

## **PURPOSE STATEMENT**

***"We are disciples of Jesus Christ committed to making a difference in the community and in the world through service and invitational outreach."***



# The Messenger

First United Methodist Church, Chatham

January 2026—Vol. 30—Issue 1

## **AROUND AND ABOUT FUMC**

*It's fitting that we begin this new column with the Pastor. You may be surprised, as I was, at the things you didn't know about Sonny.*



The Rev. Dr. Frank (Sonny) Gada

Sonny was ordained in 2009 as an Interfaith Pastor, receiving his doctorate in Theology and Divinity and Metaphysical Humanistic Sciences. He has served as a youth leader at Orleans UMC, and as Director of Christian Education at St. David's Episcopal Church, South Yarmouth. He's also a Life Coach, Spiritual Awareness, with his New Horizons Group.

Your Pastor has also spent time with the Franciscans at Little Portion Friary—Long Island, New York. Here he was taught and learned the Franciscan way. At First United Methodist Church, Sonny leads a weekly meditation group as well as a Faith Study Group, where everyone is welcome.

Sonny is also the Northeast

Regional Director of the Biblical Botanical Society, giving lectures on the flowers and plants of the Bible.

With 54 years' experience in Horticulture and Botany, Sonny received a degree in these studies from the University of Pennsylvania and Rittner's School of Floral Design in Boston. Working with the Green Kingdom gave him an opportunity to work for Doris Duke as an English Gardener as well as a tour guide for her botanical gardens in Somerville, New Jersey, in the late 70's. He had a well-established floral business in Chatham and a hit local TV show for 23 years, Sonny's Floral Trends.

During Covid, Sonny completed courses in Earth Sciences and has an Associates Degree in Paleontology and Biblical Archaeology.

Here at church, you can see Pastor Sonny's handiwork around almost every corner!



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***When we see God, it will not be a new discovery. It will be a profound recognition of that heart and soul of yourself that is already in union with God. All contemplation, all true prayer, is an attempt to go back to that place.***

**Richard Rohr**



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

**1-1—Tom Sharkey**

**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY**

**1-11—Nancy and Roy  
Bischoff**

### ***A New Year's Message 2026—New Beginnings***

***Dear Friends and Family in Christ ~***

***A Blessed New Year to you all.***

***As we enter the Year 2026, the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 come to my mind. I think of these words because there are some aspects of the coming year that we know will be taking place.***

***I also think of these verses from Ecclesiastes because there is plenty that we are uncertain about in the coming year. What will it bring?***

***The start of a New Year offers the perfect opportunity to make reflection intentional and to commit ourselves to living out God's will with greater purpose.***

***In the spirit of new beginnings, I invite you to consider what ministry opportunities God is laying on your heart. How are you being called to serve your community, your world, and those around you in ways that reflect God's love? In what areas of your life—whether in time or talents or your finances—can you more intentionally align yourself with your baptismal promises?***

***As we move into 2026, prayerfully consider how you can live differently, more***

***intentionally living out what God has written on your heart. Perhaps it's about prioritizing time for family, deepening your faith through a Bible study, committing to serve in a ministry that challenges you to grow, or committing to some level of financial support of the ministries happening through The First United Methodist church here in Chatham.***

***Living our faith enriching lives is about more than just words; it's about how we act, how we love, and how we share God's love with those around us.***

***It is uncertain what events the year 2026 will bring. But one thing is certain: God is in control. For Christians, it will be another year of certainty. Certainty that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. A certainty that rests in the promises of God. We are His children, and he has established a time for everything.***

***What is "Written on your Heart" for the New Year?  
Blessings, Pastor Sonny***

***"The challenge to the religious imagination is to see God's image in one who is not in our image."***

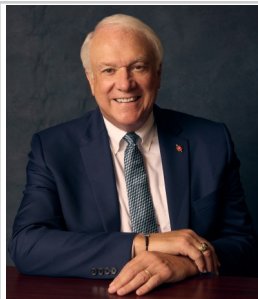
***Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi, Britain, in The Dignity of Difference, quoted in Where God Was Born, Feiler.***

***"Politicians have power, but religions have something stronger: They have influence. Politics moves the pieces on the chessboard. Religion changes lives."***

***Rabbi Sacks***

***"The Bible, at its heart, is an ode to interdependency. In the biblical view, God is born not in any particular place but anyplace where humans and the divine act in the service of a righteous world."***

***Bruce Feiler, in "Where God Was Born—2005***



**“Hear” these important, loving, and challenging words from Bishop Bickerston as you read them—**

**Psalm 55:1-5**

***And horror overwhelms me.***

***Fear and trembling come upon me, the terrors of death have***

***fallen upon me. I am distraught by the noise of the enemy. . . . I am troubled***

***in my complaint. Attend to me, and answer me; Do not hide yourself from my supplication. Give ear to my prayer, O God.***

