

COMBINED NEWSLETTER

First and Woodmar United Methodist Churches

Issue 013

March 2025



Worship with Us – Sundays at 10:15!

March - At Woodmar United Methodist Church, 7320 Northcote, Hammond

April - At First United Methodist Church, 6635 Hohman, Hammond



Several Ash Wednesday Opportunities Offered

There will be two in-person worship services with the Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday, March 5 at 2pm & 7pm at Woodmar UMC in the Sanctuary.

If you are not able to join us for service, we will also have walk-in opportunities to receive ashes from 8:30am-9:15am and 4:30pm-5:15pm in the breezeway (Door G). Imposition of Ashes will also be provided for Brianna's Hope members from 5:15pm-6:00pm.

We are also looking for volunteers for the in-person worship services. If you are able to greet and or usher for one of the services, please let the church office know. Thank you.

The Agape Ringers Return to Woodmar UMC

Join us at Woodmar UMC on Sunday, March 9, at 4:00pm for a concert by The Agape Ringers, Chicagoland's premier handbell ensemble. Learn about the ensemble at their website, www.AgapeRingers.org, and on Facebook and YouTube by searching for "The Agape Ringers." This year's program encompasses musical styles from transcriptions of classical works to Broadway hits and original compositions. For more information, contact our own Sarah Ward, a long-time Agape Ringer, at smw1213@gmail.com or (630) 624-1318.





Lenten Discipline

As we enter the Lenten season, it is a good time to choose how we will use this Lent to further our growth, build our faith, and strengthen our commitment to being the Body of Christ. First Church Lay Leader Pat Mosley has prepared a powerful resource for our Lenten discipline called "A Walk Through Lent." We will make this available to the congregations, and I strongly encourage you to accept this challenge. I know that you will find it a great blessing.

In addition to Pat's offering, we will be using a playlist of pop songs to help guide our contemplation during worship for Lent. We will hear one of these songs in each worship service throughout the Lenten season. This is unusual, but God is found in many places and through many means. One of the things that we can learn from this is to experience God in unexpected places and in unexpected ways, to discover that God is present in all things and everywhere.

God is good, and God is always reaching out to us. There is so much noise and so many distractions in the world that it is easy to overlook the loving grace that constantly surrounds us. I believe that God's grace is powerful. I believe that God's grace is transformative. I believe that God's grace enables us to do more and be more than we can ever comprehend.

This Lent, pay attention to what God is doing. Look for the signs of God's grace all around us. Let God's grace sustain us and help us to continue this long journey that we call life. Commit yourself to the path that we are on, individually and as churches. I know that the results of both paths may seem slow, and we may not always understand, but I believe that if we have faith, pray, and practice the spiritual disciplines this Lent and beyond, all will be well.

In preparation for forming a new church, we are implementing a new church software system complete with a new church website. We are doing this in two phases, beginning with First Church (because First's current system is easier to move to the new system), then combining Woodmar into it in the near future. It won't be "live" until we have a new name, but you can access the test website now. I mention this because you can listen to our Lenten playlist on that website. It can be accessed at fwum.org. The Lenten playlist is available at fwum.org/page/836?Item=85. If you do visit the "test" site, please know that it is a work in progress, and the content is incomplete.

May your Lenten journey bring you closer to Christ, bring us closer together, and give us all an assurance of hope for our future.

Blessings,
Jim

Its easy to vote! You may place your ballot in the box in the narthex or mail it to either church office. You may also call in your vote to either church office or vote online at <https://forms.gle/6jXGmTmMsmP5NYmd6>. The last day to vote is Sunday, March 30. One vote per person please!

Which name best fits
your vision for our
new church?

A. Foundry United Methodist

B. Hope United Methodist

C. Pathways United Methodist

Please Circle One



Why is it Taking So Long?

