FRANKLIN FIRST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

STEEPLE BELL

DECEMBER 2026 NEWSLETTER



PREPARING HEARTS:

REDISCOVERING THE WONDER OF ADVENT THROUGH ANCIENT TRADITIONS

BY PASTOR LAURA SAUNDERS

What if this Advent we slowed down, quieted our hearts, and experienced worship in a way that connects us with Christians across the centuries?

We are part of a long and beautiful story of people who have waited, hoped, prayed, and celebrated the coming of Jesus Christ.

Most of us are accustomed to a comfortable, informal style of worship. We enjoy familiar hymns, friendly conversations, a welcoming atmosphere, and the freedom to come before God just as we are. There is something wonderful about that! After all, God isn't concerned about whether we are wearing our Sunday best or whether we remembered to turn off our cell phones before the sermon.

But this Advent, I would like to invite us to experience something a little different. We are going to explore a more traditional, or what is sometimes called "high church," style of worship. Don't panic! Come as you are, and rest assured that nobody is going to start speaking in Latin, and you won't need a seminary degree to follow along! Instead, we will be incorporating some of the beautiful traditions of the historic Christian church into our worship.

Why try something different? Because sometimes experiencing something familiar in a new way helps us see it with fresh eyes.

Advent is not simply the four Sundays before Christmas. It is a season of preparation, anticipation, and holy expectation. It invites us to step away from the busyness of the world and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

Think about it: We spend weeks preparing our homes for Christmas. We decorate, shop, bake, wrap presents, attend parties, and make lists. Some of us even begin shopping before Thanksgiving! Yet, in the middle of all that preparation, we can forget to prepare the one place that matters most—our hearts.

The traditions of the historic church can help us do just that. These practices remind us that our faith is bigger than our individual preferences. We are part of a long and beautiful story of people who have waited, hoped, prayed, and celebrated the coming of Jesus Christ.

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Bringing Christmas Joy to Franklin Families



Franklin First, with Tami Chamberlain as director, is again leading the Community Christmas Basket Ministry for local households in need. The sign-up was held on the first two Mondays in November, with 58 families registered.



Each family will receive a food basket created for the number of people in the house. Ministry partners will be providing part of the menu, including the Franklin Pantry, Franklin Schools, and the Franklin Area Community Services. Local volunteers transport items to the church, and another team works to create the holiday-appropriate nutritional boxes. Students from the high school are typically part of the volunteer base. Most of these provisions were sponsored by people who chose to donate $25 per basket for the mission.

An Angel Tree complete with tags for each child will soon be available. Gifts for the child you choose should be returned wrapped and tagged. The Thanksgiving special offering will offset the cost of purchasing teenage gifts.

Franklin First is a church that cares deeply for our community. Thanks for the hours of volunteering and the sharing of resources that make this important ministry possible.



Share the Joy of the Season: Sponsor a Christmas Food Basket

This Christmas, you have the opportunity to bring hope, encouragement, and a warm holiday meal to neighbors facing financial hardship right here in our community.

For just $25 per basket, you can provide a local family with essential groceries and holiday staples—ensuring they can gather around the table and experience the joy of Christmas together. Every contribution is a practical, meaningful way to share Christ's love with families who need it most this season.

Please consider sponsoring one or more Christmas food baskets today. You can make your gift **on our website, in the Sunday offering, or mail to the church office.**

Thank you for your generosity and for helping make Christmas brighter for local families!



Preparing Hearts

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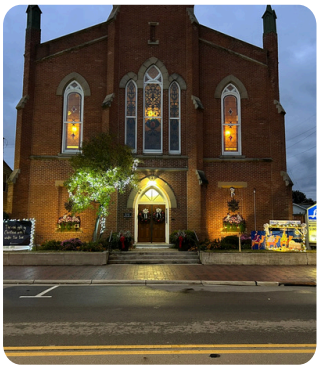
I want to emphasize that this is not about suggesting that one style of worship is better than another. God can be glorified through a contemporary praise song, a traditional hymn, a spontaneous prayer, or a carefully written liturgy. What matters is the heart with which we come before God. This is an opportunity to stretch ourselves spiritually.