**“May the petition of the psalmist be our very own today: I call upon all United Methodists in the New Hope Episcopal Area, and the New England and New York Annual Conferences, to be in constant prayer for peace, justice, and healing throughout [affected communities].**

**“We are deeply concerned for everyone affected by gun violence and the well-being of all God’s people. But today, our prayers center on the grieving communities. We extend our deepest sympathies to the victim’s families and pray all fears subside quickly as investigation[s] continue.**

**“The news of tragic shootings evokes the same feelings expressed by the psalmist; feelings of distress, anguish, and fear. ‘Lord, preserve our life, bring us out of trouble for your name’s sake.’ Psalm 143:11**

**“May it be so.**

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**“I was profoundly affected by my first experience on the continent of Africa. Years ago, I spent several weeks as a part of a delegation evaluating the continuance of certain mission projects throughout sub-Saharan Africa. As a part of that experience, we visited mission sites in Liberia, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.**

**“One of our stops was at a church-sponsored school. When we arrived, the children began to applaud and then sing. We were “missionaries from America” and our new friends were rolling out their version of a red carpet to make us feel at home. We were sat at tables. Simple yet abundant food was put in front us. Soon came wooden crates filled with bottles of warm Coca-Cola. The food was nothing special. The Coke had no ice. But the hospitality was priceless.**

**“When the visit ended, the children lined the street and waved at our bus as we departed. It was only then that we learned something that changed everything. The children had given up their only meal of the day so that we could be fed. The Coca-Cola was purchased by a months’ long campaign to collect whatever coins the children could. If we had known, we surely would have refused that meal. Our bodies were fed. Out of the sincerity of their gifts, my life was changed.**

**“Today we are living in a world where the division**

between the “haves” and the “have nots” is only growing wider. Jesus’ acknowledgement in Matthew 26 that the poor will always be with us is only being made more evident these days by actions all around us that see those in need deprived of the basic necessities of life. The government has eliminated funding for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) with the assurance that only one-half may be restored. Yet, there is hunger.

**“The New York Times reports that in New York City alone, nearly 1.8 million people are at risk of not receiving food assistance or, at best, receiving reduced amounts. In New England, over 1.7 million people receive SNAP benefits. In Massachusetts, over 1 million people are affected — 32% are children, 26% are older adults, 31% are persons with disabilities. Nationwide, roughly 42 million people are at risk.**

**“Oh, you and I can easily make excuses for why this is not our problem. You’ve heard the comments: ‘They bring it on themselves. They should get out and get a job. Why should we sacrifice our hard-earned wages to help someone who should pull themselves up by their bootstraps and help themselves?’”**

**“That rhetoric is rampant.. And every time it is spoken, more start to believe it. The immigrant is a criminal. The homeless are irresponsible. The ones who cry “injustice” are foolish. It is a daily barrage coming from multiple angles. But there is another point of view.. It’s not published in the secular press or aired on the nightly news. It’s not shared at the White House press conferences. What is it? It’s simple. Jesus said it. ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ Or, more directly, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’”**

**“Those very simple lines from Jesus are a clarion call for the Christian community to open our eyes and hearts to the plight of the poor, the lost, the homeless, the hungry. It is the foundation of who we are as followers of Christ. It is a way that we can preach without any words what it means to be kind, loving, generous, relevant and grace filled.**

**“And yet, these foundational parts of who we are have become, at times, hauntingly invisible. In our desperate effort to survive, we threaten to turn inward to take care of ourselves instead of taking risks to care for others. In the midst of constant pressure to downplay how we live out the basic principles of what it means to be good, right, and holy, we have to ask: Who will push back when evil gets a foothold? Who will simply say “no” when feeding and food distribution programs are ended? Who will stand up with conviction and fill the gap that has been created?**

**“In New England, more than 104 churches offer food and hunger-related ministries in their communities feeding more than 3,000 people each week.**

*cont’d. on p. 5*



*MOUNTAINS OF HOPE FOR HAITI***A mission of Celebration of the  
United Methodist Church, Gainesville, Florida**

“December 2025 - Advent Hope

“Among other things, the season of Advent and Christmas is a time of hope; or, it should be, especially within the faith community. For me, one definition of hope is belief that what someone is experiencing now is not, and need not be, the defining moment or experience of the rest of their lives. To be honest, I don't know that I could do what I do without believing that. That by the grace and power of God, by the care and support of others, there is something meaningful, beyond the present. Many of us have seen, experienced, this in mission and disaster recovery work; providing a caring Christian presence to people in need by what we say and do, by being present and coming alongside them in their time of need. This is hope.

“In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Melissa, the Methodist Church of Haiti and other organizations were on the scene to be that presence, to be that hope in the communities. Mountains of Hope, through your gifts, was able to support some of these efforts in Port Salut and Cayes on the southwest arm of Haiti. An organization called the Association of Women for the Advancement of Port Salut (AFAPS) provided food and hygiene kits to over 85 families. In Cayes, working with the local pastor, some 50 families were provided vouchers to purchase supplies to repair their homes. Flood waters brought infections and other health concerns, and in connections with other agencies' mobile clinics have been established to treat families. Over 700 people have been seen since the storm. They are also looking to provide food assistance. In many ways, this is hope made tangible.

