



First News First

January 2021

Opening Doors with Christ, One Another and Our Neighbors

Rain and Snow

If you are a Pennsylvanian, you're accustomed to rain and snow, lush green grass and fruitful produce. (In fact, as I write this we're having our biggest December snowfall in years!) If you are a Middle Easterner, like the Hebrew people who lived in or near the desert, rain and snow are much more rare and precious. For them these verses from Isaiah carried an especially powerful message about God's care for them in a difficult time.

Isaiah 55:10-11 says

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Isaiah pictures rain and snow covering, softening and seeping deep down into the dry, hard ground so that the soil can bring forth supple, green plants that bud and flourish, producing seed, providing bread.

Isaiah tells us that God's word has the same effect on our souls as rain and snow have on parched, dry land. God sows good seed into our lives and provides bread for our journey as we receive God's word. Developing a daily pattern of reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture is an important way to invite God to tend and care for our souls. God has given other gifts for the refreshment of our souls. Prayer and worship, small group study and Christian fellowship, serving others and giving generously soften the soil of our hearts so that we are receptive to God's desire, open to God's purpose.

As we begin 2021, with its uncertainties and opportunities, the promise of Isaiah long ago is still true. God is faithful! God is still at work in our lives, in our church, and in our community to heal brokenness, to refresh weary souls, to reconcile relationships, and to inspire us to join in his great mission of love.

From day to day, like the rain and the snow, God's word still goes forth to provide everything we need. What will you do to be receptive as you begin this new year?

Receiving God's word with you,
Pastor Denny

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Bible Reading Plan

Use our Bible reading plan to remain in God's word daily. This reading plan is available on our church website at www.fumchurch.com, and on page 8 of this newsletter.

Connect Using The Bible App

Check out the YouVersion Bible app, available for both android and iOS smartphones/tablets, or on your laptop at bible.com. There are many wonderful devotional studies, plus you can create groups to study, chat with friends and share prayer requests!

Sunday School and Bible Study Classes

Because our building remains closed right now, we are asking Sunday School classes and Bible study groups to continue meeting online. For a listing of both ongoing and new classes that are meeting, please see the weekly bulletin announcements (available on our church website, fumchurch.com).

The Upper Room Devotional

The January/February 2021 issue of The Upper Room is available! To download the free digital version, use this [link](#)! Or, if you would like to receive a paper copy, please contact Janice Bowen at wecare@fumchurch.com or 717-766-4611 x112.

From the Library

As everyone knows, the January newsletter needs to be written in early December so it is ready in time for publication. Yesterday I was sitting at my sewing machine and plotting which project I could finish this week, when they mentioned on the radio that Christmas is just three weeks away. That threw me into a tizzy. Many people have mentioned how peaceful this season is without so many outside commitments, and I think that lulled me into thinking I could sew away December. I decided I better get this newsletter finished, and then work on the Christmas projects. Fortunately for you, I have some great books to recommend.

Though I don't read Amish fiction, I buy a lot of the genre for the library as so many of you love it. Favorite author Wanda Brunstetter, writing with her daughter-in-law Jean, has come out with another look into Amish life. In **The Blended Quilt** Sadie Kuhn is the main character who not only is a master quilter, but also an heiress and writer—two things not usually in Amish fiction. Sadie's long term boyfriend, Wymann Kauffman is also different. He flits from job to job and seems to be very jealous of Sadie's outside interests. This book addresses many problems of any family-- jealousy, pride, and lack of consideration for others in a Christian context. I won't tell you how this book resolves the conflict or even if the two main characters end up together. I'll let you find this out yourself.

Now on to my favorite genre of romantic suspense. Lynn Eason is breaking her usual mold of a trilogy series by having four books in her new series ***Danger Never Sleeps***. Book three is **Active Defense** which joins **Collateral Damage** (book 1) and **Acceptable Risk** (book 2), so we have one more to look forward to in this series. Heather Fontaine, field surgeon, is home from Afghanistan where every day was filled with life and death problems. Little did she know that she would be in more peril back in the states. A stalker has broken into her house and threatened her friends. She leaves the city, hoping that she can hide out in a small town, but he has followed her there. Luckily Heather has Travis Walker looking out for her. Maybe together they can figure out who wants her dead and stop him before he can accomplish his mission. Better put on some more coffee as you won't be able to put this down until the last page.

