

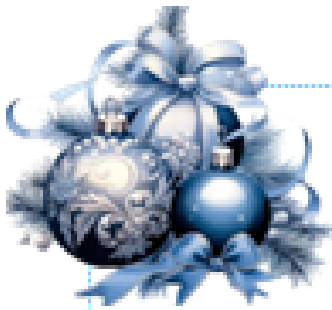
*The Church Tower*  
*First United Methodist Church*  
*December 2024*



**“For I know the plans  
I have for you,”  
declares the LORD,  
“plans to prosper you  
and *not* to harm you,  
plans to give you  
hope and a future.”**

**~Jeremiah 29:11~**

*Strengthening and sharing our Christian  
faith through fellowship and service.*



### A Note from the Pastor ...

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ~ Jeremiah 29:11

Beloved,

You are well aware of the conversations that have been taking place regarding our future. Below are the minutes of a recent family meeting & Church Council, and copies of letters that have been shared with our Church leaders; including one that I will be sending to the District Superintendent (DS). To avoid confusion, and to be fully informed, please read these in the following order: Letter to DS, Follow-Up Letter, Church Council Minutes, and Family Meeting Minutes.

At this time, we are *not* asking for a Church Conference with the DS or planning a congregational vote about whether or not to continue in ministry. Our intention is to take the DS's counsel to wait and work within the "framework" (his words) of what we have, not what we don't.

In my Pastor's Narrative for Charge Conference I closed with the following:  
"We have re-affirmed our strengths and examined our challenges so that we can move into the future with the confidence that even if we do not know what the future holds, we know the One who holds the future."

Trusting Always in Him,



Rev. Charles Ledlum-Bates  
Mission Rivers District Superintendent  
6515 George Washington Memorial Hwy  
Ste. 203  
Yorktown, VA 23692-2182



25 November, 2024

Dear Reverend Ledlum-Bates,  
Thank you for your time and conversation regarding the mission and ministries at First UMC, Newport News. We have been very intentional in considering your thoughts during this time of discernment and prayer.

As I stated on October 23rd, I have taken your counsel to our Leadership Team and Church Council. **They are in agreement with your recommendation to continue to work into the future within the framework we have presently.**

We wait with hope and promise to learn the way God will have us work within our community. Again, First UMC Newport News is grateful for your wisdom and counsel.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth".

Rev. Elizabeth A. Lutz



Beloved,

As promised, this note is a follow-up to my most recent conversation with our DS.

At the beginning of our conversation, I asked him to add First UMC to the list of churches being evaluated in early 2025; he agreed.

I also informed the DS that our Church Leadership Team and Church Council had agreed to First Church staying open through June 2026. I then asked if this date was too far away to discuss holding the required Church Conference. The DS responded that it was, indeed, too far into the future and our church should continue in its current mission and ministry.

Shortly after he said this, the DS continued with a caveat, saying it would be unfair to appoint a Pastor for one year. He suggested we consider closing sooner, in June 2025. I replied that I would take his comments to our leadership and get back with him.

After discussing my DS-conversation with the current & future Church Council Chairs, Lay Leaders, and Staff-Parish Committee Chair it is clear that our first decision should be presented to the DS again. It is our opinion that we are not yet ready to ask for a Church Conference regarding the closure of FUMC next June. We are, however, ready to ask for an Interim Pastor or Retired Elder to meet the needs of the congregation through June 2026.

That said, the DS has the option to disregard our wishes and move ahead by calling a Church Conference on this matter. I don't know if he will. I also do not know how he will handle the upcoming appointment sessions with regard to First Church.

**What we need to do now** is make a decision about whether or not to continue as planned until June 2026 as finances allow.

This note is going to all the people who have been regular in the attendance at Family Meetings, our Church Leadership Team, and Church Council.  
I need your input (each of you)! Thank you!