So, as we enter this Advent season, I invite you to come with an open mind and an expectant heart. Resist the temptation to compare everything with what we normally do. Instead, ask yourself: What might God be saying to me through this experience? What might I discover about the beauty and mystery of Advent?

May this Advent be a time when we slow down, look beyond the decorations and celebrations, and rediscover the wonder of God's promise to us.

Following the Star, Sharing the Joy: Franklin First Participates in Very Merry Main Street









A group of very creative Franklin First folks worked to create a free-standing window display for the city's Very Merry Main Street Window Wonderland event held November 14. Although our church does not have a traditional storefront window, the frame-based display beautifully showcases our Advent and Christmas theme, "Follow the Star; Find the Joy." Window boxes and planters were also decorated with festive touches to welcome visitors throughout the season.

The display has already drawn attention from the community, with some festival attendees even using the church steps as a backdrop for family Christmas photos!

The Window Wonderland contest is open for public voting. Be sure to stop by the church, view the display, and cast your vote by scanning the QR code posted near the window on the front lawn. Every vote helps showcase the creativity and ministry presence of Franklin First in our community.

A special thanks to all who shared their time, talents, and creativity to bring this project to life and help spread the joy of the season!

The Power of Connection: Franklin First Receives $3,000 Outreach Grant

We have been notified that we will be receiving the following grant next year.

- A Great Miami River District “Community Connection” grant in the amount of $3,000 to support the outreach work we do in the schools and community.

Once again we are benefiting from being part of a “connectional church” where apportionment dollars are reallocated to the ministries of those churches who are doing good in the community. One eligibility requirement for these grants is to have paid and continue to pay 100% of our apportionments. Your continued faithful support of the church has resulted in some real financial blessings.





Did you know that one of the easiest ways to serve is by helping create a welcoming atmosphere on Sunday mornings? Whether greeting at the door, serving as an usher, or simply introducing yourself to a visitor, your friendly smile can make all the difference. If you're interested in serving on a hospitality team as a greeter or an usher, contact the church office at 937-746-5232 or office@franklinfirstumc.og

Blessed Beyond Measure:
The Difference Your Generosity Makes

The year 2026 is almost ready to draw to a close, and Franklin First has engaged in some amazing ministry this year:

- More than 2700 weekend snack packs will have been distributed to Gerke and Schenck Elementary children in need. This year, Franklin High School's National Honor Society partnered with us to provide assistance with packaging the snack packs. We are so grateful for their help!
- We provided literacy tutoring for twenty first-grade students at Gerke. These kids also received free books regularly for their home library. The students love the relationships they build with their tutors.
- Our church provided appreciation gifts for Gerke staff at the end of the school year.
- We collected school supplies, which were given to students on Backpack Sunday and then divided up among all the schools in Franklin.
- We have participated in community events like the July 4 Parade, National Night Out, and the Community Trick or Treat – increasing our visibility in the area.
- The Angel Shop Boutique was blessed with continued formal wear donations and welcomed 104 young people who chose their special occasion attire free of charge.
- Our FFUMC kids collected $1,325 in the noisy bucket for Heifer Project International to provide animals for needy families around the world. They will be collecting again during Lent 2027.
- Monthly birthday contributions totaling $556 have been given to the following charities: The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), Abilities First, Deardorff Senior Center, and Franklin High School Senior Fees.
- FFUMC is administering the Christmas food and gift ministry for approximately 58 families this month. The cost to sponsor a food basket is $25 per basket.
- We have made quarterly contributions to the Franklin Community Pantry of paper products, baby items, cleaning supplies, and personal care items, amounting to approximately $1009 in value.
- We hosted and co-sponsored 3,337 community meals through the end of October in partnership with St. Mary's Catholic Church and the Coffee Collab food truck.
- We hosted a fundraiser concert featuring Middletown High School musicians, raising $920 for their music program.
- Our very active Women's Circle's Fall Marketplace was another success, and workers prepared 407 batches of noodles. Profit totaling $5,259.63 is typically used for big projects around the church. For example, two kitchen refrigerators were replaced this year.
- Our music program has inspired us with the Chancel Choir, Women's Ensemble, and the Aspenleiter Bell Choir gracing our worship with their songs. We have been blessed to have Middletown High School musicians joining us.
- Our Christian Education program serves both children and adults. Kids enjoyed Vacation Bible School in partnership with Hope UMC, and Church School classes for Elementary and intermediate-aged children. We offer a nursery and a Sunday morning "Faith Seekers" adult class. Twenty-six adults took Safe Sanctuary training.
- Emphasizing our social media presence and online worship has increased the visibility of our church in the greater Franklin area and beyond. We now have more than 1,000 Facebook followers. Theresa Fultz and Joe Chamberlain have spearheaded this ministry.

