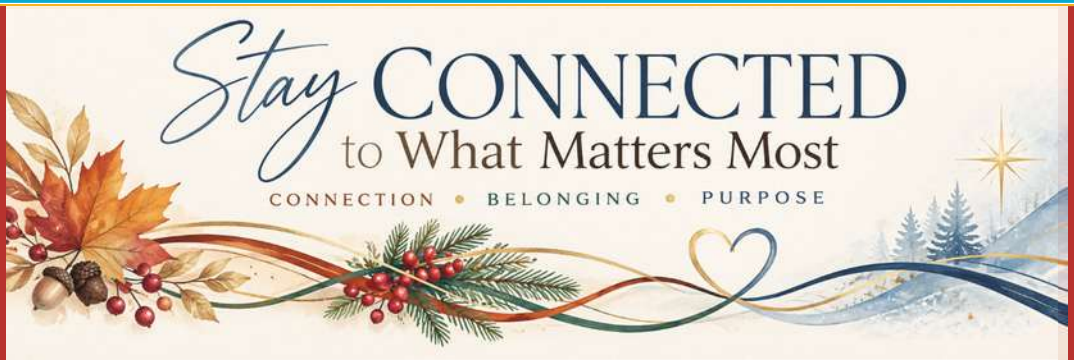
WINTER
2026-2027

FIRST METHODIST CHURCH

LOVE GOD
REACH PEOPLE
SERVE ALL

THE MESSENGER



A WORD FROM PASTOR GINA:

Blessings to my awesome FMC Family,

Can you believe we're already approaching the holiday season? Before we know it, Thanksgiving will be here, Christmas decorations will be going up, calendars will be filling, and we'll be wondering where another year has gone! I LOVE this time of year. But I also know how easily we can get caught up in all the doing and miss some of the being. Between the celebrations, shopping, cooking, gatherings, and endless to-do lists, we can find ourselves busier than ever yet sometimes disconnected from the very things that matter most.

I'm getting a little firsthand experience with this! With our daughter Krista and her husband Nick welcoming baby Oliver into the world, this holiday season is taking on a whole new dimension. Ollie will be just three months old, and suddenly all those familiar holiday traditions are being renegotiated! Who gets to be part of his FIRST Thanksgiving? His FIRST Christmas? And how do we balance the hopes and expectations of two VERY excited extended families while honoring what Krista, Nick, and Ollie need most? Oh, it's a whole new adventure!

But here's what I'm discovering—there's real joy in figuring it out together. It means being flexible, letting go of a few expectations, making room for new traditions, and remembering that the most important thing isn't when or how we celebrate, but the love that connects us. Sometimes making room for someone new means doing things a little differently. And THAT is not such a bad thing!

So, as we move through these holiday months together, I want to offer a simple invitation for all to consider: Stay connected to what matters most

Stay connected to God. Not because you need one more thing on your calendar, but because God's grace is what grounds us, renews us, and reminds us who we are. Make space for prayer, worship, gratitude, and those quiet moments when you can simply breathe and remember that you are deeply loved.

Stay connected to one another. The holidays can be awesome, but they can also be difficult. Some of us will gather around crowded tables, while others will feel the empty chair of someone dearly missed. Some will celebrate with joy, while others carry worries, grief, or uncertainty. A phone call, a shared meal, a thoughtful invitation, or a simple "I've been thinking about you" can become a gift of God's love.

Stay connected to God's purpose for your life. As we turn the calendar to 2027, we'll explore a powerful truth together: We are MADE FOR MORE! More than simply getting through another day. More than going through the motions. God continues to call us to lives filled with meaning, generosity, courage, and hope. And I believe God has even more in store for our FMC family!

Connection. Belonging. Purpose. Three beautiful reminders of what it means to be part of a community of faith. My friends, whatever these next few months hold for you and me, my prayer is that we will find moments to slow down, reach out, welcome others in, and rediscover the joy of belonging to God and to one another.

Because the greatest gifts of this season are found in the love we share, the grace we extend, the hope we nurture, and the lives we touch. This season, don't just fill your calendar. Fill your life with what matters most.

With love, gratitude, and great hope for all that is ahead,
Pastor Gina

church@FMCMoorestown.com | 856.235.0450 | 446 E. Camden Ave. Moorestown, NJ 08057

November Preaching Series: CONNECTED - LIVE TO GIVE

Generosity is not simply something Christians do; it is who Christians become. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live open-handed lives marked by gratitude, stewardship, and generosity. When people deepen their connection to God, one another, their purpose, and God's world, generosity becomes a way of life.