Why is it taking so long? Members of the Merger Team have been hearing this a lot, even from our own families! We understand how everyone is feeling, because we feel the same way. The process is taking longer than we expected because there are so many issues to consider. Our Merger Team members are Pastor Jim Denton, Pastor Pete Ward, Bob Brown, Jane Harper-Alport, Niki Avina, Cyndi Slaboski, Fran Vukovich, and Mary Zaikis. Fran took over for Nancy Craig, who stepped down due to her new job responsibilities.

What We've Been Doing

The Merger Team has been meeting regularly since May, 2023. We began by learning about each church's buildings, programs, missions, worship style, and finances. We also spent some time creating a vision for the future church. Recognizing that we need to address the root causes of our current situation so that we do not continue down the path of decline, we spent a lot of time discerning what cultural shifts we will need to make and how we will make those deep changes to our mindset, practices, and attitudes. That has been a lengthy and ongoing process.

Then we began discussing the many decisions that need to be made for our merger. Since the members of the Merger Team feel strongly about some of these issues, there was sometimes a lot of discussion! We all care deeply about the future of our newly merged church and want to make the best decisions possible. Some of the things we have discussed (including several issues that we are still working on) are:

- Which building will we use? What happens to the other church building? (It took about ten months to get appraisals on both buildings.)
- If the unused building is sold, how will profits from the sale be used? The UMC Book of Discipline restricts these funds for capital improvements and pastor housing needs, but Conference leadership may make an exception.
- Depending on which building is chosen, what happens to The Vine Food Pantry, Brianna's Hope, Messy Church, Community Preschool & Childcare, Woodmar's many AA groups, and First's Wednesday Bible Study and Quilting Group.
- How do we keep the congregation informed and get feedback from them? (town hall, listening session, newsletter articles, etc.)
- What process will we use to choose a name for the new church?
- What will be our future financial structure and budget? What finance software will we use?
- Who will hold various staff positions and what will their salaries be? Can we afford an outreach pastor?
- How will the assets of the two churches' respective Foundation (First Church) and Endowment Fund (Woodmar) be handled?
- How will the funds from the sale of First's parsonage be used? Are we keeping or selling the Woodmar parsonage? If sold, how will these funds be used? (As noted above, the UMC Book of Discipline restricts these funds for capital improvements and pastor housing needs, but Conference leadership may make an exception.)
- How will we structure the new Church Council and committees?
- What expenses will we have for this merger, such as new signs, moving costs, modifying class rooms, new location for The Vine Food Pantry, and other building remodeling?
- What are the projected long-term capital plans (5, 10 and 20-year) for the merged church and what are the recommendations for how they will be funded?
- What are the short- and long-term funding plans for the Community Preschool & Childcare?
- Each church uses a different software to keep track of membership. How will we handle that?
- What is the procedure for the final vote?

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Why is it Taking so Long?

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Why can't we merge now and take care of these details later?

When it comes time for an official vote, we will be voting yes or no on a proposal prepared by the Merger Team. It will include every significant detail we can think of and even things that we didn't think of, but our attorney did. The proposal must be very detailed so we know exactly what we are voting for. There could be a lot of hard feelings if people assumed things were going to be a certain way and then discovered was not what they were expecting. We want to make sure that there are no misunderstandings.

What is happening now?

We are currently in the process of developing responses to the above-listed questions that are undetermined at this point. After the Merger Team agreed on the need to obtain legal counsel, we entered into an agreement of engagement with an attorney in early December. In the past three months we have been responding to questions and providing a lot of documentation for the attorney. He will advise us on the elements of our merger proposal and prepare the legal side of the proposal, called a Memorandum of Understanding, which is required by the Indiana UMC Conference.

As you are now aware, plans are to use the Woodmar building and sell the First UMC building. Decisions have been made on many of the above issues, but there are many significant issues still under discussion, which will need to be resolved before the attorney can proceed. We are very aware that everyone is tired of this process and wants it to be completed. So do we!! We will do our best to speed things along while still making careful, responsible decisions and will continue to inform and respond to questions from our congregations.

