to Christmas Tea

All women and girls are extended a special invitation to the Christmas Tea hosted by United Methodist Women. Please join us for an afternoon of delicious desserts, interesting conversation, a beautiful Christmas program on the harp by Anna Vorhes, and tea on December 17, at 2 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

Reservations may be made in the Fellowship Hall on December 4, and December 11. There is no cost to attend the Christmas Tea but reservations are needed.



• CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Children's Program celebrates the birth of Jesus

The Annual Children's Sunday School Christmas Program will be December 11, at 4:30 p.m. *First United Methodist Church Sunday School Children Celebrate the Birth of Jesus*, will be presented.

The children are practicing the

music during Sunday School.

The rehearsal for the program will be during Sunday School on December 11.

Please join us as the children present this version of the Christmas Story as their gift to

our church.

The Christmas Program marks the beginning of the Live Nativity and Streets of Bethlehem.

Please plan to stay after the Christmas program for a soup supper.

Advent, Christmas activities abound for FUMC Children's Ministries

Believe it or not, we are at the beginning of the busy season of Advent. This is the time of the year that whizzes by for adults and drags for our children. It is my prayer that we all take some time to savor this season as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

2 Year Old Room: The Rock a Bye class will focus on the story of Jesus' birth and celebrate the birth of Jesus as told in Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-2:12. They will be doing some "hands-on" activities as well as reading stories. They will bring a picture story card home each week so the parents can continue to share their faith with their children.

3 & 4 Year Old Rooms: The B.I.G. Idea for December is: We believe that the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem shows us that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Bible Verse for December is He will be born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:5. We will be studying the stories of The Prophecies, Journey to Bethlehem, Jesus' Birth and The Shepherds.

Kindergarten – 2nd Grades: The Power Xpress unit for December is Good News. The main idea for this unit is: The first people to hear the good news of Jesus each had a special role to play in introducing that news to the world. Each of us is



MARY JANE RICHARDSON

Minister of Children's Education
First United Methodist Church

called to share the Good News of God's Son, Jesus. The Bible Verses are: For nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37. My soul magnifies the Lord, and the spirit rejoices in God my Savior. Luke 1:47 and She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus. Matthew 1:21.

3rd Grade: The B.I.G. Idea for December is: We believe that the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem shows us that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Bible Verse for December is: He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote. Matthew 2:5. We will be studying the stories of The Prophecies, Journey to Bethlehem, Jesus' Birth and The Shepherds.

Covenant Club: They will continue the unit called God Provides. During this unit, they will explore the practice of tithing, how it honors God and helps others. They will learn when we trust God with our money; God will use it to help those in need.

Jesus instructs us not to focus on getting more possessions; God will always provide for us.

Children's Church: We will use the curriculum Sharing God's Love and will study the Advent lessons during December.

Disciples in Training and Bible Zone Live: During December, our Wednesday night groups will use the curriculum In the Land of the Messiah as we prepare for Christmas. We will explore the stories of Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Elizabeth, The Messiah is Born and By the Star's Light.

We hope to see you all at the Sunday School Christmas Program followed by Streets of Bethlehem and Live Nativity.

We will **not** have Sunday School on Christmas Day or New Year's Day. There will be one worship service at 9:30 a.m. and there will be worship bags available.

Have a blessed Advent Season and a Happy New Year.

DECEMBER
11

• Children's
Sunday School
Christmas
Program at
4:30 p.m.

DECEMBER
25

• No Sunday
School

JANUARY
1

• No Sunday
School



• FAITH, HEALTH AND CARING MINISTRIES

Christmas Service of Remembrance and Hope

Approaching the first Christmas without a loved one can sometimes accentuate grief during a season of the year that is full of memories. We want to be a part of the healing process and offer a service that will be remembering and honoring your loved one.