Your faithful stewardship has enabled this and more. Thank you for your year-end generosity that keeps our ministries vibrant! Pastor Laura





Celebrate the Joy of Christmas Eve at Franklin First

Christmas Eve is one of the most beautiful services of the year, and we invite you to join us as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. This year's service will feature a special Christmas Eve drama, The Night That Changed Everything, followed by our traditional candlelight worship service.

Through the voices of Mary, Joseph, an angel, a shepherd, and a wise man, worshipers will experience the Christmas story from the perspective of those who witnessed it firsthand. This dramatic retelling invites us to see the wonder, hope, and mystery of Christ's birth through fresh eyes as five voices share one life-changing story.

As you make plans for Christmas Eve, consider inviting a friend, neighbor, coworker, or family member to join you. For many people, Christmas is one of the few times they are open to attending church, and a simple invitation can make a difference.

Christmas Eve is also one of our most attended worship services of the year. As guests and visitors enter our doors, let's offer the warm hospitality for which Franklin First is known. A friendly smile, a welcoming greeting, and an invitation to sit together can help someone feel at home from the moment they arrive.

Join us on December 24 at 7:00 p.m. as we gather for The Night That Changed Everything and candlelight service. Together we will celebrate the hope, peace, joy, and love that entered the world on that holy night when everything changed. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, share the joy, and help us make room for all who come seeking the light of Christ this Christmas Eve.

Women's Circle Christmas Party

All women of Franklin First are invited to the Women's Circle Christmas Party on Monday, December 7, at 6:00 p.m. at the Harding Museum. Enjoy an evening of fellowship, festive food, and holiday cheer.

Please bring a dish to share, gifts for our adopted family, and a wrapped ornament if you'd like to participate in the ornament exchange. We hope you'll join us for this special Christmas celebration!





Christmas Music Sunday

Prepare your heart for Christmas through the gift of music. Join us on Sunday, December 20, at 10:45 a.m. for a special service featuring beloved Christmas carols and inspiring music from our choirs and musicians.

Whether you're worshiping in person or joining us live on Facebook, come celebrate the joy of Christ's birth and the message of hope that continues to change lives today.

An Unexpected Blessing: Fuel Tank Project Update



Last month, we shared the need to address what was believed to be a leaking underground fuel tank on church property. Thanks to your generous response, the project moved forward quickly and successfully.

When contractors began the work, they discovered an unexpected surprise: there was no underground tank after all. Instead, the issue was caused by old pipes that had been collecting water and leaking residual fuel oil. The pipes were properly capped, sealed, inspected, and approved, resolving the concern.

The good news is that the final cost was significantly less than originally anticipated. We are grateful for the generosity of our church family, whose gifts fully covered the expense. Any remaining funds will be applied to planned parsonage maintenance projects in 2027

Thank you for your generosity, your trust, and your commitment to the stewardship of Franklin First. If you have any questions regarding your contribution, please contact Tami Chamberlain, Treasurer, or Pastor Laura. Your support continues to be a blessing to our congregation and community.

Fall Marketplace a Wonderful Success!





What an incredible day! Thanks to the hard work of our Women's Circle, volunteers, bakers, cooks, crafters, shoppers, and supporters, this year's Fall Marketplace was a tremendous success. Not only did the event raise $5,661, but we completely sold out of all the favorites, including our famous homemade noodles!