After our work is completed, we will draft a detailed Merger Proposal that we will share with our respective Church Councils to obtain feedback. The final proposal will be submitted to the congregations, who will be given time to look it over. Then in-person charge conferences will be conducted for each church and eligible members will cast their official votes. If a majority of those present at each charge conferences vote "Yes," the actual date of the merger will be a couple of months later. Let's all just hang in there over the coming months! We will get there!



SET YOUR CLOCKS

Ahead!

Next Sunday, March 9, is the beginning of daylight savings time. Remember to turn your clocks ahead one hour!

Opportunities to Grow Our Faith

Discipleship
and Spiritual
Vitality



Messy Church - Spread the Word!

More than 30 people joined us for Messy Church on February 25! The craft activities and celebration message revolved around Love: the love we have for one another and our communities, as well as Jesus' love. "Breakfast for dinner," with waffles, bacon, and homemade mini cinnamon sugar muffins, was a big hit, as was the musical chairs game!

Our next Messy Church is March 25, 6:00 – 7:30 pm at Woodmar's Community Center, Door B. Help us spread the word about Messy Church, a safe place to experience the joy of Christian community. This month, Messy Church activities and message will focus on grace. Who is Jesus? It's all about grace.



SCRIP: Every Purchase Supports Our Churches!

SCRIP gift cards are offered in the narthex at both Woodmar and First UMC following the Sunday worship services. Orders can also be placed and picked up the following Sunday at First Church or Woodmar, depending on where our congregations are worshipping together. Please contact Kathy Smith at (708) 935-9807 for more information.

Combined Churches Sponsor Easter Cantata

Combined area churches, including Woodmar United Methodist Church Foundation, First United Methodist Church, Ridge United Methodist Church, and Christ Lutheran Church are sponsoring an Easter Oratorio on Palm Sunday, April 13, at 4:00 pm. The concert, in the Woodmar UMC sanctuary, will feature three soloists performing with a combined choir from the four sponsoring churches and a 22-piece orchestra. The oratorio, entitled "Saviour," tells the story of God's passion for God's people, offering an uplifting and moving experience. It is not too late to join if you sing or play an instrument! For questions or to join us, contact Dave Bieschke at davebieschke@me.com or (773) 791-8277.



Easter Flowers Order Form

We would like to have spring flowers beautify the church again this Easter. If you would like to order a flower, please complete this form and place it along with your payment in an envelope by mail, church offering plate, or the church office or by visiting the church website by NO LATER than Thursday, March 20.

_____ LILIES @ \$15

_____ TULIPS @ \$10

_____ HYACINTHS @ \$10

_____ TOTAL NO. OF PLANTS

_____ TOTAL COST

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO FUMC

In Memory of:

In Honor of:

From:

(PLEASE **PRINT** SO NO TRANSLATION ERRORS ARE MADE.)



Reaching Out to Our Community

March is a Busy Month for United Women in Faith

At our February meeting, our treasurer Nancy Jarmula reported on the missions we support including the Lucille Raines Residence for recovering addicts, Mission U, Bashor Children's Home, and Community Services of Northwest Indiana. Volunteers were recruited to supply meals once a month for Brianna's Hope and to bring punch and cookies for the Agape Ringers program on March 9.

Jackie Lewis presented a program guided by the UWF study on water. She will continue the program at our next meeting at 10:00 am on March 19 in the church and on Zoom.

On March 23, which is the United Women in Faith Day of Giving, we will donate flowers for the altar and serve as greeters and ushers. During the church service Lora Ward, our district president, will give a presentation on the goals and activities of UWF.



Mission News

Both First Church and Woodmar are designating Heifer International as the recipient of money collected for Second Mile Giving for the months of March and April. Heifer International, established in 1944, is a development organization working to end hunger and poverty in partnership with local communities. To learn more about Heifer International, please visit <https://www.heifer.org>. If you are unable to donate financially, please pray for the volunteers and those who receive assistance from Heifer International.

