

The Reporter

Back to School 2026

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



Pastor's Article

There's a particular kind of joy that comes with fall, the joy of gathering back together. As summer travels wind down and schedules start to settle, I find myself looking forward to seeing familiar faces fill our pews again, to hearing the halls buzz with the voices of our Sunday School kids, and to feeling the full rhythm of our church community return.

This Welcome Back Sunday, September 13th, feels especially meaningful this year. We'll be diving into the Genesis creation story together, reflecting on God's breath breathing life into all things, and there's something fitting about beginning our fall together with a reminder that God is always creating something new, even in us. Whether you've been here every week this summer or you're just now finding your way back, know that there's a place for you here. We have a full season ahead: a meaningful worship series celebrating God's Creation; an important season of studying our denomination's updated Social Principles together; and the simple, steady rhythms of Sunday School, fellowship, and worship starting back up. I can't wait to walk through it all with you.



Welcome Back Celebration – Sunday, September 13



On September 13, we will begin our fall schedule (children's Sunday School resumes at 9:25 am). We will celebrate after the 10:30 am service with **ice cream sundaes** (toppings provided). Stop by the Fellowship Hall and start the year by visiting with old friends and making new friends. If the weather is nice, you can take your ice cream down to the courtyard. Hope to see you there!

Worship and the Season of Creation

This September, our worship will center on "Salt+Soil+Seawater" a Feast of Creation series developed by the Worship Team of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. Each week draws on rich, sensory images from the natural world – salt, soil, and seawater – to help us praise God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Throughout this series, we'll be reflecting on how God's ongoing creativity is woven through both Scripture and the world around us, and how we are called to live as faithful, loving stewards of that Creation.

We're especially excited to celebrate Welcome Back Sunday on September 13, as we gather for worship centered on the Genesis creation story and a sermon titled "God's Breath." This Sunday will also mark the joyful restart of children's Sunday School, so families and children are warmly invited to return and reconnect as our education ministries kick back into gear for the fall. Whether you've been away for the summer or are joining us for the first time, we hope you'll come be part of this meaningful season of worship, learning, and community.

Our Congregational Creation Care Team will be leading worship on September 20. Be sure to join us as they bring their own gifts and perspective to our celebration of God's Creation.

Fellowship Time

We'll be restarting Fellowship Time after the 10:30 a.m. service on September 13. A sign-up sheet will be available in the Fellowship Hall that Sunday if you'd like to volunteer to provide fellowship for a future week. We try to keep it simple – just coffee and a light snack to share. What matters most is that we take the time to be together as a faith community. Training on how to make the coffee is always available, just ask Pastor Casey or Randy.

Sunday School & Small Group Opportunities

Children's Ministry on Sunday Mornings

9:25 – 10:20 am Sunday School. Two classes: "Littles" up to 6 years old & "Olders" aged 7 to 12 years.

Children start church seated with their families. (If your child would like to acolyte – light candles and extinguish candles at the beginning and end of service – let the Pastor know). Once children receive the children's message the nursery staff will come up to the Embury Room to meet parents, gather their contact information, and escort the children to the nursery. Kiddos over 6 years of age are welcome to participate in parallel worship in the Embury Room. It is a simple, quiet activity that mirrors the message of the sermon that week. Children are welcome to remain in the Embury room to worship with the other children, or are free to return to their parents upon completing the quiet activity.

Confirmation

Teens aged 13 and older (starting 8th grade or in high school) are welcome to participate in a one-year Confirmation process in which they explore their faith and membership in the United Methodist Church. Please reach out to Jennifer Withington at (607) 376-3996 if you are interested.

Digging Deeper

Digging Deeper is an adult study class that meets on Sundays at 9:25 am. Sessions usually involve a short video followed by discussion. Digging Deeper will start on September 20, topic to be announced soon.

Three Simple Questions: Knowing the God of Love, Hope, and Purpose (6-week study for adults)

Based on Rueben Job's book *Three Simple Questions*, participants will read a roughly 30-minute portion of the book each week. The small group will gather after the first service at 9:30 am and end before the 10:30 service. Prayer, videos, discussions, and spiritual practices, along with liturgy, combine to engage adults as they explore Three Simple Questions: Who is God? Who am I? Who are we together?

The group will meet in the Dauley Room starting September 27 and continue the following five Sundays, ending the first Sunday in November. If you have questions or decide to join in, please text Lori DePauw at 607-287-7140 so she can ensure a book is ordered for you.