**First United Methodist Church Council Meeting  
October 15 2024**



**Members Present:** Jerry Dodson, Kim Webster, David Dellinger, Martha Dodson, Elizabeth Lutz James Michener , Jane Preston, and Cathy Nicholson

**Call to Order and Opening Devotions:** The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm by Paster Elizabeth Lutz who opened with a prayer.

**Finance Report:** David Dellinger stated that First United Methodist is financially viable until June 2026 and possibly June 2027.

Council members recommend to the Trustees to sell the parsonage. Trustees meeting is November 12th at 7PM.

**PASTOR'S REPORT:**

Pastor Elizabeth reported about the status of our church and decision from the Leadership committee. After discussion the council decided to draft a letter to the district superintendent stating we are requesting a church conference to vote on continuing our church until June 2026 with a closing date thereabouts. We are hopeful for this meeting in the time frame of December to March. A letter will go out to all members stating the reason for the meeting . At this meeting all members present may vote.

All council members were is favor of the letter to the district superintendent requesting a church conference.

Pastor Elizabeth adjourned the meeting with prayer at 2:30.

Signed ,

Cathy Nicholson  
Recording Secretary



## First United Methodist Council Meeting November 12, 2024

**Council Meeting members:** Phill Rehrig, Cathy Nicholson, Elizabeth Lutz, Jane Preston, James Michener, Kim Webster, David Dellinger, and Glen Miller

**Phil Called the meeting to order at 1:00PM**

Elizabeth opened with prayer. Previous council minutes were approved.

Foundation gave \$10,000 to UMCOR to help Hurricane victims in the South. Various groups received \$45,000 this year from the Foundation.

David Dellinger gave a Treasurer's report: As of September, there is \$268,000 in the Wood Miner Trust. All apportionments are paid.

United Methodist Men will meet at The Warwick Restaurant the 16th for breakfast.

**Pastor's Report :** Elizabeth is sending a letter to Dr Charles Ledlum-Bates DS, stating that FUMC is in agreement with the his recommendation to continue to work into the future within the framework we have presently. Pastor-Parish Meeting, October 21 discussed the type of new pastor we will need based on the upcoming church closure. In addition to the clergy standards set by the conference, we are looking for someone who: can serve full-time at a traditional church, has life experience. If possible someone who has experience with a church closure, is compassionate during this season who has pastoral care skills.

**UPCOMING DATES:** November 25 Hanging the Greens in the Sanctuary and Chrismon Tree up at 1:00. December 8th at 4PM Christmas Cantata, December 16th Staff/Parish regarding Pastor Elizabeth retiring in June 2025. December 21: Sing along Christmas Carols 2:00 Christmas Eve Services: 7PM, 5th Sunday lunch after church. Church and School Closings: FUMP: Monday, December 20 through January 6, 2024 Church: Monday December 25 through Tuesday January 2, 2024

**New Layleader for 2025:** Diane Harwood. Glen Miller for Council Chair, Pastor/Parish Committee: Lisa Coleman, Martha Dodson, Ray Hussein, Jay Nicholson, Jane Preston, Kim Webster, Chick Yost Please see any of these members for any new suggestions for our future pastor replacing Elizabeth in June 2025. The District Superintendent makes appointments early in 2025 ahead of June 2025 conference.

Cathy Nicholson reported the United Women in Faith will have a general meeting November 19th at 10:30. Speaker from Newport News Green Foundation. Breakfast served all invited. The fall festival/ Brunswick stew Bakesale earned around \$3000 for missions for women, children and youth nationally and internationally.

James discussed the gas issues and plumbing problems. He volunteered to do the repairs on the heating unit. There is a Trustees meeting this evening to discuss the personage. Rev. Lutz is moving November 25th.