This service will be held Sunday December 4, at 4 p.m. in the sanctuary. This is for members and friends of FUMC who have grieved the death of an immediate or extended family member in the past year. Please RSVP the church office at 336-3652 if you are planning to attend.



receive booklets and handouts such as “Your Game Plan to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes, helpful information and a pedometer. Dr. Fred Lourien will be attending to answer any questions you may have after the program.

People with pre-diabetes usually have no symptoms, and many who learn about their pre-diabetes think it's no big deal. The good news is that it can be reversed before it turns into diabetes. The best way to fight pre-diabetes and get your blood sugar back in the normal range is with a coordinated plan of healthy nutrition, increased physical activity and lifestyle coping strategies that support modest weight loss if you are overweight. (Modest weight loss is defined as losing 5 to 10 percent of body weight.) Research shows that following such a plan not only reduces diabetes risk, but does it better than using medication.

Improvements in glucose levels may be seen in as little as three months.

If you have pre-diabetes, you need to start making lifestyle changes quickly. There's a window of only about three to six years in which you can turn around elevated glucose levels before it turns into the chronic life long disease of diabetes.

If you are unable to attend this forum, but are interested in the information you can contact the Parish Nurse by phoning the church office at 336-3652.

Blood Pressures will be taken December 11, from 8:30-10:30 a.m. in the Round Table Dining Room.

Thank you to all who donated blood November 6. We had a total of 30 people who were able to give! The Community Blood Bank is extremely grateful for your efforts! Since we have partnered with the Blood Bank, the First United Methodist Church has had a total collection of 282 pints!

DECEMBER

4

- Christmas Service of Remembrance and Hope at 4 p.m.

DECEMBER

11

- Pre-Diabetes Health Forum from 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- Blood Pressures will be taken from 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Pre-Diabetes Health Forum

On Sunday, December 11, there will be a health forum on pre-diabetes from 10:30-11:30a.m. in the Fireplace Room.

Please come to this health forum promoted by the SD Diabetes Coalition in which you will listen to a 10 minute DVD,

• MISSION OF THE MONTH

KidStop, United Day Care December Missions of the Month

The Mission of the Month for December is KidStop and United Day Care.

KidStop is a free after school and summer recreation program for children and youth in grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. They provide a safe, caring environment with enrichment activities, homework help, snacks, crafts and games. Their focus is on learning life skills and building community. Cur-

rently we are licensed to serve 20 children per day. Kidstop began as a mission of this church in 1989 as a Latch Key program and is funded by this church and the United Way.

United Day Care has been in business since 1970 — 41 wonderful years of serving children and their families! We have two locations in Sioux Falls, one at First United Methodist and the other at Asbury United Meth-

odist. They serve children from 2 to 10 years of age and currently have 58 preschoolers and 20 school age children attending their centers.

The families come from a variety of household incomes, but their mission is to serve those of lower incomes. The goal of United Day Care is to give children a nurturing environment while they learn and their parents work.



• YOUTH MINISTRIES

Storm Mountain trip a success!

On November 11-13, nine confirmation students took part in a retreat to our United Methodist camp at Storm Mountain. The weekend consisted of hiking, fellowship, games, study and

worship. Being in such a special part of God's creation made learning and sharing an easier and more memorable experience. We are very grateful to the students

who made this weekend a priority for them and the parents who encouraged them to take part.

*Blessings,
Mark and Lisa*

Thank you for supporting youth missions

Thank you for your generous donation of time, talent or treasure to the 53rd Annual Turkey Dinner, Silent Auction and Country Store.

Your gift benefits First United Methodist Church youth mission projects in Sioux Falls and throughout the world. You are greatly appreciated.

May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord show you His favor and give you His peace.

