

# The Messenger



**FIRST METHODIST CHURCH**  
**— OF ZEPHYRHILLS —**  
a Global Methodist Family

## ***Following the Star***

***December 2025***

*In this issue: Salvation's Rock Song of the Month See page 10*

38635 5th Avenue, Zephyrhills, FL 33542  
Church Office: (813) 782-5645  
[www.fmcz.org](http://www.fmcz.org) / [info@fmcz.org](mailto:info@fmcz.org)

## Join us for Live, In-Person Sunday Worship

Contemporary Service 9:30am

Traditional Service 11:00 am

**Children's Church** dismissal at both services

**Three Adult Sunday School Classes:** 9:30-10:30am Crusaders

9:30 -10:30am Spirit and Truth and 11:00am-12:00pm Truthseekers

### ***New to FMCZ? Welcome!***

#### **First-Time Guests**

Welcome! We hope you'll have a wonderful, Spirit-filled experience worshipping God with us. We have a gift for you. Just ask one of the ushers for a first time guest gift bag after the worship service.

#### **Children's Nursery**

We offer a Nursery for children aged 8 weeks through 5 years. It opens at 9:15am each Sunday morning and is open for the full hour of each worship service. It is a safe and nurturing place with screened and trained leaders located in the Education Building through the door to Cooper Hall.

#### **Children's Church**

Kindergarten through fifth graders are invited to Children's Church! They are dismissed halfway through each worship service. One of our screened and trained team members will lead them to the Children's Church room in the **Education Building** for a fun, Christ-centered learning experience. All parents/guardians please pick up your children immediately following the service.

#### **Sanctuary Mothers' Room**

Mothers' Room offers live streaming of each service and a quiet place for mothers to attend to the needs of their small children. Located through the door to the right of the altar platform.

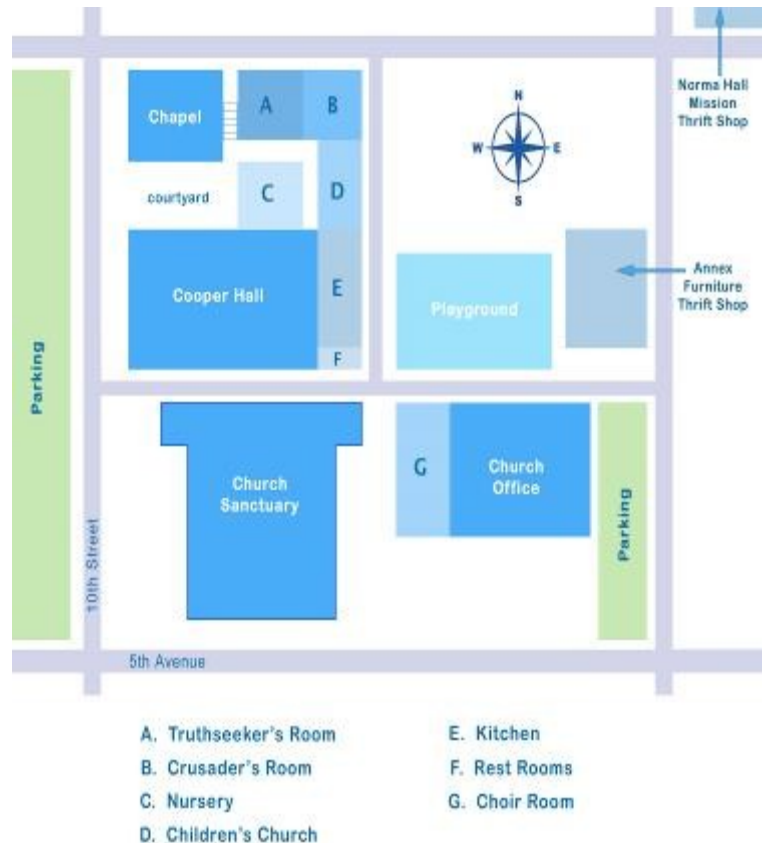
#### **Restrooms**

Restrooms are located in the sanctuary lobby, in Cooper Hall by the kitchen, and at the end of the hallway in the Education Building. Changing tables are available in most restrooms.

#### **Sunday Café**

Drop in for light refreshments in Cooper Hall before or between worship services 9:00-11:00am. Grab a cup of coffee and a treat on your way to worship or Sunday School class, and meet some of the other friendly people in our church family!

### ***Campus Map***



## December 2025 Worship Services

### Worship Themes

December brings us into the Advent season, a time for remembering and celebrating the fulfillment of all things in Christ. Advent puts Christmas in its proper place, not as a winter holiday, but rather as the completely disruptive inbreaking of the God who, through his birth, makes all things new.

### **Sunday, December 07: Communion Sunday ~ 2nd Week of Advent**

My True Love Gave to Me – “PEACE”, Mark 1:1-8 and Isaiah 40:1-11  
Advent Candle Lighting at both services and Baptism at 9:30 service.  
*“The birth of Christ gave the world its best hope for peace since the Garden of Eden.”*

### **Sunday, December 14: Christmas Cantata 11am service ~ 3rd Week of Advent**

My True Love Gave to Me – “JOY”, John 1:6-8, 19-28; Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11  
Advent Candle Lighting at both services and Baptism at 9:30 service.  
*“The JOY of the season is found, not in a cultural experience but in recognizing that God’s reign is now with us in Christ.”*

### **Sunday, December 21: 4th Week of Advent**

My True Love Gave to Me – “LOVE”, Luke 1:26-38; Samuel 7:1-11  
Advent Candle Lighting at both services.  
*“The overwhelming LOVE of God is expressed by sending his Son to live among us. We respond with our love for him and to one another.”*

### **Wednesday, December 24: Christmas Eve Services**

Services at 6:00pm (Contemporary) and 8:00pm (Traditional)  
*Both services will be candlelight and communion gatherings.*

### **Sunday, December 28:**

One Combined Service at 10:00am

## WORSHIP: Witnessing Boldly

**Music Ministry** Our Music Ministry groups are always open to welcoming new members! If you are interested in serving through music, talk to a group member!