**Next Council meeting is: January 14, 2025**

**Pastor Elizabeth closed the Meeting with prayer at 2:04**

Signed,  
*Cathy Nicholson*  
Recording Secretary



# Joy to the World



ISAAC WATTS

Arr. from GEORGE F. HANDEL

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth re-  
 2. Joy to the world! the Sav - lor reigns; Let men their  
 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in-  
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the

ceive her King; Let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare Him room,  
 songs em - ploy; While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
 fest the ground; He comes to make His bless - ings flow  
 na - tions prove The glo - ries of His right - eous - ness,

And heav'n and na - ture sing,	And heav'n and na - ture
Re - peat the sound - ing joy,	Re - peat the sound - ing
Far as the curse is found,	Far as the curse is
And won - ders of His love,	And won - ders of His
1. And heav'n and na - ture sing,..... And	

sing,	And heav'n, and heav'n and na - ture sing.
joy,	Re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
found,	Far as, far as the curse is found.
love,	And won - ders, and won - ders of His love.
heav'n and na - ture sing,	

## Family Meeting – 19 October 2024

Approximate attendance: 25 members and Pastor Elizabeth

Meeting began at 10:00 AM with a short devotional by Pastor Elizabeth

### Opening remarks and discussion:

- Is everyone aware of our church's financial status?
  - We are running a deficit close to \$70,000 for this year.
  - The church meets its expenses from offerings and the Wood-Miner Trust.
    - The Trust has slightly over \$250,000.
    - Note that the church has not often survived fiscally from just the weekly tithes and offerings.
    - Usually, a few large gifts are made at the end of the year to cover any deficit.
    - Memorial gifts have helped; however, those cannot be planned.
  - If we are financially conservative, and if no major unexpected expenses are incurred, the church should have the funds needed to stay open until the end of 2026, possibly into 2027.
- What happens once we get to the point where the church cannot financially continue?
  - The Conference could choose one of several options:
    - Cluster us with other local UMC churches.
    - We have no details on what this might entail.
    - Make us part of a multi-church Charge.
    - Close the church and repurpose the church building, including but not limited to:
      - Starting a new UMC congregation that focuses on a different demographic, i.e., a Hispanic population.
      - Making the space a social service center.
        - Senior Center
        - Childcare Center
      - Providing the space for nonprofit organizations.
    - Sell the property
      - Assets from the sale of church property, combined with any other assets remaining at that time, would go to the District.
        - The District invests the money from the sale of a church and uses the interest from that investment to help lower the District apportionments.
      - One potential buyer would be the city of Newport News.
      - Regardless of who might buy the property, the Hilton Historic District would require that no visible changes be made to the property.
  - Where are we in this discernment process?
    - The Church Leadership Team has met monthly for the past two years, discussing our future. They made a recommendation to the Church Council to stay open until funds run out, approximately June 2026.

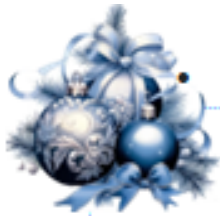




- Church Council has agreed to the recommendation.
- Pastor Elizabeth has spoken to the District Superintendent (D.S.)



- He is aware we are going through these conversations.
- Pastor Elizabeth will speak to the D.S. again this next week to confirm details on our next steps in accordance with Paragraph 213 of the UMC Book of Discipline.
- All communication to the D.S. is courtesy copied to the Bishop.
  - It is easy for any church's concerns to "fall through the cracks" given the recent district realignments that often more than doubled the number of churches per D.S.
  - Final decisions for any church's future will ultimately be made by the Bishop so by copying her on our communication, she will be more aware and less surprised by any decision or recommendation from our congregation.
- Our next steps
  - Hold a Church Conference in December or January
    - Date to be determined by the D.S. since he or his representative will facilitate the meeting.
    - Church Conference is similar to our annual Charge Conference, except only one question will be discussed and voted upon:
      - Should FUMC stay open as an autonomous church until June 30, 2026, the anticipated date when our funds are exhausted, and then close?
    - Vote is a simple majority.
      - If the majority vote Yes:
        - We continue our daily operation as normal.
        - The Bishop then appoints a pastor to serve after Elizabeth retires in June 2025.
        - Appointments are technically for one year at a time so an appointment would be made.
        - Church funds continue to pay normal expenses.
        - The Foundation would continue disbursing funds to our church and other organizations in need.
        - Church ministries continue as normal
        - Church staff remain as normal.
        - First UM Preschool (FUMP) evaluates the upcoming school year for viability.
        - To be fair to parents and schoolteachers, if there is any possibility that the church would close prior to the end of a school year, FUMP would not start classes.
      - If the vote is No
        - We would be telling the District that we don't want to continue as an autonomous church.
        - The District would evaluate options for our church's future and make a decision for us.