JANUARY

7


Winter Camp 2012 at Inspiration Hills

1st UMC Youth Calendar

DECEMBER
 Dec. 7 – MS regular youth group, HS book study at Johnsen's home
 Dec. 14 – Service project: Salvation Army bell ringing
 Dec. 21 – MS and HS lead sing along @ Dow Rummell 6:30-7:30 p.m.
 Dec. 25-Jan.1 – NO SUNDAY SCHOOL OR YOUTH GROUP

JANUARY
 Jan. 4 – MS and HS regular youth group
 Jan. 7-8 – Winter Camp at Inspiration Hills for MS and HS
 Jan. 11 – MS regular youth group, HS book study at Johnsen's home
 Jan. 18 – MS and HS service project: Kids Against Hunger
 Jan. 25 – MS and HS service project: Children's Care Hospital

STAY CONNECTED!
 For all the latest news and updates, join our Facebook group.
 Contact Mark and Lisa for more information at johnsens@sfumc.



Winter Camp 2012!

"Amazing Grace"



JANUARY 7-8, 2012
Inspiration Hills
Middle School and High School Students from around the Sioux Falls Area will gather together for a fun weekend of fellowship, worship and study.

- Cost:** Free for First UMC youth
Includes: food, lodging, transportation, a t-shirt and time to explore what Grace really means and how it can transform our lives!
- When:** Saturday, January 7 – Sunday, January 8
Leaving your home church in time to arrive at Inspiration Hills by 10 a.m.
Returning to your home church around noon on Sunday.
- Pack:** Sleeping bag, pillow, Bible, pen, journal, clothes for outside and inside (boots, hats, gloves/mittens). Bring change for pop/snack machine and money for tubing (\$6) if you want to tube Saturday afternoon.



First Church Charge Conference, December 4

Every member of the congregation is a voting participant in Charge (Church) Conference. We will look back at the past year, approve parts of the budget for the coming year; and we'll be receiving the fourth "minimal factor" report from the last Natural Church Development survey which will help determine the major ministry

emphasis for the next year. So your participation is vital.

We will also be restructuring our Church Council and Ministry Teams as we elect church leadership. This is one of the final steps in fulfilling the goals arising from the Church Consultation process of August 2010 as we refocus on "making disciples for Jesus Christ for the

transformation of the world."

The Charge Conference will be on Sunday, December 4, following the 11 a.m. worship service. We will start with sub-sandwiches in the Fellowship Hall and quickly move into the meeting.

The Charge Conference will be conducted by District Superintendent Roy Caudill.

DECEMBER

1

• U.M.W. Unit Meeting at 11:45 a.m.

DECEMBER

4

• Ingathering Bake Sale beginning at 7:30 a.m.
• Charge Conference at noon

There is still time to return Stewardship Pledge Cards

The month of November has been a busy month at First United Methodist Church with our annual stewardship campaign which starts the motion of planning financially for 2012 and the future.

We have set a goal of \$2,000,000 on our 1st UMCopoly Board. This will keep track of all giving including pledges, special offerings, Ingathering and much more as we move forward in supporting the mission and ministry of FUMC.

We encourage all of you, if you have not already, to return your pledge card to the church as it takes ALL of us working together to reach this goal. With our pledges, we not only work together within our church but with other United Methodist Churches as many needs are best met by joining together.

Remember that our annual stewardship campaign is much more than fund-raising — it also helps each of us to grow spiritually in our relationship with God through the faithful management of all that God gives us.

• INGATHERING NEWS

Ingathering bake sale offers cookies, candies

The annual Ingathering Bake Sale is coming up the first Sunday of December.

The Ingathering team invites you to help us in this fund-raising project by donating your homemade baked goods and candies, if you are able, and/or purchasing the tasty treats to take home to enjoy.

Our bake sale will be in the Fellowship Hall on Decem-

ber 4, from 7:30 a.m. until all items are sold.

Donated baked goods and other food items may be brought to the church on Saturday, December 3, from 9-10:30 a.m. so that they may be readied for sale on Sunday.

Funds raised go toward Ingathering's efforts with the UMCOR disaster kits and hunger projects.