Please note that brown bag Sunday is the first Sunday of every month. Pick up an empty brown bag the last Sunday of the month and return the bag filled with non-perishable food items the following Sunday. During the months when we worship at Woodmar, Richard Miller will deliver the bags to First Church on the first Monday of the month.

First Church and Woodmar would like to thank everyone who donated in January and February to Love, Inc. Richard Miller, FUMC Missions Team

Heifer International's Mission – “We work to end hunger and poverty in partnership with the communities we serve. Our programs support entrepreneurs around the world, creating lasting change from the ground up. It begins with a seed investment of livestock or agriculture, followed by mentorship to help project participants build a business, and ultimately to gain access to supply chains and markets.”

“These families are able to earn a living income and continuously lift up their communities as they train the next generation of leaders. By supporting and training the world's farmers, ranchers, and female business owners, we're investing in a new breed of success.”

All gifts your congregation makes through June 2025 will be matched — doubling your impact!

THE VINE FOOD PANTRY AT-A-GLANCE January 2025

New Clients.....	71
Return Clients.....	436
Total Clients Served.....	507
New Households.....	32
Return Households.....	218
Total Households Served.....	250

Total Pounds Distributed: 9,015

Building Relationships



Genesisius Guild Presents “Sweeney Todd”

The Genesisius Guild will open their 2025 season with Stephen Sondheim’s “Sweeney Todd” in the Fellowship Hall at First Church. The acclaimed Broadway musical will be performed on March 7, 8, 14, and 15 at 7:30 pm and on March 9 and 16 at 3:00 pm. Ticket prices are \$15 for students and seniors, \$20 for adults, and \$45 for a dinner-theatre package (March 8 only). For reservations, call (219) 501-8228 or visit www.genesiushild.net.



Join the Book Club

“From the celebrated author of *The Nightingale* and *The Four Winds* comes our selection for March. *The Women* is the story of one woman gone to the Vietnam War, but it shines a light on all women who put themselves in harm’s way and whose sacrifice and commitment to their country has too often been forgotten. A novel about deep friendships and bold patriotism, *The Women* is a richly drawn story with a memorable heroine whose idealism and courage under fire will come to define an era.” Please consider joining us for an informal discussion on March 17 at 1:00 pm via Zoom. You may call the church office for a Zoom invitation.

As you probably know, both First Church and Woodmar are in severe financial distress and that prevents us from having paid staff to do some of the various needed tasks. Woodmar has been without a maintenance person and a custodian for many months.

Until the financial situation improves, we are seeking a list of people willing to assist here and there as needed on a volunteer basis. Please call either church office (Woodmar (219) 844-3030; First Church (219) 932-5915, to add your name to a “call-sheet” of volunteers to help with tasks such as shoveling snow, simple repairs, restocking paper towel dispensers, or office tasks. We deeply appreciate your help.

Pastor Jim Denton

Children's Ministries

Birthdays
Children
Miscellaneous



Woodmar UMC

- 1 Sue Fusner
- 1 Robert Solon
- 4 Carol Wagner
- 16 Bong Yohl Kim
- 18 Debbie Austin
- 18 Shirley Lopatkiewicz
- 20 Andrea Fukuda
- 24 Donna Wilkinson
- 26 James Thomas
- 28 Mary Jo Shea
- 29 Vincent Romero

First UMC

- 3 Ken Baker
- 3 Mary Cook-Baker
- 5 Phyllis Widstrand
- 6 Shana Chelich
- 6 Kaitlyn Encinas
- 7 Jerry Kolanowski
- 10 John Adkinson
- 13 Dean Seehausen
- 14 Bellamy Avina
- 14 Logan Malloy
- 17 Tim Petty
- 18 Jan Yehnert
- 18 Jack Yerkes
- 19 Amy Rummel
- 21 Esther Bunger
- 22 Paolo Mejia
- 23 Ansley Avina
- 24 Alyson Hawkins
- 25 Isaiah Herrera
- 25 Pam Longhi
- 29 Blake Cook
- 30 Karen Mulcahy-Smith
- 31 Paulette Tapper

Community Preschool and Childcare

The Munster Lion's Club came to CP&CC to conduct vision screenings for our kids through Operation Kid Sight! We so appreciate the kind service that the Lions provide to our community.