## Questions

- Is June 2026 a definite cutoff point for our finances?
  - David Dellinger and our business administrator Kevin Wilson have analyzed our finances and believe June 2026 is realistic, with a possible extension to December 2026 or early 2027.
- What is our property worth if the District were to sell it?
  - Approximately \$6 million to sell; \$12 million to replace.
- How would taxes apply to our situation?
  - As a church, we are not taxed.
- Concern – what if people who are members but have not been an active part of the church in years decide to come to the church conference and vote?
  - If someone is at the church conference, they get a vote.
  - The consensus today was that this was unlikely to happen.
    - If they have not been coming to at least some of the meetings already, their actions show that they are not prioritizing the church.
    - Reminder: those who do not want the church to move forward with any of these ideas should see David and bring their checkbook.
- Could we decide to close in December 2026 instead of six months earlier?
  - Technically, yes. However, closing at the end of the UMC appointment year (June 2026) makes more sense than asking the Bishop to appoint a pastor for a half year.
- What does Pastor Elizabeth want for the church?
  - No matter how our finances play out, if First Church has to merge, cluster, start afresh, or close, then we should do so on a high note of dignity and enthusiasm. We should use our remaining resources in accordance with the will of God!
  - Our church needs to make decisions that affect our church. If we don't, the District and the Conference will make decisions for us.
  - We should use our resources wisely and in support of our mission to our local community.
- What about visitors?
  - We have had a few visitors coming on Sundays. This is a good thing.
  - We would need many more consistent visitors to become consistent in their gifts, offerings, and tithes to make up for our financial deficits.
    - Note: at a prior meeting, the number of new members needed to make a difference in our financial dilemma was estimated to be 50 families.
  - Do we contact visitors after they come on Sunday?
    - Yes. Pastor Elizabeth contacts them the first of the week after they visit.
      - Home visits when the visitors allow (some do not want this.)
      - More often, Pastor Elizabeth will meet them for coffee or lunch.