From the preparations leading up to the event to the final purchases on Marketplace day, countless hands helped make this annual tradition possible. The overwhelming support from our church family and the community is a testament to what can be accomplished when people come together in fellowship and service.

Funds raised through the Fall Marketplace help support special projects and improvements around the church.





Thank you to everyone who donated items, prepared food, worked behind the scenes, volunteered their time, and came out to shop. Your dedication, generosity, and enthusiasm made this year's Fall Marketplace one of the best yet!

We are already looking forward to next year!

Christmas Altar Poinsettias



Help fill our sanctuary with the beauty of Christmas by sponsoring an altar poinsettia in memory or honor of a loved one. Poinsettias will be displayed for the Christmas service as a way to celebrate loved ones and the joy of Christ's birth.

Orders must be received by Sunday, December 13. The names of those being honored or remembered will be included in our December 20th worship materials. Following the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, you are welcome to take your poinsettia home to enjoy.

Order forms are available at the church office or can be ordered on our website. Thank you for helping make our sanctuary a beautiful and welcoming place for Christmas worship.

Mark Your Calendars for the Chili Cook-Off!



Start perfecting those recipes and bring your appetite! The Franklin First UMC Chili Cook-Off is returning on Saturday, January 23, 2027, hosted by the Women's Circle.

Whether you're a chili-making champion or simply enjoy sampling a variety of delicious recipes, this fun-filled event is a great opportunity for fellowship, friendly competition, and a little wintertime warmth. More details about entering a chili, judging, and event times will be announced soon.

For now, be sure to save the date and plan to join us for an evening of great food, laughter, and community. You won't want to miss it!

Save the Date for A Croppin' Good Time!

Join us for 16 hours of scrapbooking, crafting, and fellowship at Franklin First United Methodist Church (303 S. Main St., Franklin, OH).

- Fri, Mar 5, 2027: 6–11 PM
- Sat, Mar 6, 2027: 9 AM–8 PM
- Perks: Dedicated 5-ft table, Wi-Fi, and Saturday brunch & dinner included; fees support church ministries
- Register: Scan the QR code or visit www.franklinfirstumc.org (non-refundable, but transferable)

Grab your tote bags and get ready for a productive, relaxing weekend of creativity and connection. We can't wait to craft with you in March!



Reading with children shapes their faith

By Amy Houts

When our daughters were young, our naptime and bedtime routines always included reading a book. This shared experience created an intimate bond and a sense of security that I still treasure today.

Reading together fills a social-emotional need, but there's something even deeper taking place: Faith formation.

READING AND FAITH ARE CONNECTED

"When we read with children, we're doing more than teaching them a story," says Brittany Sky, Director of Children's and Intergenerational Ministries at Discipleship Ministries. "We're telling them they belong. Snuggled up on a couch or gathered in a circle on the floor, children learn that faith is something we share with one another, not something we figure out alone."

As a United Methodist author who writes faith-based books for children, I find books are like an open door. When I walk through that door, I can discover and discuss big ideas about faith and discipleship, not only while we're reading together, but afterward as well.

BOOKS ARE LIKE AN OPEN DOOR. WHEN I WALK THROUGH THAT DOOR, I CAN DISCOVER AND DISCUSS BIG IDEAS ABOUT FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP

Children learn faith concepts from the earliest age. They understand that God loves them, God watches over and protects them, and God created the planet where they live.

FIND A GOOD STORY WITH GOOD THEOLOGY

The first step is choosing good books to read, ones that will help foster important discussions. The best faith-based books are those where a good story meets good theology. They inspire both children and adults alike, and children ask for them to be read again and again.

"Since faith building and discipleship begin in the home," says United Methodist children's author Glenys Nellist, "parents and caregivers deserve the very best of resources to help them as they guide their little ones to grow in faith and become disciples of Jesus Christ."