November 1: Connected to God – John 15:1-8
Everything begins with God. Generosity grows from gratitude when we remember that all we have and all we are is a gift from God.

November 8: Connected to Others – Isaiah 58:6-12; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
We are not created for the journey alone. Generosity creates community, strengthens belonging, and helps repair what is broken.

November 15: Connected to Our Truest Selves – Micah 6:6-8; Ephesians 2:8-10
We are created on purpose and for purpose. Generosity forms who we are becoming. Many people today are disconnected from their truest selves because they have confused identity with achievement, consumption, productivity, image, or success.

November 22: Connected to God's World ~ Commitment Sunday – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Psalm 67
Generosity is joyful partnership in God's mission. We are blessed to become a blessing. Generosity is not simply about meeting needs or supporting a budget. It is a way of participating in God's healing, reconciling, and life-giving work in the world. New members will be welcomed, and our 2027 Commitments will be blessed.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Every Christmas, people long for home. Some travel hundreds of miles to be with family. Others remember loved ones who are no longer there. Many discover that even when they are home physically, they still long for something deeper—a place to belong, to be loved, and to be known.

The Christmas story reveals that our deepest longing is ultimately a longing for God. Through Jesus, God comes to dwell among us and invites us home.



November 29 (Hope), 9:00 & 11:00 a.m. – The Longing for Home
Holy longing prepares us to receive God's greatest gifts.

December 6 (Peace), 9:00 & 11:00 a.m. – The Journey
Peace is trusting God even when the path ahead is unclear.

December 13 (Joy), 9:00 & 11:00 a.m. – CANTATA: The Invitation Nobody Expected
Everyone belongs in God's story. Special music and the surprising grace of God.

December 20 (Love), 9:00 & 11:00 a.m. – The Search for Home
Those who sincerely seek Christ often find more than they expected.

December 24 | Candlelight Christmas Eve:
Home at Last – Bethlehem: The House of Bread
The home we have been searching for is found in Christ.

4:00 p.m. – Family-friendly Interactive Service with Contemporary Praise Team
6:30 p.m. – Sacred Music Prelude by Worship Choir & Instrumentalists
7:00 p.m. – Celebration of the Birth of Christ with Traditional Worship Team

December 27, 10:00 a.m. – Home Is Where the Heart Is
Those who have found their home in Christ are ready to follow wherever God leads.

December 13, 3:00 p.m. | Chapel Holiday Service of Remembrance



All are welcome to this time of naming those who have left us.

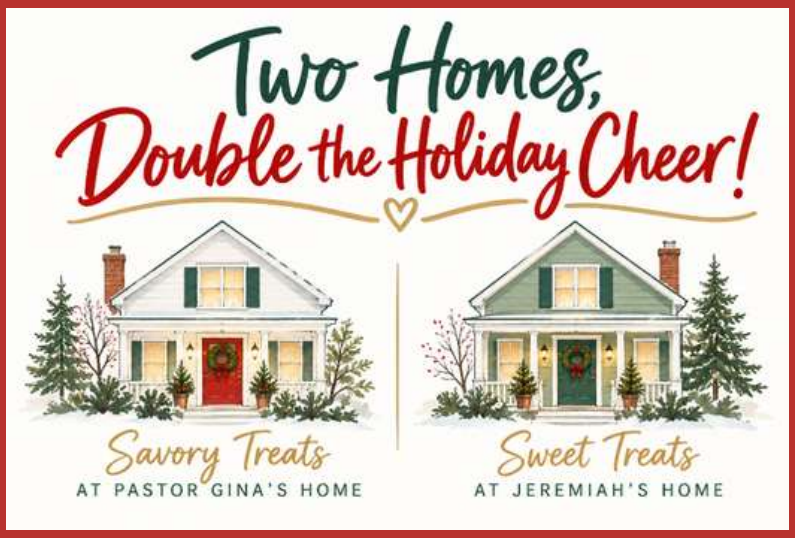
MADE FOR MORE | January 3 – February 7

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine..." — Ephesians 3:20

What if God has more in store for us than we could ever imagine? As we begin a new year, we're asking a bigger question than simply, "What comes next?" We're asking, "Who is God calling us to become?"

Throughout Scripture, God calls ordinary people to step beyond what is comfortable and familiar, to trust more deeply, dream more boldly, and discover what is possible when we follow God's lead. At FMC, we believe God isn't finished with us yet! Let's explore what it means to grow in faith, embrace new possibilities, and make an even greater difference in our community and world. Because God has created us, called us, and empowered us for MORE!





FMC's Annual Holiday Open House

Sunday, December 27 2:00–5:00 p.m.