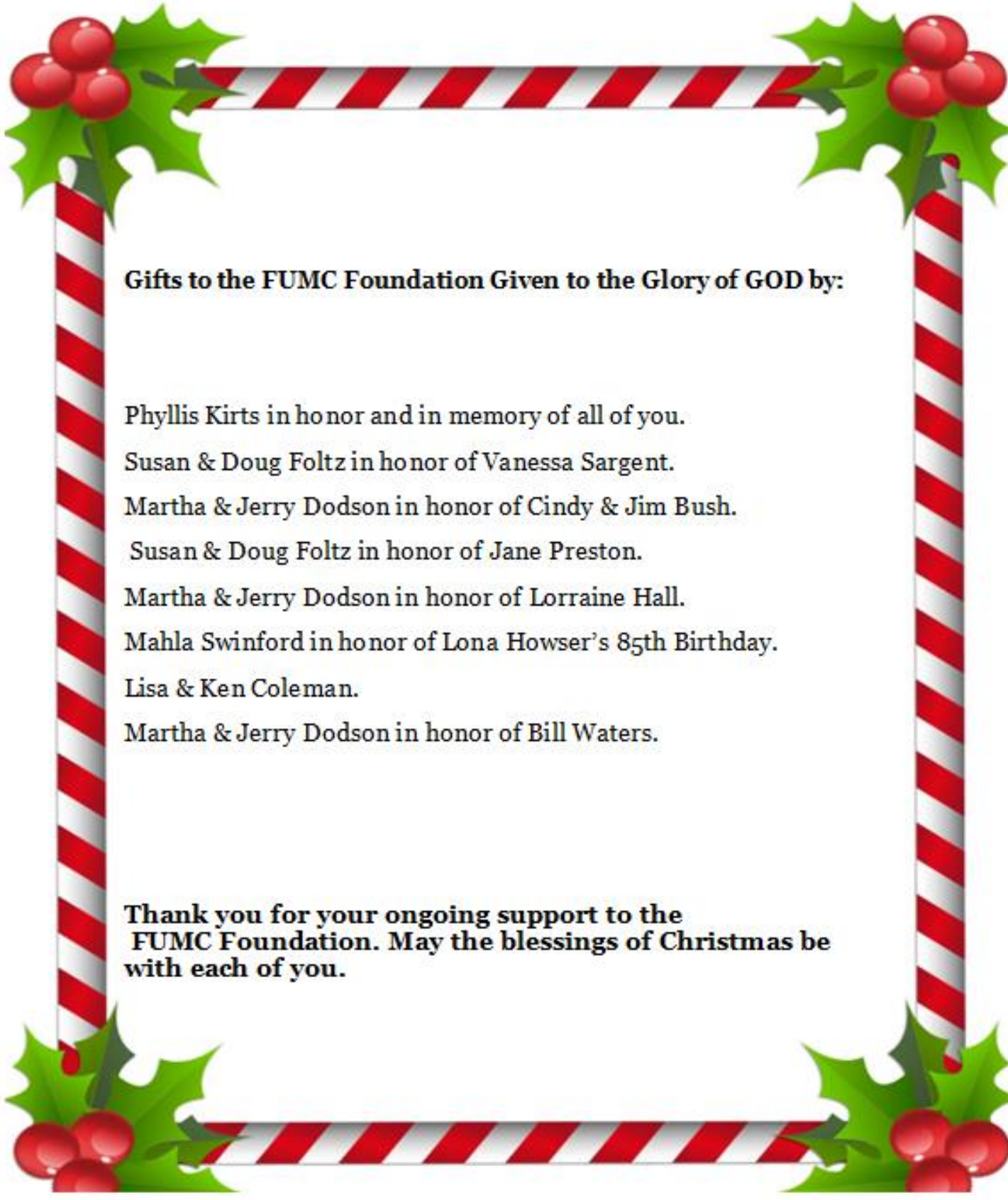
- Could we close in June 2025 instead of a year later?
  - This would also require a congregational vote.
  - This option was not recommended by the church leadership team or the Church Council.
- Could we put these decisions off until next year?
  - Yes.
  - Even after our church conference vote, the D.S. could decide we need to hold off for a year.
    - The D.S. has said, however, that he will support whatever a church decides to do.
  - Many people on the Church Leadership Team and Church Council said it was preferable to “rip the band aid off” and make the decision before someone else (the District) makes a decision for us.
- Can we better monitor our climate controls to save money?
  - Yes, we can always do better in this regard, however this would not make a difference in our overall financial situation.
- Is the church staff aware of our financial situation?
  - Yes. In fact, the uncertainty of our future was a factor in our previous church administrative assistant’s decision to leave.
- How about the Foundation?
  - The Foundation has gone above and beyond with their generosity this year, and they plan to continue to use their resources to support local needs.
- What about the Parsonage?
  - Pastor Elizabeth and Doug have purchased their retirement home nearby and will be moving out of the Parsonage in November.
  - The Parsonage has several maintenance issues to consider
    - Encapsulated asbestos
    - Lead paint under the current paint, which is cracking and peeling
    - A few electrical concerns
    - Kitchen and bathrooms are very dated
    - Wood floors should be sanded and refinished again.
  - Church Council is discussing the possibility of selling the parsonage “as is.”
    - Money from sale is restricted to the following uses:
      - Buy another Parsonage
      - Invest the money and use interest to pay a new pastor’s housing allowance.
        - Rent in our area ranges from \$1800 – 2400 per month
      - Use the money for capital improvements at the church

The Meeting ended with a closing prayer at 10:58 AM by Pastor Elizabeth.