I feel redundant saying I hope I will be seeing all of you very soon. Here's to a New Year and a new way of living!! Feel free to contact either one of us if you wish to check out books with a private appointment.

~ Pam and Donna

explore
life
faith
meaning



Alpha

First Church is excited to offer Alpha!

- Alpha is a place to explore the Christian faith with others in a low pressure environment to discuss the big questions in life.
- Each Alpha session focuses on one question, like "Who is Jesus?", "How does God work in my life?" or "How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit". There is a video, followed by discussion where guests can share their thoughts and questions openly and honestly.
- Alpha is run all over the world. 1.3 million people have tried Alpha, in over 100 countries!

Alpha is very easy to share online for free! Our plan is to offer Alpha using zoom conferencing starting **January 5th** at 7:00 p.m. led by John and Merri Shellenberger.

There are a few different ways you can get involved:

- Pray – Pray for Pastor John and Merri, who will be leading this course, and pray for the guests and conversations that will happen.
- Seek - Ask God for direction on who you know that has questions about faith or might benefit from participating in Alpha.
- Invite – Ask that person... it might be a friend, coworker, family member or neighbor. Ask if they would be interested in participating. You are invited to participate with them, especially if that makes them more comfortable, but you don't have to.

Registration is easy! Contact Tina Eaton at adultministry@fumchurch.com to sign up or to learn more about the Alpha Course.

explore
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Alpha

Little Friends Preschool Substitute Teachers Needed

Little Friends Preschool is in need of substitute teachers for their classes. For more information or if interested in a substitute teacher position, please contact Jemma Church at lfn@fumchurch.com or Devon Betz at devonbetz@gmail.com.

Praying Follower



Weekly Prayer Letter

If you have not already done so, sign up for our weekly prayer email so that you can receive a list of praises and requests from our church family. Contact Janice Bowen at wecare@fumchurch.com to share requests and to sign up for this once-a-week list.

Passionate Worshipper



Upcoming Sermon Series: "Good News!"

Are you ready for a new year? As 2021 begins, we continue to feel the lingering effects of the pandemic and the unrest of 2020, but the new year is a time to embrace *new possibilities*. At the beginning of his gospel, Mark declares that the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is good news. (Mark 1:1) In this series we're going to walk closely with Jesus through the first chapter of Mark. As we do, we'll discover why the coming of Jesus is still the good news we all need and how believing the good news makes all the difference in our lives.



- **January 3** "Make Room for Jesus!" Mark 1:1-8 Holy Communion
John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' arrival. He shows us how to *make room for Jesus* and why it is the most important thing we can do as we begin this New Year.
- **January 10** "Listen to the Voice!" Mark 1:9-13
At his baptism, Jesus saw heaven split open and heard a voice that called him *chosen and dearly loved*. In a world of many voices, we discover who we are, and whose we are, as we learn to listen to his voice.
- **January 17** "Jesus Uses Ordinary People" Mark 1:14-20
When Jesus called, ordinary fishermen left everything and joined in the extraordinary work of his kingdom. *Jesus still calls*, yearning to use ordinary people like us today.
- **January 24** "Jesus Has Authority" Mark 1:21-28
In the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus revealed his *power to save this broken world*. He invites us to turn the reins of our lives over to him so that we might be made whole and be a healing presence for others.
- **January 31** "Early Riser" Mark 1:29-39
Even with many demands pressing in upon him, Jesus prioritized *time with God in prayer*. We find rest for our souls, strength to love, and direction for our days when we follow his example.
- **February 7** "Jesus Isn't Afraid of Your Mess" Mark 1:40-45
Moved with pity, Jesus touched and cleansed a leper who lived on the fringes of society. Jesus is with us in *the messy situations of our lives* and calls us to join in his ministry of compassion in this messy world.