**Salvation’s Rock** [Contemporary Service 9:30am]

**Music Worship Leader: Eric Gale**

**Practice Schedule: Thursdays –7:30—9:30pm, Sundays – 8:00am**

**Chancel Choir** [Traditional Service 11:00am]

**Music Worship Leader for both choirs: Miriam Ezra**

**Hand Bell Choir** [Periodically at Traditional Service 11:00am]

**Practice Schedule: Mondays – Bells 6:00—7:00pm; Choir 7:00—8:00pm**

**Men Of God** [Periodically at Traditional Service and other functions]

**Practice Schedule: Varies**

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## Sunday Study and Discussion Groups

Weekly study groups offer adult Bible study each Sunday morning in the Education Building Classrooms through Cooper Hall East.

**Crusaders from 9:30 - 10:30am**

**Spirit and Truth from 9:30 - 10:30am**

**Truthseekers from 11:00am - 12:00pm.**

**Crusaders Class:** Facilitated by Jeanne Narum, this class uses material developed by Cokesbury Methodist publishing house. Crusaders continues to study the 3 sermon epistles of John. They teach us how to love both God and neighbor by showing hospitality.

**Spirit and Truth Class:** Facilitated by Greg Peavey. How can the 2,000 year old Bible help us live in our world today? How can reading about ancient people help us walk more closely with God? Starting with the book of Luke, this class will work verse by verse, learning how we can be the men and women God calls us to be. Ideal for those new to a close reading of the Bible as well as long-time deep-divers into Scripture. This class will focus on how God's Word is alive and meaningful in ways we may not yet have realized. We will talk, learn and discuss together!

**Truthseekers Class:** We are excited to announce that the TRUTHSEEKERS class began a new session of Bible study in mid-November. In this series, we explore the book of Acts, guided by the insightful study materials of Max Lucado. What to expect from this class:

- In-depth Exploration: Dive deep into the book of Acts, discovering its lessons and relevance for our lives today.
- Guided Study: Benefit from Max Lucado's trusted approach to understanding scripture.
- Community Fellowship: Share insights and encouragement with fellow seekers as we grow together in faith. All are welcome to join us in discovery and discussion.

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## Technical Support Services [Team Leader ~ Todd Kramer]

To meet modern needs, our A/V support services are constantly expanding. Activities include live audio and video projection control, streaming video control, and audio/video preparations. The quality of live services and online streams impacts how much and how well we engage those who may be looking for a church home, especially in this day and age of electronic media. This team is actively looking for several new volunteer members to help run the audio board and slide presentations. No experience needed! Training can be provided. Contact our Technical Director at [tkramer@fmcz.org](mailto:tkramer@fmcz.org)



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## Sunday Café ~ Cooper Hall East [Team Leader ~ Michelle Hill]

The Sunday Morning Café is located in Cooper Hall east from 9:00 am until 11:00 am every Sunday, before and between services. Enter through the side door facing the sanctuary which also leads to the Education Building. Join us as we greet the day with coffee and fellowship! It's a great time to meet or make friends, share our viewpoints, or prepare to join in a Sunday Bible Study class.



## MINISTRIES: Making Disciples of Christ

### Children's Ministry [Team Leaders ~ Carol Runyon and Polly Adwell]

**Children's Church** (grades K - 5)



#### December Class Activities

Beginning December 07, the classes will explore the rich meaning of the Advent season as we await the birth of the Savior. These holiday times are great times for your children to discover and discuss the true joys of the season. Questions? Contact Carol Runyon at: [crunyon@fmcz.org](mailto:crunyon@fmcz.org)

Bring your children and youth to Sunday Service from where they will be dismissed to the Cooper Hall Education Building for their own prayerful fun and Bible-based activities with Next Waves Kids and Youth Ministries. Children meet in the Children's Ministry Room down the main hallway of the Education wing and Youth meet in the Chapel Classroom.

### Youth and Family Ministries [Team Leader ~ Karen Ezra]

**Youth Sunday School** curriculum continues to explore themes from Genesis with tie-ins to other key passages in both the Old and New Testaments, using material from "Answers in Genesis".

#### December Youth Lesson Plan

##### Unit 5 continues

Dec. 07 ~ Lesson 69:	Topic - Israel Turns to Idols
Dec. 14 ~ Lesson 71:	Topic - God Uses Gideon
Dec. 21 ~ Lesson ~:	Christmas Story and Party
Dec. 28 ~ Lesson ~:	No Youth Sunday School This Day

Youth Sunday School is held in the Chapel Classroom and conducted by Karen Ezra and other members of the Ministry Team. Connect with Karen at [kezra@fmcz.org](mailto:kezra@fmcz.org) for more information.



#### OTHER YOUTH AND CHILDREN NEWS FOR DECEMBER

**Open House Fundraiser:** Saturday, December 6th: 4:00pm - 9:00pm. Two food and drink tents as part of Zephyrhills Festival of Lights will be set up on our church lawn and in the west parking lot near the Women's Club building. Coordinated by Karen Ezra at [kezra@fmcz.org](mailto:kezra@fmcz.org). The booths will offer pretzel knots with cheese sauce and walking tacos along with snacks and drinks to help support the youth ministry's annual trip to Universal Studios in Orlando for Rock The Universe.

**Youth Christmas Party:** Sunday, December 14, 11:00am - 2:00pm. Youth Lunch and Christmas Party in Cooper Hall East. Bring a wrapped \$15 gift for a super fun gift exchange.

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## Prayer and Praise [Team Leader ~ Connie Norton]

Every Tuesday Morning 9:00am, Truthseekers Room, Education Building

As we enter into this most joyful season of the entire year, there are many who feel rejected, forgotten and or abandoned. We Christians realize the importance of letting people KNOW they are important to GOD.

We can help people to KNOW God's love through our prayers, words and actions. We may not always know the effects our words may have on those around us but an encouraging word and heart-felt support can mean a great deal to others and be the one moment in a day that opens their hearts and inspires them to continue to move forward.

In this holiday time, REMEMBER to pray for these special persons.



*submitted by Connie Norton*

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## Walk to Emmaus [Team Leaders ~ Dave and Roz Hill]

*The following excerpt was written by a Clergy person from Illinois:*

*"Emmaus is not an "emotional bubble-bath." It is essentially a journey with Jesus Christ. The main focus is not how wonderfully close we have grown with each other, but how much closer we are to Christ and how much more effective we are as servants in his church."*

The Walk to Emmaus is a spiritual renewal program intended to strengthen the local church through the development of Christian disciples and leaders. The Walk to Emmaus experience begins with a 72-hour short course in Christianity comprised of fifteen talks by lay and clergy on themes of God's grace, disciplines of Christian discipleship, and what it means to be the church. The course is wrapped in prayer and meditation, special times of worship, and the daily celebration of Holy Communion. The "Emmaus community," made up of those who have attended an Emmaus weekend, support the 72-hour experience with a prayer vigil, by preparing and serving meals, and other acts of love and self-giving. Men and women attend separate events.