## December 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>1</b> <i>Sun. School 9 am</i> <i>Worship 10 am</i> <i>Choir 11 am</i> <i>Handbell 11:45 am</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> <i>CMA</i> <i>Christmas</i> <i>Party</i> <i>6-8:30 pm</i>
<b>8</b> <i>Sun. School 9 am</i> <i>Worship 10 am</i> <i>Choir 11 am</i> <i>Handbell 11:45 am</i>	<b>9</b> <i>Bible Study—</i> <i>10:45 am</i>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> <i>Chapel—10am</i> <i>Bible Study</i> <i>6pm</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>15</b> <i>Sun. School 9 am</i> <i>Worship 10 am</i> <i>Choir 11 am</i> <i>Handbell 11:45 am</i>	<b>16</b> <i>Bible Study—</i> <i>10:45 am</i>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> <i>Chapel —10am</i> <i>Bible Study</i> <i>6pm</i>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> <i>Preschool</i> <i>Christmas</i> <i>Program—</i> <i>11:00 am</i>	<b>21</b> <i>Christmas</i> <i>Carol Sing</i> <i>Along</i> <i>2pm</i>
<b>22</b> <i>Sun. School 9 am</i> <i>Worship 10 am</i> <i>Choir 11 am</i> <i>Handbell 11:45 am</i>	<b>23</b> <i>Bible Study—</i> <i>10:45 am</i>	<b>24</b> <i>Christmas Eve</i> <i>Worship —</i> <i>7:00 pm</i>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>29</b> <i>Sun. School 9 am</i> <i>Worship 10 am</i> <i>Choir 11 am</i> <i>Handbell 11:45 am</i>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>Luke 2:11</b>  <i>For unto you is born this day in the</i> <i>city of David a Savior,</i>			



**Gifts to the FUMC Foundation Given to the Glory of GOD by:**

Phyllis Kirts in honor and in memory of all of you.

Susan & Doug Foltz in honor of Vanessa Sargent.

Martha & Jerry Dodson in honor of Cindy & Jim Bush.

Susan & Doug Foltz in honor of Jane Preston.

Martha & Jerry Dodson in honor of Lorraine Hall.

Mahla Swinford in honor of Lona Howser's 85th Birthday.

Lisa & Ken Coleman.

Martha & Jerry Dodson in honor of Bill Waters.

**Thank you for your ongoing support to the  
FUMC Foundation. May the blessings of Christmas be  
with each of you.**



## DECEMBER TOWER REPORT - UWIF - 2024.

OUR PRAYER~GRACIOUS GOD, WE THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR EVERLASTING GIFT AT CHRISTMAS.

**LUKE 2:11**

FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN THIS DAY, A SAVIOUR THAT IS  
CHRIST THE LORD."

Tuesday, November 19th the UWIF hosted a delicious breakfast as we gathered for our General Meeting in the Fellowship Hall. Tami Farinholt of the Newport News Green Foundation shared their team's challenges for beautifying our city and creating a more attractive environment for all of us to enjoy. Following this interesting presentation, Shelley Knoble conducted our World Thank Ceremony. This offering allows us to respond to God's abundance and grace with spontaneous gifts of gratitude. The funds are used for missions carried throughout the United States and around the world. Several baskets were also filled with collards, instant potatoes, corn bread mix, yams, etc. Thanks to all who contributed during this special season.