The Christmas celebrations aren't over yet! Pastor Gina and Jeremiah are opening their homes (and their kitchens!) for an afternoon of holiday cheer, delicious treats, laughter, and connection!

Craving something SAVORY? Stop by Pastor Gina's Parsonage, 433 E. Kings Highway, Moorestown

Have a SWEET TOOTH? Head over to Jeremiah's Parsonage, 503 E. Kings Highway, Moorestown

Why choose one when you can enjoy BOTH? Come for the food, stay for the fellowship, and celebrate the joy of being connected as an FMC family! Whether you're a longtime member, new to FMC, or somewhere in between, there's a place for YOU at our holiday tables. Two homes. Lots of treats. One wonderful church family! We can't wait to welcome you!





YOUTH UPDATE

Jeremiah Appleton, jeremiah@fmcmoorestown.com



An Interview with Stephanie Maines: FMC's Youth and Young Adult Coordinator

On September 28, Stephanie officially joined FMC's staff in a role that will see her work in partnership with Jeremiah to lead the youth ministry programs. As we are seeing vibrancy and increased attendance in Kids Church, Young Followers, and Youth Group, the timing of her call to ministry is perfect. Let's take some time and get to know Stephanie a bit more.

You grew up at First Methodist Church and were actively involved in Youth Group before graduating in 2020. What are some of your favorite memories from those years?

I recall a particular fondness for our weekend retreats at Ignite or Midwinter Advance, and even our lock-ins at church. These were meaningful because they helped build deeper connections with my fellow Youth Groupers, more than the typical Sunday night gathering. I also relished the service trips we went on over the summers with organizations like Oak Hill and Adventure Serve. Compared with our current ASP mission trip, these experiences provided more intentional devotional time that fostered my connection to God where we were. I look forward to working with Jeremiah to plan how we can do more of that on next summer's mission trip.

Looking back, how did your experiences in Youth Group influence your faith, your friendships, or the person you've become today?

My mentors in Youth Group were big influences in my life – Kathy Clawges and Karen Murray did more than just mentor, they provided living examples of what it means to be a faithful Christian. Their approach to the youth also provided scaffolding for friendships that were formed and strengthened during Youth Group...and in several cases, have extended into life today.

It's been six years since you graduated from high school! What has life looked like for you since 2020, and what are some experiences or accomplishments you're especially proud of?

In 2025, I graduated from Misericordia University with a Master of Science Degree in Speech-Language Pathology. I started out working in a Skilled Nursing Facility in Vermont, helping people with speech therapy before officially moving back to Moorestown in January 2026. Since returning home, I've begun working in the Moorestown School District providing speech-language therapy to so many wonderful students. I've had a couple of unique, notable experiences since graduating high school. I thoroughly enjoyed volunteering with a non-profit Performing Arts Training Academy where among other things I managed their social media accounts. I also took a very rewarding service trip to Belize where I was able to work with other Occupational and Physical Therapists to bring therapy services to an underprivileged community.

How has your relationship with God and your understanding of faith evolved as you've moved from your teenage years into young adulthood?

The biggest change I've noticed is my willingness, even eagerness, to live out my faith in more intentional ways. I feel more confident in my ability to have conversations with others, youth and adults, about my faith. Growing up, I often felt my faith needed to be perfect and that proved an obstacle for me at times. One's middle school and high school years are not often seasons ripe for helping you feel like life is going perfectly. Yet, as I've matured, I've realized faith doesn't need to be perfect to be lived out meaningfully.

What excites you most about returning to FMC in this new role as Youth and Young Adult Coordinator, especially now that you'll be helping lead a ministry you once participated in?

As I continue to reflect on my own youth experience under the leadership of Kathy and Karen, I am so excited for the opportunity to be a role model for others in the way that those before me provided along my journey. I am eager to build a community of faithful youth that mirrors my own experiences.

Having experienced Youth Group as a student yourself, what do you think young people need most from their church community today?

This is a tricky one, because there is not a singular answer. I am excited to get to know our youth on an individual level, to figure out where each one is on their journey, to understand their needs, and to be a source of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment. The stigma around coming to church and embracing faith seems to be as real as ever and I'm interested in helping our students break through those barriers.

As we work together to strengthen Youth Group and expand opportunities for young adults, what are some ideas, hopes, or goals you're particularly excited about exploring?

For our Youth, I'd like to reintroduce a dedicated Bible/Small Group Study that goes deeper than our Sunday night discussion time. I'm also looking forward to finding and pulling the invisible threads of ministry that can help us bind Sunday sermons through to Youth Group, Young Followers, and Kids' Church as we take a more intentional approach to our Youth Curriculum.Starting in the new year, I'll be exploring opportunities to engage our post-high school age, young adult population.