Livestream Team — New Ministry

Livestream worship is underway! This new group forming has exciting potential to reach beyond the walls of our church. *Because of the higher demand for more volunteers to livestream, we are looking for more individuals to help grow our livestream team.* No prior experience is needed, and training is provided. If you would like to meet the challenge of modern church and advance the kingdom into a digital era, please contact Sarah Pugh at worship@fumchurch.com.

Spotify Playlist

On the first Wednesday of each month, we will release a new monthly playlist on Spotify. Each song-- hand-picked by staff, musicians, and volunteers-- has been on our hearts, and prayed over for a holy and meaningful connection with our congregation. For Spotify users, search for the user First UMC of Mechanicsburg, and click on the playlist titled “*Where Words Fail, Music Speaks*”. For non-Spotify users, click this link to listen to the playlist: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5rbHEYEfHei97cUI8rjwNJ?si=qzOB7cTVRg6iAU1L4BY2hA>

Worship DVDs Available

If you or someone you know are unable to access the online church worship services, we have DVD copies of worship available upon request! Please contact Janice Bowen at wecare@fumchurch.com or 717-766-4611 x112 for more information.

Dedicated Missionary



Christmas Blessings Express at New Hope Ministries

Each year, New Hope Ministries blesses each of our guests with Christmas gifts donated by the Mechanicsburg community. This year though challenged with Covid-19, flexibility made the distribution a bit more interesting! However, we were able to adjust and the three days of gift distribution went off without a hitch. We were very concerned about the health and wellness for all of our volunteers and guests, so proper disinfecting of the shopping cars and social distancing was well maintained.

This year we found that we didn't have as many volunteers as we had had in the past so a new way of setting up the actual distribution arrangement and we believe that it worked better than in the past! So, a new and better way has been established!!! Amazing how God allowed a better solution to present itself in a time of special need.

212 families were served. Not as many physical/tangible gifts may have been given out because of decreased donations but increased donations of gift cards were appreciated by all of the guests.

Thank you to all of you who made donations of either gifts, gift cards or physically coming to help with Christmas Blessings Express....your expressions of love to those less fortunate than us was so appreciated by everyone of our guests.

Merry Christmas, *Debbie and Don Karns*

Help Us Feed Those In Need

We are asking all who can to help us fill our Little Free Pantry – the food is going fast and your donations are needed. Go to our church website for information on what you can donate and contact Lori Hoffnagle at outreach@fumchurch.com if you have questions.

Get Connected With Service Opportunities

If you have not already done so, sign up to receive our periodic “Service Opportunities” email. Contact Lori Hoffnagle at outreach@fumchurch.com to share opportunities and to sign up.

Relationship Builder



Extravagant Hospitality

We hope that everyone had a blessed holiday! Things are still not the normal that we remember, but we can still show our hospitality in so many ways. We can still give the gift of prayer to those who might need it. We can also tell as many people as we can, what we love most about them. If you are on social media, send them funny emojis, silly as that may sound, it does make us laugh when we see them. As we move into 2021, we can all pray that with the new year, we will be able to be back together soon. Remember, hospitality can be shared more in these uncertain times through the gift of love. Wishing everyone a joyous New Year!

Women's Retreat

After much prayer, thought and discussion, we have made the decision to cancel our in-person retreat at Mt Asbury (scheduled for February, 2021) due to Covid and the uncertainty surrounding it. Our deposit will be applied toward our 2022 retreat, already scheduled for February 4-6, 2022! Instead, our plans for 2021 will include hosting a very special Lifeway Women's Ministry simulcast event. This day will be filled with practical Bible teachings, and you'll be joining others online from around the world for a full day of worship and God's Word. Please stay tuned for further details as they unfold!

Lenten Devotional

2020 was not a typical year - it has not been easy for us to connect while keeping our distance and staying at home due to Covid. Because of this, we are hoping to prepare a First Church devotional booklet for Lent, 2021 as one way to help keep us connected to one another this winter and stay connected to God as we share our personal God moments!

Ash Wednesday is on February 17th this year, so the deadline for submissions is January 10th. So make a date with yourself now to pour a cup of coffee or tea, curl up in a cozy chair and spend some time with God. Take time to reflect on the ways you experienced God at work in your life in 2020 and share your story. Yes, 2020 has been a year like no other, but thankfully, we have a God who is ever-present and unchanging! Please contact Tina Eaton at adultministry@fumchurch.com if you are willing to share a story or would like some help/more details.