During and after the three days, Emmaus leaders encourage participants to meet regularly in small groups. The members of the small groups challenge and support one another in practical, faithful living. Participants seek to Christianize their environments of family, job, and community through the ministry of their congregation.

First Methodist Church of Zephyrhills is an Emmaus Church. We have approximately 26 active Emmaus members who have been on their "Walk With Christ" and actively participate in monthly Emmaus Reunion Meetings. Once a year we host an Emmaus Gathering. There were approximately 70 people from other churches throughout Central Florida who met at First Methodist for fellowship, food, prayer, communion and music last September. It was an amazing time for everyone involved.

Emmaus members are available as sponsors who will guide you through the process of becoming a member of our Emmaus community.

**Next Men's Walk - September 10-13, 2026 ~ Next Women's Walk - September 17-20, 2026**  
Please join us! Call Roz or Dave Hill at 443-834-8621 to be referred to a sponsor for details.

Our next Emmaus function will be a Spaghetti Dinner on Tuesday, January 13th from 5:00 - 8:00 pm This will be a fundraising opportunity to raise money for scholarships for the next Emmaus Weekend scheduled for September 2026. If you're ready to share in the Emmaus experience, please contact Roz Hill at 443-834-8621 or via email at: [rozzie1944@gmail.com](mailto:rozzie1944@gmail.com) .

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## United Women in Faith [Team Leader ~ Phyllis Blanchard]

*Updates From Phyllis Blanchard:*



Our unit of United Women in Faith met Thursday, the 13th of November. It was right after the eBlast went out reminding folks of our Meals Around the World dinner November 22nd. Considering that, it was a really hard decision that we made to postpone our dinner to February 28th due to all the activity in the church lately. We are so blessed that we have such an active and engaged church family, but sometimes it really does become too much of a good thing and blessings really don't deserve to be rushed or squeezed too tightly together. So we chose "patient food" over "fast food"!

Our next two fundraisers are both in December. On **December 11th, 5:00 - 8:00pm**, we'll serve up a holiday **Roast Beef & Mashed Potatoes Dinner** in Cooper Hall for only \$12.50. Try getting that at a local Applebee's! Tickets will be for sale in the office starting Monday, November 24th.

**December 14th**, the same day as the Christmas Cantata, we're selling **PICK YOUR OWN COOKIES** in two sized boxes. Our helpers will help fill Christmas cookie boxes for **\$5 or \$10** during both services in **Cooper Hall, 9am to 12:30pm**. You'll definitely want to come early to get the best selection and stock up for all your own holiday entertaining. If you want any additional information about either of these special events, talk to any United Women in Faith member!

We're excited to see the Angel Trees up in Cooper Hall and in the Narthex of the Sanctuary! Lyn Sears worked hard with representatives from the schools and has the tags all ready to hang on the trees. We made ornaments to replace those Angel Tags when they're taken so our little trees don't seem sad during the drive. Bare trees during Christmas just don't look happy, you know? SO, we made ornaments and we'll bring in ornaments that don't make it on OUR family trees at home this year. The more Angel Tags that get removed to be turned into children's wishes, the more sparkly our trees will become! How cool is that?

**Above all, we wish everyone of our church family a blessed and joyful Christmas, full of friends, families, and fellowship!**

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## Project Others [Team Leader ~ Deann Harrington]

### PROJECT OTHERS SCHEDULE 2025 - 2026

11-28-25 MEET AS USUAL

12-05-25 PACK CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS  
PACK HEALTH KITS

MEMBERS' CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON @ GOLDEN CORRAL WILL FOLLOW

12-12-25 8 AM PACK ITEMS  
DISTRIBUTE YOUR PACKAGES

12-19-25 NO PROJECT OTHERS

12-26-25 NO PROJECT OTHERS

01-02-26 BEGIN THE NEW YEAR @ OUR REGULAR MEETING TIMES!

Questions may be directed to Team Leader, Deann Harrington (813) 713- 4119.

As always thank you for your support and donations throughout the year. Our projects are made possible by the generous donations of raw materials that are then made by hand into caring comfort items.

### THE PROJECT OTHERS TEAM

Meeting faithfully for hand crafts, fellowship, and prayer  
Every Friday morning, 8:00 - 11:00am in Cooper Hall West

## MISSIONS: Community Outreach

### Food Pantry [Team Leader ~ Tana Day]

**Update for the holiday season from the food pantry.**

Our November distribution which included a special Thanksgiving bag with canned chicken, gravy, stuffing, green beans, mashed potatoes and a dessert mix was a great success. We distributed 163 setups!! With your help, we are planning on having a 'holiday meal box' containing all things 'foodie' for Christmas available for our December distribution. The folks that come to the pantry will be able to pick items from the box that they want.

Bookmarks listing our desired items will be available for you to pickup in the office, on the Narthex Welcome table, and in Cooper Hall at the entry table throughout November and December.



**Food Pantry Distribution Days are December 8, 9, and 10**

**THIS MONTH'S DONATION COLLECTION SUNDAY IS December 14**



### Thrift Shops [Team Leaders ~ Lyn Sears, Main Shop; Terry Dutkiewicz, Annex]

**The holiday season is upon us!!**

All our Christmas tableware, home decor and clothes are out on the shelves and racks for your buying pleasure.

**Our year-end sale extravaganza will be Saturday, Dec. 27 - Saturday, Jan. 3.**

All regular priced items in the main store will be 1/2 off  
Discounts on sale and clearance items as well. ***Have a joyous Christmas and New Year!!***

#### **Regularly Featured In the Annex**

Furniture ~ larger home goods ~ Christmas decor

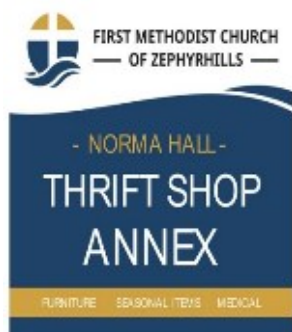
#### **Regularly Featured In the Main Shop**

Clothing, books, and smaller home goods  
and general home décor

Mondays 8am–12pm

Donations only

Wednesdays & Saturdays 8am–12pm





Throughout the year, our team stays in close contact with our brothers and sisters in Christ down in Southeastern Cuba. The best news recently is they came through hurricane Melissa with no damage despite being near the path of the storm. Praise God!