Studying Our New Social Principles

This past year, the United Methodist Church's General Conference approved significant updates to our Social Principles – the statements that guide how we, as a denomination, understand and respond to the moral and social issues of our time. These revisions reflect years of prayerful discernment and represent some meaningful shifts in how our church speaks to the world.

- **Environmental Justice** – The revised Social Principles include stronger, more direct language addressing our responsibility to care for creation and to confront environmental injustice, particularly as it affects vulnerable communities.
- **Marriage** – The previous language limiting marriage to "a man and a woman" has been removed, opening the door for a broader understanding of marriage within our church.
- **Human Rights** – The Social Principles now reflect broadened and more inclusive stances on a range of human rights issues, affirming the dignity and worth of all people.

These are not small changes, and we know they may raise questions, spark conversation, and even stir up some uncertainty. That's okay, and it's exactly why we want to walk through this together as a congregation rather than simply announce it and move on.

This fall, our church will be studying the revised Social Principles as a community. We'll take time to read, reflect, ask questions, and better understand what these changes mean, both theologically and practically, for who we are as a church.

More than just learning what the documents say, this study is an invitation: an invitation to think together about how First United Methodist Church might live into these principles in our daily lives, our relationships, and our ministry here in our community.

Speak with Pastor Casey if you are interested in being part of this study. In-person and Zoom sessions will be offered.

Selah Circle

The circle is back in September. We'll meet for an hour on Tuesdays at 2:30 pm to pause and reflect on our lives, our church, and our world. Got something weighing on you? Want a place to talk through some of the heaviness of the world? Selah Circle provides an unstructured space to share your faith and life. First meeting is on September 29 in the Coke Room.

Lectio Divina

Lectio meets on Thursdays at noon to engage in an intentional practice of reading the scriptures for the upcoming Sunday service.

United Women in Faith Book Group

The United Women in Faith book group will meet next at 10:00 am on September 10. During that time, we will discuss the book *Lincoln at the Bardo* by George Saunders. In this fictional narrative, beginning after the death of his son, Abraham Lincoln secretly visits the Georgetown cemetery crypt to hold his son's body. He meets a cast of characters that help illustrate the themes of grief and letting go. Our next book is *A Flower Traveled in my Blood: The Incredible True Story of a Grandmothers Who Fought to Find a Generation of Children* by Haley Cohen Gilliland.

Please join us for fellowship and a lively discussion on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month. Contact Sharry Strait-Carey at 607-434-5234 if you have any questions.

Monday Book Group

The Monday book group meets weekly at 10:00 am and discusses mainly fiction books. The group will resume meeting on September 14.

September Jingle – Susquehanna SPCA

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.

The September Jingle goes to the Susquehanna SPCA to support Sparky's Pet Food Pantry. The pantry is in their Admissions Lobby and is available to the public any time Monday through Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The pantry is stocked with any surplus pet-related supplies (food, litter, toys, etc.) that are donated to the animals in their care. Sparky's Pet Food Pantry supports folks in our community who are experiencing difficulties. It helps keep animals with their families where they are happy and comfortable. To learn more about the Susquehanna SPCA, visit their website at <https://www.sqspca.org/>.

United Methodist Student Day – September 13

United Methodist Student Day is one of six denomination-wide Special Sundays designated to support ministries and causes important to the entire United Methodist Church. For this Sunday, we come together to invest in the future of our church by supporting students' education and their journey of faith. The special offering supports scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students. By supporting our students now, we contribute to community transformation and leadership empowerment, building future leaders. Your gift is a practical expression of care, equipping students to shape a hopeful future.

Pledge & Contribution Statements

Pledge and/or contribution statements (or a more concise update on your remaining pledge amount) are available upon request. If you would like to receive a summary of your 2026 giving to date, please contact Kieran Andrews (secretary@firstumc-oneonta.org or 607-432-4102).

Future for Oneonta Community Engagement Award

On July 30, 2026, First United Methodist Church was honored by the Future for Oneonta Foundation for our leadership and ministry this past winter as a warming station. Pastor Casey reminds us that sometimes we are called to do "hard things." Spearheaded by Anthony Eardley, FUMC committed to keeping community members warm and safe during a bitter cold snap.