On Thursday, December 12th, from 12:00 until 2:00, our church will provide snacks for students at CNU during a stressful exam week. We usually pass out over 250 items such as pre-wrapped nabs, water bottles, apples, homemade cookies and brownies, etc. WE NEED YOUR HELP! Please bring your contributions to the church kitchen Thursday morning between 9:30 and 11:00. THANKS SO MUCH FOR ANY SUPPORT YOU CAN GIVE!

Our "SOUP KITCHEN" prevails! Every third Thursday, Sept. through April a team, of ladies and men meet in the kitchen and make two huge pots of vegetable soup. We take it to St. Vincents and they distribute the soup to @ 75-80 homeless, needy people. We meet at 7:30 and deliver the soup no later than 10 a.m. If you are interested in serving in this way, please call me. Thanks! Jane Waters (757)874-4888

Several of our women are planning to attend the traditional Advent Breakfast on December 7th, at Providence UMC. Breakfast will be served at 9:30 followed by a Musical Program presented by Rev. Lisa Blackmonson.

### **UPCOMING DATES OF IMPORTANCE:**

DEC. 4TH/WEDNESDAY/CIRCLE #6/11:30 LUNCH AT SCHLESINGERS

DEC. 8TH/SUNDAY/4:00 IN AFTERNOON~OUR CHOIR CANTATA followed by  
A POT LUCK DINNER IN FH.

DEC. 10TH/TUESDAY/CIRCLE #7/11:30 LUNCH AT SCHLESINGERS

DEC. 15th/SUNDAY/CIRCLE #5/12 NOON AT ANNA'S. (They will be collecting children's books & amp; a throw blanket for Menchville House.)

*Jane Waters*  
Leadership Team, UWIF



MERRY  
Christmas



### **December Birthdays**

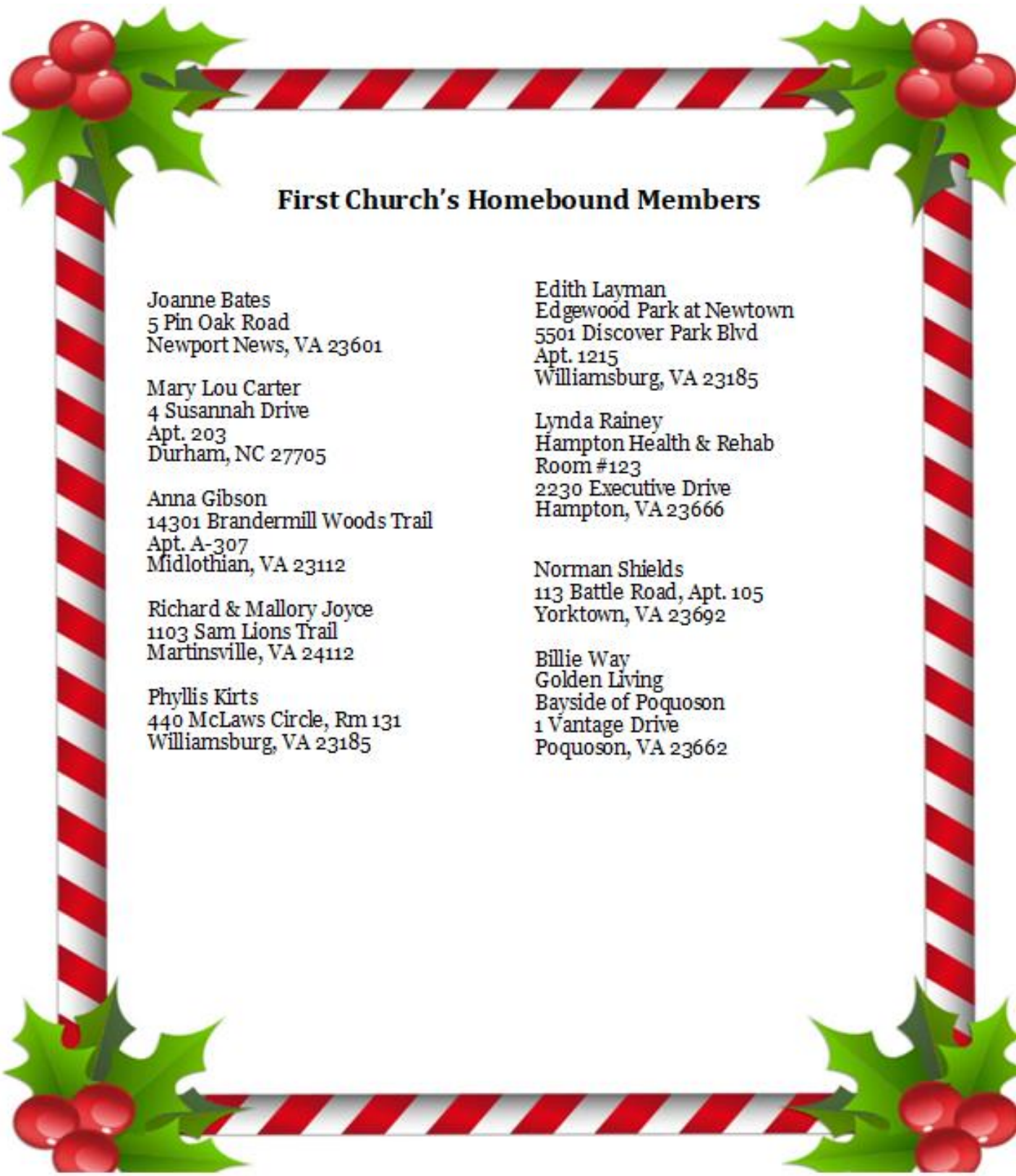
12/02 Jim Bush	12/26 Bill Waters
12/12 Vaughan Lunsford	12/28 Emma James
12/19 Jennifer Leslie	12/30 Shelby Knoble
12/23 Cindy Bush	12/31 Rosa Phillips
12/23 Phil Rehrig	