Otherwise, the church community is staying very busy! Pastor Osmar is reinstating a former feeding program for the local children. We recently sent \$400.00 dollars to help get this started.

Also, they are looking to add a cover between the church and parsonage. The church is regularly overflowing every service and people stand outside the open windows to listen to the service. The cover would provide shelter from the weather and the area could be used to hold activities and meals for the congregation. We are currently in discussion on sending money to help with this project in the near future.

Pastor Osmar and his wife, Yoandra, are in contact every couple weeks to send blessings for our church and the Pastor. They are always praying for us. Please remember to keep them in prayer. The mission trip to our sister church in February is documented on a special page on our website. There you'll find photos and our impressions of the trip. <https://fmcz.org/missions/cuba-mission-trip-2025/>

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## Spotlight < Christmas Angel Trees

This season First Methodist Missions will be sponsoring a number of students from Woodlawn EL, Raymond B Stewart MS, and Zephyrhills HS through a Christmas Angel Tree program. Beginning on November 16th, trees were set up; two table-top trees in the Narthex and one larger tree in Cooper Hall near the classroom hallway. A representative from each school has provided a list of needy students along with their Christmas wishes that are made into Angel Tags and hung on the trees. To participate, pick one or more tags from the trees and purchase the gift or gifts. The suggested gift price range is between \$15 and \$25. Once purchased, return **unwrapped** gifts with the ornament tags to Cooper Hall or the church office by noon on Sunday, December 7th. From there the program coordinators will deliver your gifts to the schools to give to each student. *Thank you for your generosity at this special time of year.*



## Spotlight < Salvation's Rock ~ Praise Song Playlist



Welcome to Praise Playlist, a monthly feature where one of the Salvation's Rock members will suggest a song that they think should be added to your own Worship Playlist. This list is for Contemporary Christian tunes that band members feel especially drawn to as they choose weekly music, even if the track is not in our music library or available to play at worship service.

This month's song is suggested by Tom Sharp, the group's bass player. Along with being a longtime member of the band, Tom is very active in a number of FMCZ ministries and can often be found leading classes as part of Wednesday Night Refuels. Tom's song choice for December is "Let the Wind Blow," a contemporary Christian song from the 80's, written by Mark Martin and performed by the Imperials. Tom writes, *"It's a fairly simple song with great lyrics. It tells of a coming storm (Spiritual) and the trials and conflicts we face in our lives. It tells of a Mighty storm on the horizon with thunder and rain falling from the sky above. He's trusting in the Lord of Love, 'Let the Wind blow. Let the evil one devise his plans, I'm trusting in the Great I Am, let the wind blow. Let the wind blow because he will stand on the solid rock of God, trusting in the Prince of Peace.' I would encourage every Christian to listen to this song. The music and singing are excellent."*

Listen to it here: ["Let The Wind Blow" performed by The Imperials](#)

## Long Term Prayer List [For December 2025] updated 11-18-2025

Along with the weekly list of those connected to our congregation in need of prayer support, our team of prayer warriors maintains a special focus on those who are in need over a long period of time; prolonged illness, lengthy recoveries, uncertain circumstances, or protracted personal challenges. The team asks all church family members to keep these individuals in your own prayers as well throughout the month ahead. **As Jesus reminded us, "Ask, using my name, and you will receive."**

Gary Bridges, Chloe Budge, Michele Devine, Joan Donaldson, Richard Dreyer, Jim Elliot, Randy Hall, Bryistol Loftis, Gary McLean, Suzanne Morgan, Trisha Stevens, Betsy Strickland, Roxanna Young.

## Commission on Missions Committee [Team Leader ~ Kay Milligan]



OVER 90 YEARS OF HISTORY

In 1925, Hiram Frakes, a Methodist minister, came to the Laurel Fork Valley in southeastern Kentucky with a dream of educational, economic, and spiritual reform. Local families donated 123 acres of land and Frakes started a school for the area. It opened in the fall of 1925 with 13 students.

That was the beginning of Henderson Settlement. The vision has shifted focus over years to meet the changing needs of the community

Today, over 90 years later, Henderson Settlement still provides opportunities for the communities we serve.

Pray for Us & Seek God's Will for Your Participation in Mission

- Volunteer Your Time & Talents
- Send Financial Support
- In Kind Donations
- Shop Our Amazon Wish List
- Become a Covenant Partner
- Join the Frakes Society. Include us in your will, life insurance, retirement plan, and other financial planning.

(Main Campus)  
16723 HWY 196, P.O. Box 205  
Frakes, KY 40940  
606.337.3613  
[WWW.HENDERSONSETTLEMENT.COM](http://WWW.HENDERSONSETTLEMENT.COM)

Satellite Location: White Oak Center  
4433 White Oak Road  
Duff, TN 37729

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### HENDERSON SETTLEMENT

**Creating Opportunities for Better Lives through Christ-centered Service.**

December's Mission of the Month is one that our church family has a long tradition of supporting, primarily through proceeds from the two Thrift Shops. When you purchase items in the shops, the money regularly goes back out to a varied list of worthwhile organizations, charities, and social projects both local and distant. The Henderson Settlement has served its Appalachian community in Kentucky for many years and its Methodist roots run deep.

As a Mission of the Month, you can directly support this ministry by using the offering envelopes and marking your donation "Henderson Settlement". Thank you!

Faith Community Nursing [Team Leader ~ Druann Briggs, RN 813-420-7919]

Next Blood Pressure Checks ~ December 7th ~ 10:30 - 11:00am in Cooper Hall

PLEASE CHECK THE BULLETIN BOARD IN COOPER HALL FOR OTHER UPDATES

### Is the Grinch Stealing Your Christmas? Handling Holiday Stress

Finding new perspectives on this Christmas season can help to recenter our expectations, goals, and priorities so that we can rediscover the joy and peace that was given to us through Christ's humble birth so long ago.