But the warming station was just one piece of the picture. The Future of Oneonta Foundation's recognition also lifted up FUMC's broader witness in our community – our open and affirming welcome of our LGBTQ neighbors; our ongoing commitment to feeding the hungry; and our work alongside refugee families finding their footing in a new home. Together, these ministries reflect a church that shows up for people wherever the need is greatest.

With over 20 members of FUMC present, the Future of Oneonta Foundation recognized our congregation as a vibrant and important part of the Oneonta Community. Keep doing the work we are called to do.



Come Canoe and Kayak!

Stewardship of God's gift of water is the Creation Care Team's focus this year and we thought a fun way to kick off this theme is to join in a canoe/kayak adventure together on the beautiful Susquehanna River (weather permitting)! Dave Edwards and Karen Palmer will host this event on **Sunday, September 6, at 2:00 pm.**

We'll meet at Canoe and Kayak Rentals and Sales at 2828 State Highway 28, Portlandville, NY. Canoe rentals are \$40 and kayaks are \$30 (for 2 hours). Financial support will be offered if requested. Please sign-up with our church secretary Kieran (secretary@firstumc-oneonta.org) by August 31. Include your name, contact info, and the number of canoes or kayaks you will need, if renting.

Women's Water Walk Protest

From UWF: The date of the 113-mile Women's Water Walk to protest the route of the proposed Constitution Pipeline has been changed. The walk is now planned for September 19 through October 4.

Women's Water Walks are indigenous-led prayer relays. This Water Walk will follow the route of the proposed Constitution pipeline, which cuts along the I-88 corridor through the ancestral territories of the Lenape, Susquehannock, and Haudenosaunee Peoples and threatens to forever change the landscape for all of us.

UWF plans to support the walkers with one or more meals while they camp at Hartwick College's Environmental Campus at Pine Lake during the walk. Please watch for details during the coming weeks and consider joining us in this ministry.

A Note of Thanks

Last month, proceeds from the **Helping Hands Thrift Shop** were given to The Foothills Performing Arts & Civic Center. This letter of thanks truly embodies the impact that this ministry has on the community. Through the dedication and leadership of Angela Eardley we are so fortunate to continue this work. Please find a way through your time, talent, or resources to support this important FUMC ministry.

To the Good People at FUMC

I am writing to thank you for the gift from Helping Hands Community Ministry! That was incredibly kind and generous of you. We greatly appreciate your support and your kindness.

The work that your church and its members have been doing in our community has literally saved lives, and I am beyond grateful to have a church and congregation like yours here in Oneonta. If there is ANYTHING I can do to offer support to your mission, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Again, thank you so very much for your support, and for everything you do to help others.

Warmest regards,

*Geoffrey Doyle
Executive Director*

Church Rummage, Bake & Book Sale

Thursday, September 17, 9 am – 7 pm

Friday, September 18, 9 am – 1 pm

(Bag sales both days)

You may bring your donations to the **front of the stage** in the Fellowship Hall.

Please only bring in clothing and household goods that are usable and in good condition.

Please put donations in a box that closes or a plastic bag to make them easier to pile.



YES!

- **Clean**, usable clothing*
- Household goods
- Books (novels, non-fiction & audio books)
- CDs & DVDs
- Games, Puzzles & Toys



NO!

- Broken /damaged appliances or household goods
- TVs
- Textbooks, Reader's Digest condensed books, worn out books

* If textiles are clean, but ripped, stained, or just worn out, put them in the box in the hallway.

The **Bake Sale is on Thursday only**. We need cookies, brownies/bar cookies, cupcakes, pies, etc. If you can't work the sale, think about making some homemade goodies!

Volunteer Opportunities – Many Hands Make Light Work!

Setup Days

Sunday 9/13

12:00 – 5:00 pm – Come & Go as you can

Monday 9/14, Tuesday 9/15
& Wednesday 9/16

9:00 am until ??

We appreciate any time that fits into your schedules – one hour or all day. Lunch provided on Monday & Tuesday.

Sale Days

Thursday 9/17

Shifts: 9:00 – 11:30 am; 11:30 am – 2:00 pm;
2:00 – 4:30 pm; 4:30 – 7:00 pm

Friday 9/18

Shifts: 9:00 – 11:00 am; 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
Cleanup: 1:00 – 3:30 pm

Contact Joyce Miller (607-434-4963 or millerumw@gmail.com) or say YES when called!

First United Methodist Church, Oneonta

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