

DECEMBER 2025

# The Messenger



“DO GOOD,  
DO NO HARM, &  
STAY IN LOVE WITH GOD”

## A Christmas Message

As we step into Advent, our campus begins to glow with that unmistakable warmth—the soft shimmer of trees, the fragrance of fresh greenery, and the gentle hope that rises whenever God’s people prepare for Christ’s coming. This is our first Advent with you, and I cannot wait to walk this luminous journey together.

Our theme this year is “The Light of Christmas,” and it truly will be a season of light—light shared, light noticed, light passed from hand to hand and heart to heart. More than events on a calendar, this is a holy invitation: to slow our pace, to lift our eyes, and to let Christ’s radiance meet us in every moment.

Each gathering on campus—whether worship, fellowship, music, or service—has been crafted with one purpose in mind: for you and your guests to encounter the love of Jesus in ways that feel personal, beautiful, and unforgettable. As you walk beneath twinkling lights or sit beside a friend in the pew, may you sense God’s nearness. As you bring children, grandchildren, classmates, neighbors, or coworkers along, may you discover again that the Light grows whenever it is shared.

This year, I’m especially excited to join Rev. Jean Sanders in offering a special Advent Pastors Study—a weeknight time of Scripture, reflection, and a hands-on art experience centered on how the light of the Christmas story unfolds through each chapter of God’s redeeming love. This study will be gentle, creative, and welcoming—perfect for inviting someone new or stepping deeper into the season yourself.

My prayer for you is simple: May this Advent be filled with moments where Christ’s light finds you—comforts you, surprises you, restores you—and then shines through you into our community.

I hope you’ll be present. I hope you’ll bring someone along. And I hope that together we will receive, celebrate, and share the Light who came into the world... and still comes to us now.

-With the Creator’s Love,  
Rev. Kennon



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### Sunday Services

8:30 Grace Life  
11:00 Traditional

### Church Office

(318) 443-5696  
Mon-Thur 9:00-3:00  
Friday- 9:00-12:00



## Advent Bible Study



What do you get when you have two pastors who are artists? A chance to explore not only scripture, but also creative activities to respond to the word. Join Rev. Kennon and Rev. Jean for a new class offered on Wednesday nights only during Advent.

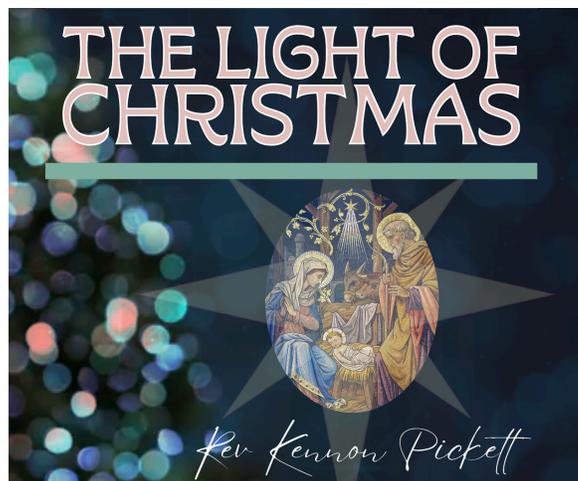
These three sessions, held on December 3, 10, & 17 at 6pm, will be a deep dive into the Christmas story through the lens of Light: "Prophetic Light", "Guiding Light", and "Radiant Light". Adults and Youth are welcome! Don't miss the chance to attend. Invite a friend to come with you!

## Christmas Feast Gathering



Christmas is coming! Please join us on December 17<sup>th</sup> for our Christmas Feast! This is a reservations only event so please reserve your spot by December 12<sup>th</sup> with the front office or with the sign up sheet in the Narthex and Fellowship hall Welcome area! We hope to see you there!

## Upcoming Sermon Series

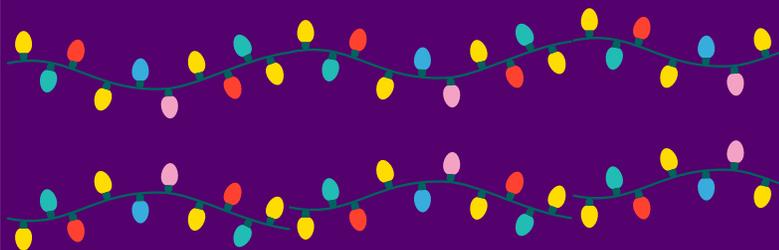


Welcome to the season of Advent at First United Methodist Church of Alexandria—a sacred time when we prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This year, we journey together in our worship series, The Light of Christmas, where each week we explore the radiant gifts the Christ child brings into our world and into our souls: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and finally, the Light that has come to illuminate every corner of our lives.

## Weekly Events

<b>Monday</b> 10:30am Staff Meeting 6pm Accept Dance	<b>Wednesday</b> 5pm Gathering Meal time 6pm Small Groups
<b>Tuesday</b> 9:45am Centering Prayer in Chapel 10:30am Art Class in Art Studio 3pm Farmers Market in the parking lot across the street	<b>Thursday</b> 5:30pm Pickleball in Johnson Center
	<b>Friday</b> 1pm Mahjong 50/50 room



## Pre-school

The preschool's annual Christmas program coincides with The Gathering's annual Christmas Gathering this year. The idea is to enjoy a dinner with friends and afterwards walk down to the Sanctuary and enjoy the 3- and 4-year-olds singing seasonal songs. Ms. Denise Downing, who taught 3s here for over 12 years, is the preschool's music teacher. We are encouraging families of around 30 children who will be singing that evening to enjoy a meal at The Gathering as well.

We are thankful the church shares their building with the school. I can not wait to see the children singing in a sanctuary decorated for Christmas as we celebrate the birth of Christ. My hope is the children will see the beauty of Jesus in Christmas. I hope you can spare the extra time after dinner to witness this celebration on December 17th, at 6pm

-Catherine Lytle, Pre-school Director



## Music Ministry

This has been an incredible year at FUMCA! I'm excited to share some of the plans I have for 2026. Genuine worship deepens our friendship with the Lord and changes us forever. Here are several ways you can go deeper. Our Chancel Choir is a great place to learn how to sing, deepen your faith, and make many life-long

friends. No experience is necessary. There are several ways you can help the Chancel Choir and myself that don't involve singing. Please email me to find out other ways you can support us. Our Grace Life Service, Sundays at 8:30am, is an absolute delight for me. The band meets early to practice (and even earlier to visit). The congregation greets the band over coffee, a sense of community, and genuine concern for one another. It feels like every time we worship together; the "Grace Life" that God has planned for us as a community of worshippers, is revealed more fully. Keep your eyes open for a Grace Life Chorus, and special Grace Life worship experiences coming very soon.

Healing Voices of Alexandria is excited to make a difference in this community in 2026. This multi-denominational women's choir brings healing, comfort, a prayer and a smile to those who need it most. This group plans to resume in January and we would love to have you join us. To join any of our musical groups, or to inquire about a Healing Voices visit for a friend or loved one, please email me at [enix@fumca.org](mailto:enix@fumca.org)

The most common way an individual finds themselves in a church is on the arm of a friend. People need Jesus more than ever. Jesus is asking us to cast our nets again, even if we have been unsuccessful before. As we deepen our faith and tune our hearts to follow His word, my prayer is that He strengthens our congregation in Christian love for one another and we all live lives that testify to His transforming mercy, everywhere we go.

Happy New Year!

-Elizabeth Nix,  
Director of Worship & Music Ministries



## Youth and Children Programming

“Let saints on earth unite to sing, with those to glory gone, for all the servants of our King in earth and heaven, are one.” –“Come, Let Us Join our Friends Above,” Hymn #709, Charles Wesley

Our youth began November in an air remembrance with our visit to the Methodist Cemetery in Pineville. Did you see the collage we crafted from charcoal rubbings of headstones? Our aim was to show respect and reverence for those who have gone to join the great cloud of witnesses, and it brought feelings of peace, prayerfulness, mild (but healthy) discomfort, and gratitude according to the youth who attended. When we remember and learn from our predecessors, we grow. I’m grateful to our youth who stepped out of their comfort zone and prayed for people they never knew.

Now Christmas Past has been remembered, and we look to Christmas Present and Future! May our children and youth remind us of the wonder of the season, and may we see the light of the Christ Child reflected in their faces.

Peace,

-Carly Bratcher, Program Director



Youth All Saints Collage 2025

## Art Ministry- Inside/Outside

When I was a girl, my parents signed me up for art class when an artist moved into our little town. They said it was the best thing they ever did for me because I was a happier little girl when I went to art class once a week. We did not have art at school, so it was a real treat.

My parents learned what neuroscience has since discovered – the effects of making art on the mood and emotional stability. It relieves stress and calms the mind. It can teach the important lesson of turning off your inner critic, operating from your heart and soul instead of so much in your mind. It helps you express emotions that you have no words for, and the process helps you to navigate your own life with more creativity. And maybe the most important reason to make art... it connects you to God. The Creator of everything has made us in our Creator’s own image.

When I use my God-given creativity, I can feel the Creator’s pleasure.

You don’t have to take my word for it. Here is what Jacob Nordby wrote about creativity...

“Besides being fun, creativity offers a path out of stagnation, unhappiness, self-judgment, and the kind of robotic living that leaves so many of us feeling unfulfilled. Creativity is a forgotten cure for these life-depleting ailments and a spiritual practice for returning to your truest self and living a life you love.” — The Creative Cure: How Finding and Freeing Your Inner Artist Can Heal Your Life, Jacob Nordby. (And I do recommend the book!)

All that to say, come join us for art class and/or for Urban Sketching. For the next Urban Sketching we will be at the church on Tuesday, December 16, at 3pm

-Jean Sanders Pastor and Artist in Residence

# LIVE NATIVITY

Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup> 5:30-7:30pm

Our annual Live Nativity returns as a drive-thru experience celebrating the birth of Christ, featuring Bethlehem scenes in the parking lot, and a cast of adult and youth church members, along with live animals. Last year's event was canceled due to stormy weather. This year, weather permitting, it will once again surround the church campus as in years past. Vehicles will enter via Jackson Street and exit onto North City Park Boulevard. The event is free and open to the public. Visitors are asked to dim headlights and drive slowly through the display. For more information, contact the church office at (818) 443-5696.



# Christmas Cantata

Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup> 10:00am

A special Advent worship experience, presented by the Chancel Choir with special guests. The program, arranged and directed by Elizabeth Nix with narration written by Rev. Kennon Pickett, celebrates the joy and mystery of the season through beloved carols and inspiring choral works.



Selections include "I Wonder as I Wander," "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Song)," "Mary, Did You Know?," "This Holy Night," and more.

This combined service of word and music invites all to gather in the light of Advent joy and the promise of Christ's coming. A brunch will follow in the Fellowship Hall.

## Christmas Eve Services

Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup>

### Traditional 4pm

Join us at 4pm for our traditional Christmas Eve service, a celebration of the joy and hope Christ's birth brings into the world. This service will feature the final message in Rev. Kennon Pickett's sermon series, The Light of Christmas, and will include communion, carols, and a beautiful candlelight worship experience.



### Casual 7pm

For a more relaxed and casual Christmas Eve celebration, we're excited to introduce a brand-new 7pm service. Come in your pajamas and enjoy a family-friendly time filled with singing, dancing, glow-stick fun, and playful instruments the whole family can join in on.



# Blue Christmas

Starting December 1<sup>st</sup> - January 6<sup>th</sup>

For many, the holiday season can be a bittersweet time, where moments of joy are shadowed by feelings of grief, loneliness, or distress. These emotions may emerge suddenly or be anticipated as the holidays approach. In a culture that often pressures us to "put on a happy face," First United Methodist Church, Alexandria is uniquely positioned to offer a sacred, compassionate alternative, where the full range of human emotions, including sorrow, are welcome. The chapel will be the place for you when it all gets 'too much' and you need to step aside to experience your emotions.

Blue Christmas in the Chapel offers an opportunity to lean on God's love, trusting that grace meets us in our vulnerability, guiding us toward healing and wholeness with God, ourselves, our neighbors, and creation. Go to the Chapel any time the church doors are open to be reminded that even in our darkest hours, God's light is never fully extinguished.

The simple acts of lighting a candle, listening to Scripture, and perhaps reading or writing a prayer are acts of faith in the transforming love of our ever-present God. The Chapel meditations offer a sacred pause amid the holiday bustle, providing space for honest reflection, lament, and the hope of God's enduring grace. The meditations in the chapel, which will change each week of the Advent/Christmas season offer a special resource for people to acknowledge their laments, find solace, and experience God's comforting presence.



## Epiphany

Sunday, January 4<sup>th</sup>

Epiphany is the twelfth night of Christmas, and church tradition tells us that this is when the Magi, the Three Wise Men, arrived at the Nativity after following the star. On Sunday, January 4th, we will observe this special occasion at both morning worship experiences. Grace Life Contemporary worship is at 8:30am and Traditional worship is at 11am. All are invited and encouraged to come. Bring friends and show them how we celebrate Christmas all season long.

# POINSETTIAS

Orders due December 18<sup>th</sup>



A tradition in the church, poinsettias are a red Christmas flower that is used to decorate the church and help honor and memorialize people in our lives.

This year the church will be selling the poinsettias for \$15 a piece. At the end of the advent season after Christmas Eve the poinsettias can be collected and taken home. If you would like to place an order for poinsettias then you can call the office to place an order for the person/persons that you wish to honor or memorialize and find out ways to pay. If you would like to pay with cash or check the Fellowship hall and the Narthex will have the forms to fill out and it can be turned into the front office. The due date for the order of poinsettias is Thursday, December 18<sup>th</sup>.



Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> 3pm

The Urban Sketching art ministry brings people together, beginners and advanced, to make their own sketches, watercolor, and ink drawings of landscapes and buildings.

This growing ministry has been in downtown Alexandria, on the riverbank in Pineville, and most recently out at Lake Buhlow. In December you are invited to join them right here at FUMCA on Tuesday, December 16 at 3pm.