Do you remember the popular movie, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*? The Grinch observed the people of Whoville happily preparing for Christmas. He decided to go down to their village and steal their joy. Many Grinches threaten to steal our joy and peace at Christmastime. We think we are buying just the right gift for someone, but it receives a cool reception. The rush of the season, long lines, and slow traffic replace our joy with frustration. Some relatives try our patience. After the season passes, unmet expectations dampen our spirit and the holiday blues move in. With the arrival of the New Year, we are relieved the Christmas stress has passed instead of being refreshed by the promise of Christ. More than we would like to admit, we allow the stress of the Christmas season to be the Grinch that comes into our hearts to steal our joy. However, with a new and revived perspective, God can give us a transformed heart so that our circumstances don't dictate our attitude. The new perspective we need is this ~

### **G.R.I.N.C.H. God Reached Into the world Now Christ brings Hope**

#### WAYS TO RECENTER PERSPECTIVE TO FIND THE PEACE AND JOY OF CHRISTMAS

- **Listen** - Inaugurate the season by treating yourself to a CD or ONLINE music of real Christmas classics, not songs of White Christmas or Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire, but great hymns such as Joy to the World or Angels from the Realms of Glory.
- **Read** - Open up the Bible to the Gospel of Luke and read the familiar story with new eyes. Remember Mary's story as you encounter aggravating people and circumstances over the holidays .
- **Reduce** - Do you really need to throw a Christmas party in your home, host the school party, bake cookies, decorate like Martha Stewart, send cards, or buy multiple gifts? Give yourself permission to decline an invitation, buy rather than bake cookies, or skip the Christmas cards so that you can maintain room in your heart for worship.
- **Adjust** - Set expectations to match your reality. Life doesn't turn out perfect and neither does the holiday season.. As you experience disappointment around you, keep in mind that Christ entered into a broken world to bring healing and peace. Though you can't change others, ask God to work in your heart so that you can exemplify His love, joy, peace, and patience to the hurting world surrounding you.

*Embrace fully the coming of our long-expected Savior and allow Him to release you from the bondage of expectations the holiday season brings. Place your joy and hope in Him as you allow the magnitude of His birth to penetrate your being and rest assured that those sneaky Grinches can't crush a heart satisfied in Christ.*

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## Stephen Ministry [Team Leader ~ Dave Hill]



Stephen Ministry offers a proven and effective way to organize, equip, and supervise a team of congregation members—called *Stephen Ministers*—to provide high-quality, one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people in the congregation and the community experiencing life difficulties. Over the years, well over one-and-a-half million people have benefited from the one-to-one, Christ-centered care of a Stephen Minister. This care is entirely confidential—no one knows the identity of a care receiver except for their Stephen Minister and the pastor or Stephen Leader who paired them together. Here's what one Care Receiver said in an interview:

*It all began soon after I moved to [a new city] to live near my family. I had just ended an eight-year relationship and was depending on them to be my support system. But a few months after I arrived, they had to unexpectedly move away—so I felt very, very alone. My grandfather passed away not long after they moved. It was one of the hardest times of my life. I knew I needed to talk to someone, but I hadn't lived in the city long enough to develop close, comfortable friendships that I could depend on. But my new church had Stephen Ministry. When I found out what Stephen Ministry was, I talked to my pastor about getting a Stephen Minister.*

### **How did your relationship with your Stephen Minister start out?**

*It started off a little bit slow. I wasn't sure how I'd feel about sharing deep, personal things with someone I didn't know very well. But her consistency, compassion, and care for me really came through. I realized that my Stephen Minister was a safe person who wasn't going to share what I told her with anyone else. From there we developed a deep relationship until I felt like I could truly share anything with her.*

### **What was it like to meet with your Stephen Minister?**

*We met weekly. Sometimes she'd come to my house and we'd sit and talk, and other times we'd go walking together. During our visits, she just let me talk while she listened. As I was talking through things, I realized that it was helping me to make sense of everything that had happened and how I was feeling. She accepted my feelings, including the ones that seemed risky to share—and that was really helpful. I actually didn't need advice from her—I needed acceptance and affirmation. I had a lot of hurts, a lot of loneliness, a lot of uncertainty inside. I needed to be validated and not put down. My Stephen Minister did a wonderful job of creating a warm, caring space for me to process my emotions and work through my issues.*

### **Could you tell me about a caring visit that stands out for you?**

*Definitely. It was a few months into our relationship, and I'd begun to trust my Stephen Minister with some of my most difficult issues. As we were walking around a track, with the wind blowing in my face, I suddenly realized that she was literally walking right beside me as I journeyed through my pain. I'd been struggling with some spiritual wounds that were pretty intense and needed healing—things I didn't want to share with family and friends. But on that visit, as my Stephen Minister walked next to me, I felt safe and comfortable. So I shared my deepest hurts with her—some really painful things that I feared she might judge me for and that made me wonder if God could possibly love me. After I told her those things, I was really nervous and dreading her response. I was worried that she would think I was an awful person. But instead, she put her arm around me and said, "I'm sorry you had to go through that." And that was a turning point for me. To go from fear of judgment to a positive affirmation of care, empathy—and even sorrow for what I'd been through—it was so meaningful. That's when I began to feel God's love again. I've heard other care receivers say that their Stephen Minister helped them experience God's love. The fact that God is invisible makes it hard for me to experience him sometimes. I'd been through some very negative experiences in life that caused me to question whether God even existed—and, if he existed, whether he loved me. I truly wondered, after all the things I'd done and the mess I'd been through, if God could still love me. I somehow knew intuitively that I needed a person that I could see and touch. I think that's truly why I asked for a Stephen Minister.*

First Methodist Church of Zephyrhills is a Stephen Ministry Church. If you feel that you could benefit from a Stephen Minister, call the Church Office at 813-782-5645. Ask to be put in touch with a Stephen Leader who will in turn talk to you to find out if you would benefit from the support of a Stephen Minister.

If you would like more information about becoming a Stephen Minister, contact Dave Hill at: [dhill1944@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:dhill1944@tampabay.rr.com) or call 410-409-9132.

## Support Groups On Our Campus

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### Adult Children of Alcoholics and Family Dysfunction

Wednesdays from 12:00 - 1:00pm in the Chapel Parlor.