Faith-formation book recommendations for kids of every age

Consider your child's age. Reading age-appropriate books is crucial in engaging your child's attention and teaching concepts on their level. As children grow older, books are longer, and faith concepts, characters, and plots are more complex. Explore a list of more than 20 book recommendations for kids, ages 0-13+, from board books and devotionals to chapter books and young adult selections.

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Reading with children shapes their faith

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"Since faith building and discipleship begin in the home," says United Methodist children's author Glenys Nellist, "parents and caregivers deserve the very best of resources to help them as they guide their little ones to grow in faith and become disciples of Jesus Christ."

Nellist offers these helpful questions for caregivers to ask when they consider which books to choose:

- Can my child see themselves in this book?
- Are my child's questions welcomed and embraced, even though they may not necessarily be answered?
- What impression or image of God will my child have as they read through these pages?

"Reading books together is a key component in spiritual nurturing," Nellist adds. "Leave room for wonder and inspire conversations that will foster and deepen a child's faith."

HOW TO TALK ABOUT FAITH WITH YOUR KIDS

After you read a book, you can use the book's content and theme to talk about your faith. Some faith-based books include a parent's page, Bible reference, and questions to discuss, but even if they don't, you can make connections between what you and your child read and what you experience in daily life.

For example, let's say you read a book about Noah's Ark and then go outside and see a rainbow. You can ask your child if they remember a book with a rainbow. You can give clues to help them remember the Noah's Ark story. You can ask questions like, "What did the rainbow mean? What was God's promise? Why would God promise never to flood the earth again?"

Once you start looking for ways to connect what you've read to everyday experiences, you will find them everywhere.

For an older child, you might talk about floods happening around the world today, not because of God, but because of the changing climate. If you read a book about the Creation story, talk about it when you take a walk. You can discuss how God calls us to take care of the beautiful planet God created.

As your child grows and can read on their own, books introduce higher-level faith concepts. Reading classic books as a family or listening to audiobooks on a long car ride are great ways to experience stories together. Both fiction and nonfiction books make for great discussions that help children believe in and trust God.

"Books give children words for wonder, for questions, and for God's love, and the adults who read with them become living examples of a faith that makes room for every child," says Sky.

Amy Houts is a former children's librarian and award-winning author of 100+ picture books for children. To find out more about Amy and her books visit: Linktr.ee/amyhouts.

Taken From: https://www.umc.org/en/content/reading-with-children-shapes-their-faith

Holiday Office Schedule

The church office will observe limited hours and holiday closures throughout the Christmas and New Year season. Please refer to the posted schedule for details.



Need assistance while the office is closed? Call 937-746-5232 and leave a voicemail. Messages are automatically forwarded, and someone will follow up with you as soon as possible.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year!

Giving Made Simple: Supporting Our Ministry Anytime, Anywhere



Life can get busy, but your generosity can stay steady. With Franklin First's updated Online Giving platform, supporting the ministries you care about is easier than ever—anytime, anywhere.

Why Give Online?

- Quick & Convenient: Make one-time or recurring gifts in just seconds—no cash, checks, or Sunday-morning rush needed.
- Consistent Impact: Regular giving helps our ministries plan wisely and serve our community with confidence.
- Safe & Secure: Our trusted system protects your personal information and ensures every transaction is secure.

Your gifts make life-changing ministry possible. Ready to take the next step?
Start today: franklinfirstumc.org/giving-%26-member-resources

Thank you for your faithful generosity and for helping us share the love of Christ in powerful ways!

Special Days!

Birthdays
December 08 Ken Lang
December 10 Peggy Darragh-Jeromos
December 11 Mishelle Dicken
December 11 Greyson Roberts
December 11 Karlie Goodpaster
December 12 Lisa Dillon
December 17 Andrew Goodpaster
December 20 Judy Bowman
December 21 Mike Smith
December 23 Joseph Chamberlain
December 25 Janet Kirby
December 26 Amber Ramsey
December 26 Gary Ogdin
December 26 Colby Trout
December 27 Gracelynne Lucas
December 29 Karen Anderson
December 31 Cody Chilcutt

Anniversaries
December 27 Julie &Jan Abell
December 28 Judy & Robert Bowman

Upcoming Fellowship Sunday



Join us for homemade treats and fellowship after service on **December 6.**

Christmas Offering: Birthday Mission Outreach

Our Christmas offering will support Birthday Mission Outreach! On your birthday, you'll receive a birthday card from Franklin First along with a postcard that you will be able to select an organization to which a contribution will be made in your honor.