Friends, each generation brings a new group of students who need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and understand how a relationship with Jesus can shepherd them through the incredibly difficult years of middle school and high school. FMC is grateful for what Stephanie will bring to this role, and we look forward to all that is to come for our Youth in the years ahead!

Connected, But to What? Faith in the Age of the Smartphone



There was a time when parents worried about who their children were spending time with, what television shows they were watching, or what music they were listening to. Today, those concerns still exist, but they've been joined by something far more complicated: a device that fits in a pocket and provides nearly unlimited access to information, entertainment, relationships, and influences.

For today's teenagers, smartphones are not simply tools for communication. They are gateways to friendships, entertainment, education, and self-expression. They can be wonderful resources for connection and creativity. But they can also become sources of anxiety, comparison, distraction, and isolation. As Christian parents, perhaps the most important question isn't how much time our children spend on their phones, but **how that time is shaping the people they are becoming.**

In Romans 12:2, Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Paul certainly wasn't thinking about smartphones or social media when he wrote those words nearly 2,000 years ago. Yet his message is remarkably relevant today.

Every day, our teenagers encounter messages telling them what they should look like, what they should own, how they should behave, and what makes someone popular or successful. Social media algorithms are designed to capture their attention, often reinforcing the very messages that leave young people feeling inadequate.

Against that constant noise, Scripture offers a different message: **Our identity and worth come not from the approval of others, but from being beloved children of God.** The challenge for parents is helping teenagers hear that message amid the countless competing voices demanding their attention. Consider just a few of the challenges our teenagers navigate daily.

Identity and comparison. Social media presents carefully curated versions of other people's lives, making it easy for teens to believe everyone else is happier, more attractive, or more successful. How do we help them understand that these social media REELS aren't necessarily REAL and that their worth isn't measured in likes, followers, or appearances?

Distraction and disconnection. Constant notifications, endless scrolling, and the pressure to remain connected can interfere with sleep, relationships, and opportunities for quiet reflection. How do we teach our children to be present with God and with the people right in front of them?

Digital relationships. Group chats, online conflicts, gossip, and cyberbullying remind us that words can wound, even when delivered through a screen. Ephesians 4:29 challenges us to use words that build others up rather than tear them down. That instruction applies just as much to a text message as to a face-to-face conversation.

Discernment. With unprecedented access to information comes unprecedented exposure to misinformation, harmful content, and unhealthy influences. Young people need more than restrictions; they need the wisdom to recognize what deserves their attention.

So how can parents respond? Here are five practical approaches rooted in Christian discipleship.

1**. Lead with conversation, not confrontation.** Ask your teenager what they enjoy about their phone, what pressures they experience, and what makes them uncomfortable online. Listen before offering advice. Open communication builds the trust necessary for meaningful guidance.

2. Model the behavior you hope to see. If we expect our children to put away their phones during meals, worship, or family time, we must be willing to do the same. Our example often speaks louder than our instructions.

3. Establish healthy boundaries together. Consider phone-free meals, overnight charging stations outside bedrooms, and age-appropriate limits on apps and social media. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul reminds us that not everything permissible is beneficial. Healthy boundaries aren't simply restrictions; they're opportunities to practice self-control. Starting this year, Youth Group has gone cell phone free.

4. Teach discernment, not just obedience. Philippians 4:8 encourages us to focus on what is true, honorable, just, pure, and worthy of praise. Encourage teens to ask whether the content they consume and share reflects those values. The goal is to develop good judgment, even when parents aren't watching.

5. Make grace greater than fear. Teenagers will make mistakes. When they do, they need to know they can turn to trusted adults for help. Appropriate consequences have their place, but shame and fear should never prevent a young person from seeking support when something goes wrong.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 reminds us that teaching faith to our children happens in the ordinary rhythms of everyday life. Conversations about smartphones, social media, and friendships are opportunities for spiritual formation and strengthening.

And parents shouldn't have to navigate these challenges alone.

As a church, we have an important role in providing young people with authentic relationships, meaningful experiences, and a community where they are valued for who they are. Through Youth Group, worship, mission trips, and service to others, we can remind teenagers that genuine belonging isn't measured by followers or likes.

Ultimately, our goal isn't simply to control our children's technology use. It's to nurture their ability to make faithful decisions for themselves. We cannot control every message our children receive or every influence competing for their attention. But we can help them develop the wisdom to recognize what is good, the courage to reject what is harmful, and the confidence to remember who they are in God's eyes.

The goal of Christian parenting and Youth leadership isn't simply to raise children who follow our rules. It's to raise young people whose faith guides their choices, especially when we're no longer looking over their shoulders.