Faith, Feathers, and Friends

The cold weather may keep some of us indoors in the New Year, however this is an excellent time to keep a watch on your backyard feeders. Faith, Feathers, and Friends will continue throughout the winter. Every Tuesday at 1pm we gather via Zoom to share the wonder of God's creation, study His word and travel online to one of the top 100 birding sites in Pennsylvania. Email Pastor John at pastorjohn@fumchurch.com for the meeting link. In January we will follow the schedule below:

- 01/05 Blue heron & Brucker Great Blue Heron Sanctuary
- 01/12 Great horned owl & Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University
- 01/19 Snowy owl & Yellow Creek State Park
- 01/26 Barred owl & Canoe Creek State Park



Joy in the Morning - On Zoom!

If you live with ongoing health challenges, we invite you to join us for discussion and friendship in our spiritually-grounded support group! We meet on designated Mondays, every 3-4 weeks from 3:30-4:30 on Zoom. Terry Ketrow and Janice Bowen co-facilitate, drawing upon readings from the book, [With the Dawn Rejoicing](#). For more information, contact Janice Bowen at 717-766-4611 x112 or wecare@fumchurch.com.

"First Church Forum"

If you are on Facebook, we invite you to join our private Facebook Group, First Church Forum! As a private group, the 'First Church Forum' is a great space to support and connect with one another during this

season of sheltering at home. The First Church Forum is a "space for sharing information, encouragement, discussion, and fellowship among members and friends of First Church." Let us know how we can support you or your local business during these challenging times. Please 'Like' our page, First United Methodist Church of Mechanicsburg, PA and then feel free to join the First Church Forum private group. If you have questions, please contact Lori Hoffnagle at outreach@fumchurch.com.

Generous Giver



FINANCIAL REPORT

Through November 30, 2020 — 92% of year

General Fund

2020 budget	\$ 955,098	
Projected giving	\$ 878,690	92%
Actual giving	\$ 845,247	88%
Actual expenses	\$ 808,491	84%

Our YTD actual expenses continue to be less than planned as the church staff is working hard to reduce discretionary spending to help keep our financial position in good shape. At this time we are continuing our Sunday services online. We appreciate all the support for our church during this difficult time and are thankful for those who have been able to continue in prayer and financial support of our ministry. Since we are not having in-person services, we hope you will consider mailing your contributions to the church office or utilizing electronic giving via the church website. Please be sure to visit fumchurch.com for regular updates and services online. Thank you to all those who presented their step-up commitment card to help us plan our ministry for 2021. If you have not yet submitted a card, please consider sending it in to the office or contact Ellen Hill at office@fumchurch.com for more information.

Endowment Fund Report

We all think back over how our life have been altered during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic effecting our day to day lives, our family and our plans and hopes. Our church has changed since the March closing for in-person worship, and this change is still continuing to identify new ways for our participation in worship and staying connected with our church family. Even with the disruptions to our lives, we still have been blessed in many ways and when I think about these blessings one is the Endowment Fund our church has as a resource to have financial funds available each year thru the harvesting of its investment earnings. During 2020 the Endowment Fund has authorized four Endowment Grants exceeding \$18,000. What a blessing that our church family continues to support the Endowment Fund to make funds available for church use and mission now and for the future. We are so fortunate to have the blessings of many people who continue to support the Endowment Fund.

The Endowment Fund now has the ability to accept stocks and bonds without the investments being sold by allowing the financials instruments to be transferred directly to the Endowment Fund Account. This transfer of stocks and bonds to the Endowment Fund Account still allows the donor to receive any tax allowance that may be permitted based on an individual's circumstances. If this financial transfer is of any interest to you, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your continued support of the Endowment Fund.

Bob Wertz — 717-448-0752 or bwertz@plantsitelogistics.com

Flower Donation

First Church would like to thank those who gave their alter flower orders as a monetary gift to the church while we were unable to hold in-person services: Donna D'Agostino, Mr. and Mrs. James Chilton, Heather O'Hara, and Annabelle Elder.