From 10th Street, enter through the white gate into the courtyard, and go to the double doors.

ACA is a 12-step international fellowship of healing from past traumas as a child and growing through the pain to become a happy and content adult! The program focuses on emotional sobriety for those affected by dysfunctional families, whether alcohol is involved or not.



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### TOPS Meetings

Every Thursday morning 10:00am - 12:00pm

Truthseekers Classroom, Education Building of Cooper Hall

For more information contact the Church Office, 813-782-5645.

*Founded in 1948, TOPS is the first of its kind, noncommercial weight-loss support group, with ties to the medical community and thousands of chapters in the U.S. and Canada.*



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### Al-Anon meets regularly here on the FMCZ campus.

Fridays, 6:30 - 8:00pm, in the Truthseekers Room.

*Please enter through the back door of Cooper Hall, on 6th Avenue between 10th and 11th Streets (a sign will be there).*

*For more information contact the Church Office, 813-782-5645.*



Al-Anon is a mutual support program for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. By sharing common experiences and applying the Al-Anon principles, families and friends of alcoholics can bring positive changes to their individual situations.

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### Meeting Information:

September 3rd through December 8, 2025

Crusaders Classroom - Education Building



For information, contact Gaynell Jeffries at:

eldis.jeffries@gmail.com or pick up a flyer in the sanctuary lobby. You can register directly at

<https://www.griefshare.org/findagroup>

December's schedule is as follows: Wednesday, December 3, 3:00 - 4:30pm; Monday, December 8 Last Class, 2:00 - 3:30pm. GriefShare will return for a new 14 week session starting in January, 2026.



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### Alcoholics Anonymous

*AA Meets on Fridays at 4:00 p.m. in the Truthseekers Room.*

*Please enter through the back door of Cooper Hall, on 6th Avenue between 10th and 11th Streets (a sign will be there).*

*For more information contact the Church Office, 813-782-5645.*

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people who utilize the 12-step program to achieve sobriety and support others who share that path.

## SPECIAL EVENTS: Information, Fellowship, Music

### Young At Heart Presentations [Team Leads ~ Harry Kehr & Gary Hartman]

#### SENIOR LUNCHEON AND HOLIDAY FELLOWSHIP



**Thursday, December 18th**

**11:30am—1:00pm**

**Cooper Hall East**

**Christmas Luncheon  
Celebrate the Season!**

Good Food ~ Good Fellowship ~ Good Times  
Featuring The Men of God and pianist, Barbara Friedman  
Complete with an Ugly Sweater Contest



**ADMISSION: BRING  
ONE COVERED SIDE  
DISH OF YOUR  
CHOICE TO SHARE.**

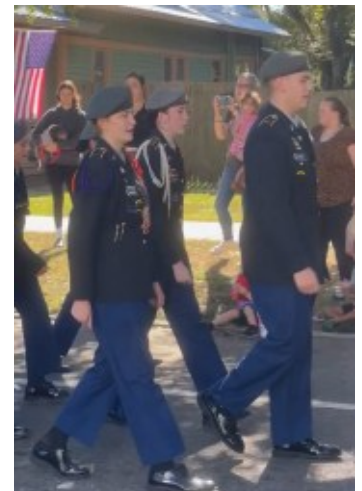
### Holiday Open House [Saturday, December 6th, 5:00 - 7:00pm]

Please join us on Saturday, December 6th as we open up our beautifully decorated sanctuary to the public to help kick off the Zephyrhills Festival of Lights Celebration up and down 5th Avenue. Featuring live musical sets by Salvation's Rock, holiday hymns and carols, a special photo corner inside with our Christmas tree, a food and drink fundraising booth out front with our Youth Ministry team, and a fitting atmosphere of peace, fellowship, and joy. Enjoy casual time with other FMCZ members and welcome our neighbors into the special place where we come to worship. Start your holiday season with warm welcomes to the town we call home. Then stroll downtown to enjoy the annual Festival of Lights where you'll find food trucks, craft vendors, live music, and a good old-fashioned Christmas Parade. It's a time to open arms as we open our house to our neighbors and friends.



### Veteran's Day Parade [November 8, 2025]

It is always a source of pride for any family when one of its members steps forward to be a positive part of the community. Our own Olivia Woodring joined in November's Veteran's Day Parade along with other members of the local JROTC to honor all those who have served our country in the military. According to those who know Olivia, she finds great joy and deep meaning in being a part of the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, a federal program in high schools that teaches leadership, discipline, and responsibility through community service and citizenship development. Olivia reminds us all that our church family is always a vital part of the greater community around us and that our examples speak loudly. When you see Olivia you can already rightly say, "Thank you for your service!"



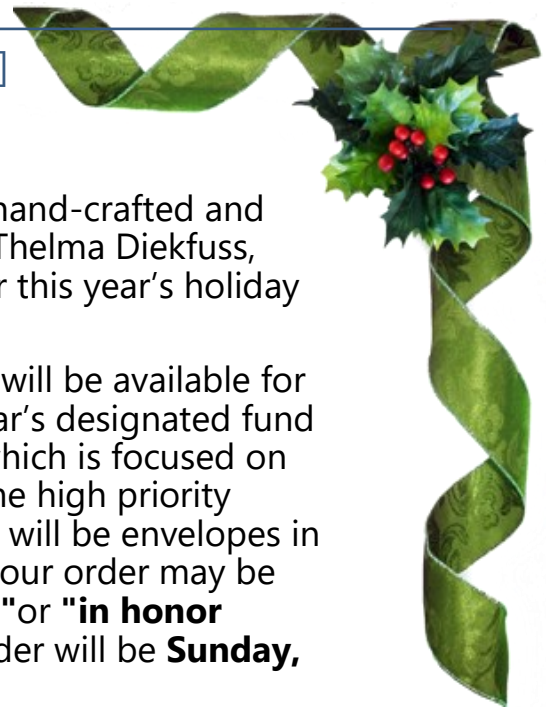


## Christmas Ornaments

Newly designed, beautifully hand-crafted and personalized ornaments, by Thelma Diekfuss, will be offered once again for this year's holiday drive instead of poinsettias.

Each personalized ornament will be available for a \$5.00 donation and this year's designated fund is "property preservation", which is focused on campus renovations and some high priority maintenance projects. There will be envelopes in the pews for collection and your order may be made either **"in memory of"** or **"in honor of"**. Deadline to place an order will be **Sunday, December 14th**.