NEW MEMBER CONNECTIONS — YOU BELONG AT FMC!



Have you been worshiping, connecting, or participating in the life of First Methodist Church? Perhaps you're newer to FMC, or maybe you've been part of our church community for a while but haven't officially joined. We'd love to invite you to take the next step!

As we explore our November theme, CONNECTED: Live to Give, we're reminded that God brings us together to grow in faith, build meaningful relationships, and make a difference in the world.

Join Pastor Gina and FMC leaders for one of our New Member Connections gatherings:

- Wednesday, November 11, 7:00–9:00 p.m.
- Saturday, November 14, 9:00–11:00 p.m.

Both gatherings will be held in the FMC Library. Can't make either date? We'd be happy to arrange a personal conversation with Pastor Gina and other leaders.

We'll joyfully welcome new members at both worship services on Sunday, November 22, Thanksgiving & Commitment Sunday. Interested or have questions? Contact Pastor Gina at gina@fmcmoorestown.com or 908-451-4761. There's a place for YOU at FMC!

Grace and peace as you continue your journey!

EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE NEWS

Jen Kaminski, jbkaminski@comcast.net



Our year got off to a good start in September when families stopped by our Jumping for Justice booth at the Apple Festival. In October, we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with a dynamic speaker who described the level of importance her family instilled in her on commitment to education and service. She also recounted her family's sacrifices on their journey to citizenship.

Later in October, some of our conference leaders, including Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi and many clergy members held an informational session at UMC Haddonfield entitled, "We Walk By Faith." Our faith leaders are deeply troubled by challenges our immigrant brothers and sisters in Christ are facing. They are urging us to speak out against the unjust treatment they are receiving and to walk alongside them so they know they aren't alone. Some committee members attended a related march and vigil in Philadelphia. October also highlights the issue of Domestic Violence. Our speaker, Wil Dubose, Prevention Director for the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence, gave us information on how to support those facing this type of abuse.



Renee Sanders / Red SilverFox Thunderbird of INDEDU Indigenous Education was our speaker in November for Native American Heritage and Justice for Indigenous Peoples Month. During the session, "An Expansive Perspective of Human Existence in the United States," we were able to broadly examine indigenous history and perhaps come to new understandings of some histories that may have been overlooked or misunderstood.

Our committee also worked on and sent Christmas cards to prisoners through the UMC Eastern PA Restorative Justice and Prison Ministry Program. The topic we plan to explore in January is Poverty in America.

THREADS OF GRACE

Stitching friendships. Sharing comfort. Quilting God's Love

Threads of Grace is a welcoming quilting ministry where people of all ages, abilities, and experience levels gather to create handmade quilts that offer comfort, celebrate life's milestones, and share God's love with others. Together, we build friendships, learn new skills, and stitch hope, care, and compassion into every quilt we create.

When We Meet:
Threads of Grace meets monthly in the Church Parlor beginning in January 2027. Our first meeting is on January 9, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

No quilting experience is required—just a willing heart and a desire to serve others through creativity, fellowship, and faith.

For More Information:
Contact Vicki Sabo at 12Ladybug58@gmail.com or 856-701-9093
Contact Kristen Alfano at beth15alfano@gmail.com



MORE THAN APPLES AND COSTUMES:

Building Connections and Welcoming the Community

The fall season brought plenty of activity to First Methodist Church, but the most important moments weren't necessarily found on an event schedule. They were found in the conversations, friendships, laughter, and shared experiences that brought people together.

A Celebration of Community



On September 18, FMC hosted its Third Annual Apple Festival, welcoming families and neighbors for an evening of fall festivities. With fresh apples, cider, donuts, baked goods, crafts, live music, bounce houses, face painting, balloon art, a magician, and a special juggling performance, the festival offered something for visitors of all ages. But behind the food and entertainment was something even more significant: an opportunity to open our doors and strengthen the connections between FMC and the wider Moorestown community. Church volunteers, local sponsors, and community partners made the festival possible by helping transform an ordinary Friday evening into a neighborhood celebration.

A Little Halloween Fun



On October 25, FMC continued the fall festivities with Trunk or Treat, inviting local families to enjoy an afternoon of costumes, decorated vehicles, and Halloween fun. Events like Trunk or Treat remind us that hospitality can take many forms. Sometimes it happens around a dinner table or during Sunday worship. Other times, it happens in a church parking lot filled with costumes, candy, and friendly faces. For families experiencing FMC for the first time, these informal gatherings can be an important introduction to our congregation. As we reflect on this season, we are especially grateful for the volunteers and participants who continue to make FMC a place of welcome and community.