Upside Down Christmas, United Day Care program for December U.M.W. Unit Meeting

The UMW unit meeting will be December 1, at 11:45 a.m. in the Round Table Dining Room with the Executive Board as hostesses. The program will be Upside Down Christmas and the children from United Day

Care Center will provide the special music. The Executive Board will meet prior to the Unit Meeting at 10:30 a.m. in the Memorial Room.

There will not be a Unit Meeting in January.

December 15 Circle Meetings

Anna	Dianne Wagner	9:30 a.m.
Rachel	Beryl Olson	9:30 a.m.
Sarah	Round Table Room	11 a.m.
Deborah	Friendship Room	1 p.m.
Nan(cy)	Friendship Room	6:30 p.m.
Rebecca	Fireplace Room	7 p.m.



• **OUR CHURCH FAMILY**

Our Sympathy to the families of:

Dr. Ralph Blackwell, Kim Brenden, Dotothy McTigue, Richard Cherry, John Glaus, Rita Jans, Bruce Walters

Marriages:

Michelle Kuntz and Josiah Nordmark

Anniversaries:

- Robert and Deanna Agar will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary on December 31, with an open house from 2-4 p.m. at the Inn on Westport. The couple requests no gifts. If you are unable to attend the open house, you may send greetings to the couple at 4000 S. Westport, #250, Sioux Falls, SD 57106
- Ron and Edna Scott will be celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary on Thursday, December 15, with a private family dinner. The couple requests no gifts but greetings may be sent to them at 2804 E. Orchard Place, #306, Sioux Falls, SD 57103.

Hidden Saints:

- Thank you to Will Archer, George Niimi, John Bahnson, Dennis Reents, and Doug Erickson for picking up leaves on Church grounds.
- Thank you to Will Archer for taking care of the flower planters in front of the Church.
- Thank you to Tom Jones for working on the sprinkler system on Church grounds.
- Thank you to Bill Schepeler for building Cabinets for men's breakfast supplies.
- Thank you to Arden Shields for welding equipment in need of repair.
- Thank you to Don Jones for donating building project supplies.
- A special thanks to Pastor Bill, Mark Johnsen and Rod Mader for being our Kidstop rescue bus drivers this fall.
- A special thank you to United Day Care Staff and Children who helped Kidstop with the Wall Of Peace Project for Veteran's Day.
- Thank you to Steve Stauffacher for helping with building projects.

Hospitalized:

Sanford USD Medical Center	Lee Wintersteen	Judy Moulton
Zachary Brummond		Sioux Falls Specialty Hospital
Marlys Hink	Avera McKennan Hospital	Lynne Jones
Ronald Ehrisman	and University Center	Carole Priest
Marilyn Jensen	Don Bradley	
Jessica Kramer	Russell Davis	Avera Heart Hospital
Janice Pierson	Louise Fonder	Sue Kuehn

• **NOTE OF THANKS**

Our very best thank you to a church congregation who really cares! Blessings to each of you for all the prayers, calls tokens of care with cards, phone calls, food memorials, flowers, many, many who

served the luncheon following the memorial and prepared the room for the annual Turkey Dinner — God's blessings to each of you.
*In deepest appreciation,
The family and friends of Kim Benden*

• **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Income Recieved Through 10/31/11.....	\$853,066
Expenses through 10/31/11.....	\$889,193
Balance as of 10/31/11	\$(36,127)
Ministry Income recieved through 11/28/11.....	\$92,322
Capital Income recieved through 11/28/11	\$2,962

• **AD BOARD HIGHLIGHTS**

- A special committee met with the Conference to discuss out 2011 apportionment.
- Efforts will be made by Stewardship and Finance to create more awareness and understanding of current and future church finances.
- Foundation announced a new position is being created, Director of Planned Giving.