Finished ornaments will be displayed on the Christmas tree in the church lobby on Sunday, December 21st and can be picked up between then and our two Christmas Eve services.

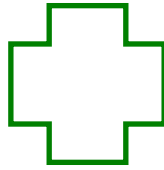


## Spotlight < Landscaping with Tom Caldwell

As part of the Campus Trustees work day in November, volunteer Tom Caldwell, who also helps to run slides during Sunday services, stepped up to direct a series of landscaping projects all around the church campus. Tom initially started his landscaping work for FMCZ when he planted a variety of annuals and perennials to beautify the courtyard for last Easter. Since then, he has worked hard to shape and maintain various landscape beds all around the campus, work recently recognized by city managers who voiced how much they appreciate the obvious care and dedication that make our church property a vital visual part of Downtown Zephyrhills and its Historic District. When asked about his volunteer work, Tom responded, *"I have to plant because its in my blood. My fathers family were all farmers from the Midwest. My mothers parents had a large garden and grew many of their own ingredients for their restaurant and tavern. Their patrons were mostly from the stockyard across the street and people would stop in after selling their cattle for home cooked meals and a beer, or two. They were from Italy so the spaghetti was famous."* Tom's own property has wonderful landscaping, obviously a joy that he graciously shares with FMCZ. When you see Tom, thank him for helping to make our campus a beautiful visual anchor for all of Zephyrhills.



### Emmaus Winter Fundraiser [Roz and Dave Hill]



#### ANNUAL EMMAUS SPAGHETTI DINNER

The popular annual Emmaus Spaghetti Dinner will be held on **Tuesday, January 13, 2026** in Cooper Hall from 5:00 - 7:00pm. Tickets will be \$10 each and meals can be purchased as dine in or take out. After the dinner, at **7:00pm**, **The Gulf Ridge Quartet** will be on-hand **for a musical concert in Cooper Hall**. There will be a love offering for the concert. All are cordially invited for an evening of good food and marvelous entertainment.

### Christmas Cantata and Holiday Services

Beginning with the Open House on Saturday, December 6th, our stunning sanctuary, all decked out in its finest holiday decorations, will be host to joyful sights and sounds celebrating this Christmas season. Our community is blessed with strong dual worship traditions, a home where both Traditional and Contemporary worship add depth and meaning not just to the Christmas season but to worship all year round. All are invited to share their joy and be an active part of this thriving church family as we celebrate the birth of our Savior!

- ◆ Sanctuary Open House, Saturday December 6, 5:00 - 7:00pm. Live music sets by the Salvation's Rock praise band.
- ◆ Christmas Cantata, Sunday December 14, at the 11:00am Traditional service. The Chancel Choir will perform Festival of Carols by Joseph Martin.
- ◆ Christmas Eve Candlelight Services, Wednesday December 24th ~ Contemporary at 6:00pm and Traditional at 8:00pm. Nursery services will be available.
- ◆ Sunday, December 28th ~ One combined service at 10:00am to finish out 2025. No nursery, children's church or youth Sunday school this day.

### Did You Know? [Helpful Hints for Staying Connected]

- If you receive our weekly eBlast, it contains "live links" to electronic copies of this newsletter. When you read The Messenger on your computer or tablet, all the embedded links become live and will take you to the web address simply by clicking on them. Below are a few examples of live links in action. Click on one and see where it takes you!

Watch a past Sunday worship service here: <https://fmcz.org/services/>

See the announcement reel as shown before each Sunday service: <https://fmcz.org/connect/>

Explore our online calendar of events for each month: <https://fmcz.org/events/>

Take a tour of some of our most prominent ministries: <https://fmcz.org/serve/>

## MEMBER HAPPENINGS: Monthly News

Budurka, Michael, Drill SGT, US Army, Ft. Moore, GA, grandson of Bob & Barb Stankiewicz  
Clark, Matthew, 1ST LT, US Army, Ft. Drum, NY, grandson of Jack & Louise Smith  
Daniels, Clay, Major, US Army, Ft. Bragg, NC, grandson of Ed Fisher  
Hill, Nathaniel, Colorado National Guard, son of David Hill  
Hunter, Hollaway, Army National Guard, great nephew of Lori Hollaway  
Hurley, Luka, MSGT, grandson of Gordon & Norma Hurley (Omaha, NE)  
Kramer, Hunter, LT, US Army MP, Ft. Lewis-McChord, WA  
Lenz, Alexander, MM3, US Navy, Norfolk, VA., grandson of Richard & Linda Bice  
Monteira, Jared, U.S. Coast Guard, grandson of Debbie Huffert  
Mueller, Hannah, US Army, Fort Sill, OK, daughter of Lorraine & Tom Mueller  
Noel, Tim, MSSGT, Air National Guard, Japan, son-in-Law of Ann Crawford  
Parks, Andrew, Staff SGT, US Air Force, Shaw AFB, SC, grandson of Bob & Barb Stankiewicz  
Shoup, Justin, Deployed  
Tindall, Tyler, US Army Specialist, TX, grandson of Ed Fisher  
White, Darrel, 1<sup>ST</sup> SGT, US Army, TX, nephew of Gerald & Virginia Swank  
Williams, Andrew, LT COL, US Air Force, grandson of Bob & Barbara Williams

**REMEMBER THEM ALWAYS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS**

### DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/4 Karen Sante  
12/8 David Freiermuth  
12/8 Emily Keene  
12/9 Anita Cahill  
12/10 Shirley DeBoe  
12/11 Linda Bigelow  
12/11 Donald Freiermuth  
12/11 Quintin Smith  
12/14 Stephanie Graves  
12/16 Karen Groves  
12/16 Charles Pedigo  
12/20 Barbara Gottschalk  
12/20 George Marcellus  
12/20 Rex Milligan  
12/21 Dave Houghtalen  
12/23 Barbara Salmond  
12/23 Debbie Williams  
12/24 Donald Cox  
12/24 Kathy Meyer

12/24 Tom Sharp  
12/27 Norma Hammond  
12/28 Mary Fuller  
12/28 Sue Green  
12/28 Mary Nutt  
12/31 Gary J. Ashline  
12/31 Bobby Theel