### **December Anniversaries**

12/17 Norman & Beverly Monk  
12/17 Chuck & Linda Bump





## First Church's Homebound Members

Joanne Bates  
5 Pin Oak Road  
Newport News, VA 23601

Mary Lou Carter  
4 Susannah Drive  
Apt. 203  
Durham, NC 27705

Anna Gibson  
14301 Brandermill Woods Trail  
Apt. A-307  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Richard & Mallory Joyce  
1103 Sam Lions Trail  
Martinsville, VA 24112

Phyllis Kirts  
440 McLaws Circle, Rm 131  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Edith Layman  
Edgewood Park at Newtown  
5501 Discover Park Blvd  
Apt. 1215  
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Lynda Rainey  
Hampton Health & Rehab  
Room #123  
2230 Executive Drive  
Hampton, VA 23666

Norman Shields  
113 Battle Road, Apt. 105  
Yorktown, VA 23692

Billie Way  
Golden Living  
Bayside of Poquoson  
1 Vantage Drive  
Poquoson, VA 23662



## **First United Methodist Church**

**Worship with our Family on Sunday mornings!**

**Sunday School 9:00 a.m.**

**Worship Service 10:00 a.m.**



### **Church Staff**

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Lutz, *Pastor*

Kim Webster, *Pre-School Director*

Kevin Wilson, *Business Administrator*

John T. Allsbrook, *Director of Music Ministries*

Belinda Young, *Administrative Assistant*

Rick Clifton, *Custodian*

10246 Warwick Boulevard, Newport News, Virginia 23601

Church Office: (757) 595-0383

Website: [www.firstumcnewportnews.com](http://www.firstumcnewportnews.com)

Pastor Elizabeth: [pastor@firstumcnewportnews.com](mailto:pastor@firstumcnewportnews.com)

Pastor's phone: Mobile: (757) 335-2649 Home (757) 595-5630

**Church Office Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:30 am—2:30 pm**