January Bible Reading Plan

Sunday, December 27

Monday, December 28

Tuesday, December 29

Wednesday, December 30

Thursday, December 31

Friday, January 1

Saturday, January 2

Worship

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Ephesians 3:1-12 *New Year's Eve Day*

Mark 1:1-8 *New Year's Day*

Rest and Reflect

Sunday, January 3

Monday, January 4

Tuesday, January 5

Wednesday, January 6

Thursday, January 7

Friday, January 8

Saturday, January 9

"Make Room for Jesus"

Genesis 1:1-5

Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

I Kings 19:11-18

Mark 1:9-13

Rest and Reflect

Sunday, January 10

Monday, January 11

Tuesday, January 12

Wednesday, January 13

Thursday, January 14

Friday, January 15

Saturday, January 16

"Listen to the Voice"

I Samuel 3:1-10

I Samuel 3:11-20

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

I Corinthians 6:12-20

Mark 1:14-20

Rest and Reflect

Sunday, January 17

Monday, January 18

Tuesday, January 19

Wednesday, January 20

Thursday, January 21

Friday, January 22

Saturday, January 23

"Jesus Uses Ordinary People"

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62

I Corinthians 7:29-31

I Corinthians 12:1-11

Mark 1:21-28

Rest and Reflect

Sunday, January 24

Monday, January 25

Tuesday, January 26

Wednesday, January 27

Thursday, January 28

Friday, January 29

Saturday, January 30

"Jesus Has Authority"

Isaiah 40:21-31

Psalm 147:1-11, 20

I Corinthians 9:16-23

James 5:13-20

Mark 1:29-39

Rest and Reflect

Sunday, January 31

"Early Riser"



To Our Beloved FUMC Camp & Retreat Families and Supporters,

As we look back over **2020**, many thoughts and feelings may be aroused. Difficult decisions were made resulting in placing on hold anticipated experiences.

Yet many found new ways to come close to God!

Some spent special time with family. Others found time to take a hike or a walk getting away from the distractions of life while finding time to truly listen to His words for our lives.

These types of “holy times” have helped cement the community together to launch us forward into **2021**.

Funding was required to sustain leadership, facilities, and programs critical to fulfilling the on-going mission of the Camp & Retreat ministries for 2020.

The "*Camp Comeback Campaign*" goal was set at **\$100,000.00**.

Churches, groups, and individuals from across the conference stepped up in support. We are excited and tremendously grateful to announce that gifts and pledges received to date exceed **\$100,000.00**.

Together we have met this challenge! To GOD be the GLORY!

We will let you know more about **2021** camp plans as we receive information from the conference camping and retreat staff. Please keep them in your prayers for wisdom and discernment.

Let us know if you have any questions.

With Hope and in Christ's Service,

The FUMC Camping & Retreat Ministry Team

Questions? Contact: Deb Noss (sdppp@msn.com) or
Amy Ortiz (amy.ogden7@gmail.com)

Church News and Notes

Love & sympathy...

to the family and friends of Deb Hamsher who passed away on November 8th
 to the family and friends of Mildred Neagley who passed away on November 25th
 to the family and friends of Paul Nesmith who passed away on December 6th
 to the family and friends of Art Murray who passed away on December 15th



Special Birthdays

Pat Hutter	January 3rd	Paul Rynard	February 3rd
Richard Reed	January 15th	Joanne Ciampa	February 6th
Leroy Weaver	January 15th	Jane K. Stover	February 6th
Leta Rohlmeier	January 23rd	Joyce Parfet	February 12th
Dot Souder	January 27th	Dottie Zimmerman	February 26th
Margaret Baker	January 30th	Gerry Aumiller	February 27th

Special Anniversaries

- ♥ There are no special anniversaries for the month of January. If you have a special anniversary (married 50+ years) in January that we are unaware of, please let us know so that we can recognize you next year and in the years to come!



FIRST NEWS FIRST
 Editor: Ellen Hill

The **deadline** for submitting articles
 for the **February 2021** issue is
January 15th

Early submissions always
appreciated!