*"We reflect on the past  
and look forward  
to the future,  
but the best life is  
always lived in today."*

### DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/03 Eugene and Pamela Williams  
12/17 Cheryl and Kurt Bjorkner  
12/20 Karen and Ken Emery  
12/21 Joan and Brian Wansor  
12/27 Dennis and Mary Nutt  
12/31 Doyle and Mirtza Springfield



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## This Month's Cover [December - "Following the Star"]

While the baby Jesus was being born into this broken world so many years ago, "wise men" from the east were navigating their way through the desert wastes, following celestial signs in the hopes of finding the savior and marking his presence on the earth. It was an extraordinary event that they were searching for by way of an extraordinary sign in the sky; a roadmap as it were, leading them without fail to the place where the savior lay waiting. Even today, thousands of years later, he waits for us (who are very seldom wise) to find him. Tellingly he doesn't show up at our doorsteps or demandingly intrude into our days. As in times of old, he offers the clear and compelling signs that will guide us to him if only we first use our free choices to take those steps and start on that journey. We are not coerced to the birthplace, not stampeded or driven because that would mean only that we could be manipulated. Instead, we are invited, shown the way, quietly but surely beckoned. And once we begin on the path of our own volition, we are shown the way as unambiguously as by a brilliant nova in a dark night sky and as gently as a soft night breeze. The destination is the gift of salvation, as it was that first new day, but the journey there is a gift too, one of freedom and choice. Even then, all roads did not lead to Bethlehem, but the "wise men" knew in their hearts it was the one they wanted to walk.

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## Nursing Homes and Assisted Living

For all our friends, family, and church members who are in long-term care facilities we keep them in our prayers and our hearts that they always remain a vital part of who we are as a church family and are never far away from our thoughts.

### **AMERICAN HOUSE ~ 38130 Pretty Pond Rd., Zephyrhills 318-400-2291**

Lyden Green Apt. 333  
Neal Slingerland Apt. 207

### **EDWINOLA ~ 14235 Edwinola Way, Dade City 352-567-6500**

Peggy Fetch Room 703  
Beulah Zeller

### **ZEPHYR HAVEN MEMORY UNIT ~ 38250 A Ave., Zephyrhills, FL**

Shirley Griffin

### **COMPASS ROSE OF ZEPHYRHILLS ~ 37411 Eiland Blvd., Zephyrhills, FL 813-783-8100**

Roberta Hubbard  
Barbara Kehr

### **ADVENT HEALTH ZEPHYRHILLS ~ 7050 Gall Blvd, Zephyrhills, FL (813) 788-0411**

Harry Kehr

### **SOLARIS NORTH ~ 7350 Dairy Rd., Zephyrhills, FL 813-788-4300**

Shirley Force Washington Unit  
Lyden Green

### **ROYAL OAK NURSING CENTER ~ 37300 Royal Oak Ln, Dade City, FL 352-567-3122**

Joan Donaldson

### **COMMUNITY CARE CENTER~ 2202 W Oak Ave, Plant City, FL 33563 813-754-3761**

Fay Kingery

### **AT HOME ~ Personal Addresses and Phone Numbers**

Allan Scheckler  
Ira Crook  
Terri Stanley

### **HILLSIDE HEALTH ~ 38220 Henry Dr., Zephyrhills 813-788-7114**

Ginger Schaefer Room 313B

## Staff and Organizational Contacts

### ***Church Web Address***

[www.fmcz.org](http://www.fmcz.org)

### ***Staff Team Email Addresses***

*(for staff with church emails)*

Church Office

[info@fmcz.org](mailto:info@fmcz.org)

Karen Ezra, Director of Family Ministries

[kezra@fmcz.org](mailto:kezra@fmcz.org)

Carol Runyon, Assistant Director of Family Ministries

[crunyon@fmcz.org](mailto:crunyon@fmcz.org)

Polly Adwell, Nursery Coordinator

[padwell@fmcz.org](mailto:padwell@fmcz.org)

Miriam Ezra, Choir Director

[mezra@fmcz.org](mailto:mezra@fmcz.org)

Steve Ezra, Senior Pastor

[sezra@fmcz.org](mailto:sezra@fmcz.org)

Carol Freiermuth, Financial Secretary

[cfreiermuth@fmcz.org](mailto:cfreiermuth@fmcz.org)

Eric Gale, Contemporary Worship Leader

[egale@fmcz.org](mailto:egale@fmcz.org)

Teresa Gale, Office Manager

[tgale@fmcz.org](mailto:tgale@fmcz.org)

Tom Gale, Communications Director

[tigale@fmcz.org](mailto:tigale@fmcz.org)

Peter Jordan, Treasurer

[pjordan@fmcz.org](mailto:pjordan@fmcz.org)

Todd Kramer, Technical Director

[tkramer@fmcz.org](mailto:tkramer@fmcz.org)

## Giving Back

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round -- apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that -- as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

From A Christmas Carol ~ 1843  
By Charles Dickens



## Season of Shared Blessings

In February, Janet Toth and a team of volunteers organized a church-wide Ministry Fair that gave our family members a chance to see all the activities and ministry opportunities available through the First Methodist community. It proved to be an excellent meet and greet between ministry groups and potential participants. Months later, the volunteer opportunities on and around campus are greater than ever and folks outside of our congregation are always amazed at how active we are in so many diverse ministries.

Recently, Fair Coordinator, Janet Toth, followed up with campus ministry leaders to assess their current needs. Here are some of the opportunities we have to bless our friends and neighbors with our time, talents, and joy of service: Greeters are needed for the 11:00am Traditional service now as our winter members are returning from the North. The Sunday Café continues to look for two people to help closing up between 11:00 and 11:45am. Our regular GriefShare class is in need of a volunteer to help when the weekly classes resume early in the new year. Project Others is inviting all who love to craft hand-made fabric projects to join them in their regular meetings each Friday morning in Cooper Hall West. Some of the projects they have worked on are sleeping mats for the homeless, small crosses with scripture, walker bags, and stockings for the food pantry, just to name a few. Both our music ministries, Salvation's Rock and the Chancel Choir always welcome new members who love to share their joy of music and song. And for those who love technology, our A/V crew are in need of volunteers to help run the audio and video components of our Sunday services. Interested? Fill out a Ministry Interest Form found on our website or leave your contact information at the church office!