Speaking of community, we are celebrating Our Beloved Community. Each family is asked to bring an item that represents their beautiful and unique family. The items will be on display in the foyer as you come in.

Our Instagram page has launched. Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Google, and please leave reviews! We would love to get a lot of exposure to provide high-quality education and care to as many families as possible! Did you know we will be opening a 2-year-old classroom for full-time childcare in August? If you know of anyone looking for childcare, please send them our way; we can help them connect with resources for free preschool and childcare.

Our Popcorn Fundraiser is March 3-24. We will have our first spring fundraiser selling popcorn. All earnings will go towards outdoor equipment for the kids! If you would like to support our fundraiser, please see Cyndi Slaboski. An order form is in the narthex. Whether it's savory treats like Jalapeño or White Cheddar, crunchy flavors like Buttery Caramel and Chicago Style, or sweet dessert flavors like Cookies & Cream, there's something for everyone! LaBraid fundraiser popcorn pops in a heart-healthy air popper. \$18 per item.



Finance and Administrative



First UMC Finance News

The First Church Finance Committee held their second meeting of the new year on February 20. Those present included Church Council Chair Jane Harper-Alport, Financial Secretary Pam Longhi, Treasurer Larry Alport, and Finance Chair Pete Ward.

The church received \$8,060.85 in offerings and gifts during January, as well as other income from building use; donations for Second Mile Giving, UMCOR relief, and Wednesday Bible Study; payments for altar flowers and SCRIP; and miscellaneous income, all of which brought total income for the month to 9,921,72. However, total church expenses for January were \$20,965.99. These expenses were made up of salaries, missions, conference tithes, office expense, property and utility expense, and pastor's pension and health insurance. The result is that the expenses for the month exceeded income by \$11,044.27.

The checking account balance as of January 31 was \$384,855.56. However, this balance is entirely made up of restricted funds that represent proceeds from the sale of the parsonage, and designated funds for Memorials, Second Mile Giving, The Vine Food Pantry, SCRIP, and several other accounts. Unfortunately, we are continuing to use restricted and designated funds simply to keep the church open during the merger process.

The Finance Committee continues to work with the Church Council and the FUMC Foundation to establish an operating budget for 2025 that will allow us to meet our financial obligations. Our fixed costs continue to exceed our monthly giving by approximately \$3,000.

Please feel free to reach out to me or any member of the Finance Committee if you have questions.
Pastor Pete Ward, FUMC Finance chair

Woodmar UMC Finance News

January Financials for Woodmar ended with expenses over income of \$88.04. We had \$26,732 cash in bank at the end of the month. Offering for the month was \$10,986. No unusual expenses were made. Community Preschool and Childcare had income over expenses of \$4,554 with \$87,835 cash in bank. Their year-to-date (August - July) bottom line is expenses over income of \$26,718. Let's pray for a great new year!!

First United Methodist Church

6635 Hohman Ave, Hammond, IN 46324
Phone (219) 932-5915
www.hammondfumc.org
email – admin@hammondfumc.org

Office Hours

Brenda: Tuesday & Thursday, 8:30-2:30
Jim: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00-3:00

Woodmar United Methodist Church

7320 Northcote Ave, Hammond, IN 46324
Phone (219) 844-3030
www.woodmarumc.org
email – office@woodmarumc.org

Office Hours

Brenda: Monday & Wednesday, 10:00-1:00
Jim: Monday, 10:00-3:00 & Wed., 1:00-4:00

Please keep in mind that pastoral care needs may mean that Pastor Jim will be in and out of the office during these times. It is always advisable to call to schedule a time to meet with him. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Pastor Jim or Brenda.