• **DECEMBER GREETERS**

December 4, 2011

8 a.m.	Office Door	Jim & Yvonne Schmuck
	Sanctuary Door	Linda Geiken
	Duluth Door	George Niimi
9:30 a.m.	Office Door	Nancy Beck
	Sanctuary Door	Gary & Jane Healy
	Duluth Door	Vince & Beth Weber
11 a.m.	Office Door	Ernest & Donna Tyler
	Sanctuary Door	Doug Erickson

December 11, 2011

8 a.m.	Office Door	Jim and Yvonne Schmuck
	Sanctuary Door	Bev Getzin
	Duluth Door	George Niimi
9:30 a.m.	Office Door	Rich and Anita Brennehan
	Sanctuary Door	Gary and Jane Healy
	Duluth Door	Vince and Beth Weber
11 a.m.	Office Door	Ernest and Donna Tyler
	Sanctuary Door	Jim and Michelle Olivier

December 18, 2011

8 a.m.	Office Door	Linda Geiken
	Sanctuary Door	Bev Getzin
	Duluth Door	Sally Dossett
9:30 a.m.	Office Door	Nancy Beck
	Sanctuary Door	Matt and Renee Munce
	Duluth Door	Vince and Beth Weber
11 a.m.	Office Door	Don Veglahn
	Sanctuary Door	Jim and Michelle Olivier

December 25, 2011

9:30 a.m.	Office Door	Marilyn Moorlach
	Sanctuary Door	Don Veglahn



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• CHURCH NEWS BRIEFS

S.A.G.E.S. will meet December 14

The **S.A.G.E.S.** will meet on Wednesday, December 14, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., in the Round Table dining Room. "Celebrating Christmas" will be highlighted by the United Day Care Singers.

Rev. Rod Gist will lead us in devotions.

The \$5.00 meal reservation deadline is Monday, December 12, at 4 p.m. Please call the church office at 336-3652 with any questions.

HyVee and Sunshine gift cards for sale

Did you know that HyVee or

Sunshine gift cards make wonderful Christmas gifts? They may be purchased in \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100 or \$200 sizes. They are available in the Fellowship room each Sunday from 8:30-11 a.m. each Sunday.

We will not be selling on Christmas Day so plan your Christmas gifts soon. The United Methodist Women receive 5% of the sales. That money is used to support various mission projects locally and worldwide.

"Reel" Faith not being held in December

"Reel" Faith is taking December off but we urge everyone to come on the sec-

ond Sunday night, December 11, for the Live Nativity and Streets of Bethlehem activities.

"Reel" Faith resumes in January with "Water for Elephants."

Kidstop Kuddles Project

Kidstop is planning to gift the children of the program with a Kuddles sack. We would like to include:

- A new standard size pillow (Jean is making personal pillow cases for each one)
- New quilt or blanket
- PJ's and slipper socks
- Several books

We will have a Kuddles

Board available in the Fellowship Hall with removable post it notes with our needs for this project.

None of this will need to be wrapped but should be returned by December 17, so we can get them ready for distribution.

Thank you for all your support of this project and our program through out the year.

We are also having our Holiday Store for the children to choose gifts for their family and will have ideas posted on the same board for other things that we can use to stock our store. Be sure to take a look and see what you might have to clean out your home and gift to a deserving family.

**Remarks of Jack Marsh, delivered at Sioux Falls First
United Methodist Church, Sunday, Nov. 20, 2011:**

Good morning everyone. Thank you to Pastor Bill Bates and to the lay leadership for inviting me to speak about the spiritual and financial health of our beloved church, to which we pledged our loyalty and we promised to uphold with our presence, gifts and service.

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Jack Marsh. I'm a Northeastern transplant drawn to this church exactly 19 years ago when I was transferred from New Jersey to South Dakota. I have been a journalist for more than 40 years. I make my living by being observant, nosy and asking a lot of questions. I'm also an advocate for civil discourse and open communication - at home, at work, in the community, and yes, in this wonderful church family. My outspokenness - rather than my limited wisdom - is undoubtedly the reason why I'm standing before you this morning.

"Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." That is how the United Methodist Church describes itself -- and those are reasons why I embrace being a United Methodist. Among the many blessings I will celebrate this Thanksgiving week are my membership in this congregation and its connection to a larger denomination, a global Christian community of committed, though imperfect, United Methodists who are bound together spiritually and financially.

My job frequently takes me to Nashville, Tennessee, where I work in the same Vanderbilt University neighborhood where the Methodist Church has many of its world offices. The walking route between my hotel and my office goes by 1908 Grand Avenue, headquarters of the General Board of Discipleship. There is a simple but bold mission statement written on the sign. It reads: "Equipping World-Changing Disciples." I walked past that sign six times this week. And each time, I swelled with pride because I too am a United Methodist -- and in some small way all of us are helping to equip world-changing disciples in the name of Jesus Christ. It is that connection to a global church and a global mission that distinguishes the United Methodist denomination from many other Christian denominations and independent churches.

I was baptized, confirmed and raised in a Methodist Church. The preacher's kid was my best friend in high school. My life was shaped by experiences and friendships developed through Sunday school, Methodist Youth Fellowship, Methodist summer camps and retreats, and at a fine United Methodist college in Ohio that set the foundation and direction for my entire adult life. I was married in a Methodist church. Both our daughters were married in this church. Our grandson and youngest granddaughter were baptized here.

I see the itinerant system of pastoral appointments as an asset - not a liability. Every local church needs a pastor - and in the United Methodist system, every church gets a pastor. Rather than local churches hiring and firing their own pastors, United Methodist bishops appoint pastors to serve in local churches.

When First Church was in a full-blown crisis about six years ago, Bishop Kiesey responded to our deep concerns and she answered our prayers by appointing Rev. Bill Bates, who stepped into a wounded, divided congregation and encouraged the healing that was so desperately needed. Bill Bates, through the words he preached and the pastoral care he provided, helped to restore our spiritual health and our faith. Now, with the upcoming retirements of both Bill Bates and Dick Boyd, we are about to face another change in pastoral leadership, as we welcome Rev. Bob Ruedebusch as our new senior pastor. That's an exciting prospect and an opportunity for us to stretch ourselves to a new level.

First Church remains a vital and vibrant Christian community, among the largest and most involved congregations of the Dakotas Conference. But we are an aging congregation, one that has seen a decline in membership and in worship attendance over the past few years. We welcome new members but not in sufficient numbers to offset those we've lost to death, moves and transfers.

Despite the loyalty and generosity of the core membership, total income has declined, expenses exceed income and we no longer can count on bequests and special designated funds to balance the budget. Most of those designated funds have been depleted. We are at a crossroads. So, I pose this fundamental question: Are the best days of First Church behind us; or are they ahead of us?

The challenge is large; the need is immediate. As of November 1st, we are \$88,000 behind in meeting our expenses and obligations for 2011. Most of that - about \$51,000 - is owed to the Dakotas Conference and to the greater United Methodist Church to pay insurance, pastor pensions, health care, to support ministries and missions, and underwrite the administrative costs of the Conference and the church at large.

First Church has a long and valued tradition of meeting its obligations and operating within its means. Fiscal responsibility is a defining characteristic. Ending the year in the red and paying less than 100 percent of our commitment to the Dakotas Conference is a painful, disturbing prospect. Although time is short, we do have the ability to make up that budget gap, to regain our financial stability and integrity, to position ourselves for growth and a smooth transition to new pastoral leadership in 2012.

It is not up to some one or to a select few to solve this critical issue. It is the obligation of each and every member of this church to contribute to the solution. As you are able, please, I implore you, prayerfully consider a special and generous gift on top of what you've already pledged or given in 2011. And then let that new, higher level of giving be your minimum total gift in 2012. I am confident that our best days are still ahead of us.

Thank you for your unconditional love and faithful support of First United Methodist Church, for the beliefs you hold, for the lives you lead and for the examples you set. May God bless this congregation, our lay leadership and pastors, and may He inspire us to be world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ.