

The Reporter

February 2026

First United Methodist Church
66 Chestnut Street
Oneonta, New York
www.firstumc-oneonta.org



Pastor's Message

Black History Month invites us to remember. In our tradition, remembrance is never passive. We remember to repent, to give thanks, and to renew our commitment to live differently. As people shaped by Scripture and by grace, we remember the stories of Black women and men whose faith, courage, creativity, and perseverance have helped bend our nation closer to justice, even when the cost was high.

These stories remind us that the struggle for dignity and freedom is not some abstract concept. It has names and faces. It has hymns that were sung in the face of violence, sermons that were preached under threat, children who were escorted into schools by armed guards, and ordinary people who chose love when hatred seemed easier. Black history is not a side chapter of American history; it is central to understanding who we are and who we are still becoming.

Yet this year Black History Month also calls us to honest reflection about the present. The injustices of the past have not disappeared. They continue to echo in systems and practices that harm the most vulnerable among us. As Christians, we are called not only to honor those who resisted injustice before us, but to ask where such resistance is still needed today.

Many in our communities live with fear; fear of being detained without due process, fear of families being separated, fear that their humanity will be reduced to paperwork or policy or even cruel indifference. Reports of civil liberty violations by immigration enforcement agencies raise serious moral questions for people of faith. Regardless of where we stand politically, our commitment to the gospel requires us to care deeply about how power is used, whose voices are ignored, and whether our

neighbors are treated with the dignity and respect afforded to them as beloved children of God. Scripture is unambiguous: God hears the cry of the oppressed, the stranger, and the one who has no advocate.

We are living in a climate of deep division. It is tempting to retreat into camps, to assume the worst of one another, or to confuse disagreement with enmity. Division is a spiritual problem. When fear hardens our hearts, when labels replace listening, when outrage crowds out compassion, we drift further from the way of Christ. John Wesley reminded the early Methodists that there is “no holiness but social holiness.”

There is no authentic faith that does not shape how we live together.

Black History Month calls the church to a better witness. It invites us to tell the truth about our history, to stand with those whose rights are threatened, and to resist the forces that dehumanize. It also calls us to be people who build bridges, who speak with courage and humility, and who refuse to let fear have the final word.

As we remember, may we also recommit ourselves: to justice rooted in love, to mercy shaped by humility, and to hope grounded in God’s transforming grace. May we honor the past not only with words, but with lives that seek freedom, dignity, and peace for all God’s children, here and now.

Worship

We begin February continuing our exploration of the values that lie at the heart of our Methodist identity. In the weeks ahead, we will be reflecting on a Wesleyan understanding of grace, one that helps us recognize the presence of God more clearly in our daily lives.

Lent begins on February 18. Please watch the announcements in the bulletin for details about our Ash Wednesday service. Throughout the Lenten season this year, we will be exploring the spiritual practice of lament. In a time when there is so much hurt and uncertainty in the world, we are invited to relearn how to lament together as a faithful community, bringing our grief, our questions, and our hope honestly before God.

February Worship Calendar

Sunday	Scripture	Sermon
February 1	1 Corinthians 13:9-12 Mark 8:22-26	Grace That Meets Us Where We Are
February 8	2 Corinthians 3:12-18 Luke 9:28-36	Transformed by Glory
February 15 (Transfiguration Sunday)	Exodus 34:29-35 Matthew 17:1-9	Perfected in Love
February 22	Psalm 13	Why Lament?

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18

Ashes available in the Sanctuary

9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM



ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

7:00 PM

Camp & Retreat Ministries Special Offering – February 8

The United Methodists of Upper New York operate five camps across the state (<https://www.unyumc.org/about/crm>). Camping ministry provides people of all ages an opportunity to connect with nature and God. Our camps are a jewel of our Conference, but they need your help.

On February 8 we will take a special collection for Camp and Retreat Ministries. These camps help shape the next generation of leaders in our local church and across the United Methodist connection. Your gifts help support the vital work of our camping ministry.

The Jingle

What is the “Jingle”?

You may have noticed, when you reach the offering in the Sunday bulletin, that listed next to it is something called the “Jingle”. Each month, the “jingle” of loose change in the offering plate goes to a different organization or cause that serves the local community.

In addition to putting loose coins in the plate, you can also give via check or cash – just write “Jingle” on the memo line or envelope.

February Jingle – The Hunger Coalition

The February Jingle will go to The Hunger Coalition of Otsego County (HCOC).

The Hunger Coalition is a non-profit collaborative alliance of organizations and individuals dedicated to supporting services in our communities to assure that everyone can receive food assistance. It primarily supports local food pantries, meals sites, and food distribution; offers networking and educational programs; and models cooperative efforts within Otsego County, New York.

The Hunger Coalition recognizes that by pooling resources, expertise, and networks, HCOC can amplify our impact beyond what individual organizations might achieve alone. Our fiscal sponsor is the United Way of Mid Rural New York (UWMRNY).

The HCOC Network list is maintained and updated often as a community service of First United Presbyterian (the “Red Door” Church), Oneonta. We have a copy of the list in the FUMC office.

You can visit their website at <https://otsegohunger.org/> to learn more.

Email and Text Scams

Remember to be on the lookout for email and text message scams. Scammers will often pretend to be people from church asking for help, often in the form of a gift card. Don’t fall for it! If you ever receive an email or text message that looks like it is from a church member or staff person asking for assistance, double check to make sure it’s really them.

If you are ever unsure, you can always reach out to the church office for help identifying potential scams.

Third Thursday Dinner

Our next Third Thursday Dinner will be on February 19 at 6 pm in the Fellowship Hall.

We're planning a Creamy Cheesy Ditalini dish, prepared by Danielle DeLuca. It is vegetarian but does use dairy. Please come and enjoy togetherness (the meal is free, but we welcome donations to help cover the cost).

We already have a salad, but if anyone would like to coordinate a second dish or other sides, please contact Max MacKenzie at 740-833-5169.

Congregation Creation Care Team

Venezuelan Oil and Environmental Justice: A United Methodist Call to Action

The environmental crisis facing our planet demands urgent attention from faith communities, and the current situation of the U.S.’s involvement with the Venezuelan oil industry makes our attention even more urgent. As United Methodists committed to environmental justice, we must examine how fossil fuel extraction—currently in particular Venezuelan oil production—contributes to global climate change while disproportionately harming vulnerable communities.

The Climate Crisis Reality

Over the past two centuries, carbon dioxide levels have surged more than 50 percent due to heat-trapping pollution from vehicles, power plants, and industrial facilities burning fossil fuels like Venezuelan crude oil. This has driven global temperatures up 1.2°C since pre-industrial times, with 2024 marking the warmest year on record. Scientists warn temperatures could rise another 2-4°C without immediate action to stop greenhouse gas emissions.

Venezuela's oil industry exemplifies the environmental challenges we face. As one of the world's largest petroleum producers of heavy oil, Venezuela's extraction and refining operations contribute significantly to global carbon emissions. The country's aging infrastructure has led to repeated oil spills, devastating ecosystems and poisoning water sources that local communities depend upon for survival.

Environmental Justice and Faith

The United Methodist Church's social principles affirm that "all creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it." This stewardship extends to recognizing how climate change disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income populations—the same communities often living near oil refineries and extraction sites in Venezuela and beyond.

These vulnerable populations experience higher temperatures, more extreme heat days exceeding 100°F, and greater health risks including respiratory problems, violent crime increases, and psychiatric distress. Environmental racism is real: those who contribute least to climate change suffer its worst consequences.

A Methodist Response

As people of faith, United Methodists are called to both personal action and prophetic witness. We must reduce our carbon footprints by choosing sustainable transportation, consuming locally-sourced foods, and conserving energy. More importantly, we must raise our voices to demand systemic change.

This means urging elected officials to invest in clean energy futures, reduce emissions, and provide adaptation assistance for struggling communities. It means standing in solidarity with Venezuelan communities harmed by oil extraction. Our faith compels us to work toward a just and equitable transition to net zero emissions—not someday, but now.

First United Methodist Church, Oneonta

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