December Calendar

Wednesday, December 2, 2026
3:00 PM Snack Pack Packing with NHS students
6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal
7:30 PM Handbell Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, December 3, 2026
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM Community Dinner (St. Mary's K of C)

Sunday, December 6, 2026
9:00 AM Faith Seekers Study Group
10:00 AM Children's Christian Education Program
10:45 AM Livestream of Worship on Facebook
10:45 AM Worship Service
11: 45 AM Fellowship

Monday, December 7, 2026
6:00 PM Women's Circle Christmas Party

Wednesday, December 9, 2026
1:30 PM Snack Pack Packing
6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal
7:30 PM Handbell Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, December 10, 2026
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM Community Dinner (St. Mary's K of C)

Sunday, December 13, 2026
9:00 AM Faith Seekers Study Group
10:00 AM Children's Christian Education Program
10:45 AM Livestream of Worship on Facebook
10:45 AM Worship Service

Wednesday, December 16, 2026
6:30 PM Choir Rehearsal
7:30 PM Handbell Choir Rehearsal

Thursday, December 17, 2026
2:00 PM – 6:00 PM Christmas Basket Distribution
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM Community Dinner (St. Mary's K of C)

Sunday, December 20, 2026 Music Sunday
9:00 AM Faith Seekers Study Group
10:00 AM Children's Christian Education Program
10:45 AM Livestream of Worship on Facebook
10:45 AM Worship Service

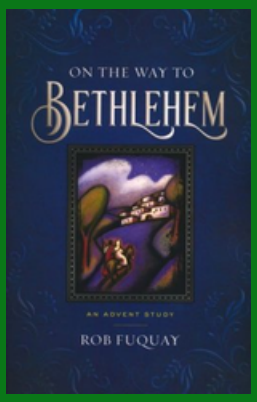
Tuesday, December 22, 2026
5:00 PM – 6:00 PM Community Dinner - Coffee Collab

12/23/2026 -1/4/27
Office Closed

Thursday, December 24, 2026 Christmas Eve
7:00 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Sunday, December 27, 2026
9:00 AM Faith Seekers Study Group
10:00 AM Children's Christian Education Program
10:45 AM Livestream of Worship on Facebook
10:45 AM Worship Service

Faith Seekers Advent Study



Looking for a meaningful way to prepare your heart for Christmas? Join the Faith Seekers Adult Bible Study as we continue our Advent journey through On the Way to Bethlehem by Rob Fuquay. This inspiring study explores the people, places, and promises surrounding Christ's birth, helping us experience the Christmas story with fresh insight and deeper faith.

The group meets Sundays at 9:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall, and all are welcome. Whether you're a longtime participant or joining for the first time, there's still room to journey to Bethlehem with us this Advent season.

Easy Way to Support Franklin First: Check Your Kroger Receipt!



Did you know your weekly grocery run can support the ministries of Franklin First—at no extra cost to you?

When you shop at Kroger, linking your account to our Community Rewards helps fund ministry all year long. It's free, takes just a minute, and if you're already enrolled, no action is needed—this is only for new sign-ups with our new church number.

How to enroll:

- Visit www.kroger.com
- Register or Sign In
- Community Rewards
- Enroll Now
- Enter RK151

Thank you for supporting Franklin First in this easy and meaningful way!

FRANKLIN FIRST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Pastor Laura Saunders

Sunday Worship Service
10:45 am
Livestreaming on Facebook

Faith Seekers Bible Study
Sundays, 9:00 am

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 20	Christmas Music Sunday
December 24	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
January 23	Chili Cook-Off
March 5-6	A Croppin' Good Time

STEEPLE BELL NEWSLETTER

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