“Friends, many rural communities will never receive formal aid. We will continue to assist families and communities and report on our work. If you have any questions about the situation in Haiti or Mountains of Hope please contact me at [tvencuss@gmail.com](mailto:tvencuss@gmail.com) or 860-324-1424. If you are able to provide support for the work of Mountains of Hope, funds may be sent to the Frontier Foundation, 20 Soundview Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606. Please make checks out to “The Frontier Foundation” and indicate “MHH” in the memo line.

There is also a donation link on the MHH website, [mountainsofhopeforhaiti.org](http://mountainsofhopeforhaiti.org). You will receive an immediate acknowledgement.

Another option is to send funds to Celebration UMC, 9501 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, Florida, 32608. Please make those checks out to Celebration UMC and also indicate MHH – Emergency Response in the memo line. You can also **donate online at** [celebrationgnv.org](http://celebrationgnv.org). Click on “give” on the home page banner, then “donate” and it will take you to the Mountains of Hope donation link at [celebrationgnv.org](http://celebrationgnv.org). Click on “give” on the home page banner, then “donate” and it will take you to the Mountains of Hope donation link.

With the blessings of faith, hope, and love, we wish you all a joyous and meaningful holiday season.

Tom and Wendy

Rev. Tom Vencuss, UMCOR/FLUMC Early Response Trainer, Mountains of Hope for Haiti  
[tvencuss@gmail.com](mailto:tvencuss@gmail.com)

cont'd. from p. 3

The need is growing while the supplies are diminishing. Our leaders are reporting that there is constant fear and anxiety over what may happen to these vital lifelines. What they need is not only food but a sense of community, an assurance that someone can and will walk alongside them.

"Friends, this is yet another opportunity that has been left at our doorstep. Another chance for us to push back with a message of compassion and respond with an act of love. We are invit[e] people to our warm fire-sides to share in [our] plenty. But just outside the door is someone who has nothing to offer to their family. One of the most effective programs this nation has to fill that gap and help them get through is gone.

"It is time for us to fill the gap. That time is right now. Out of the generosity of our hearts, bodies will be fed. Out of the sincerity of our gifts, lives will be changed. Open your pantry, one that can easily be replenished, and share the wealth of your privilege.

"Do it now.

"Why?

"Because He said so.

***'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'***

The Journey Continues. . . ."



Thomas J. Bickerton  
Resident Bishop

FUMC has a **Family Food Pantry** in our Thrift Shop (not open in January 2026). Donations of unperishable food are always welcomed as are monetary donations to buy items that are requested by those in need.

"Do not be weighed down by the clutter in your life: lots of little chores to do sometime, in no particular order. If you focus too much on these petty tasks, trying to get them out of the way, you will discover that they are endless. They can eat up as much time as you devote to them.

"Instead of trying to do all your chores at once, choose the ones that need to be done today. Let the rest slip into the background of your mind so I can be in the forefront of your awareness. Remember that our ultimate goal is living close to Me, being responsive to My initiatives. I can communicate with you most readily when your mind is uncluttered and turned toward me. Seek My Face continually throughout [the] day. Let My Presence bring order to your thoughts, infusing Peace into your entire being."

From *Jesus Calling®*,  
*Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, by Sarah Young



## A December Story of Hope

“ Good morning, Susan,  
I couldn't move on without first saying these words. ”

Today I want to express my deepest gratitude to the incredible woman who defended me with courage, empathy, and wisdom.

Your voice became mine when I no longer had the strength to speak.

You reminded me that being a woman means being powerful and that being a foreigner doesn't mean being alone.

Thank you for fighting for me, for believing in my truth, and for treating me with dignity and compassion.

You didn't just practice law; you restored my faith in justice and in the worth of a woman who survived.

Your work was light in one of the darkest moments of my life.

I carry with me the certainty that justice has a woman's face.

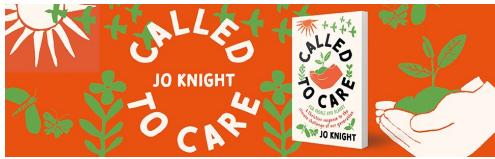
Because of you, this family is safe,  
supported, and hopeful this season.

— Thank you for being part of this work. —

"My husband said something a few years ago that I often quote: Eighty percent of everything that is true and beautiful can be experienced on any ten-minute walk. Even in the darkest and most devastating times, love is nearby if you know what to look for. It does not always appear at first to be lovely but instead may take the form of a hot mess or a snoring old dog or someone you have sworn to never, ever forgive (for a possibly very good reason, if you ask me). But mixed in will also be familiar signs of love: wings, good-hearted people, cats (when they are in the right mood), a spray of wildflowers, a cup of tea."

Anne Lamott, *Somehow*, *Thoughts on Love*





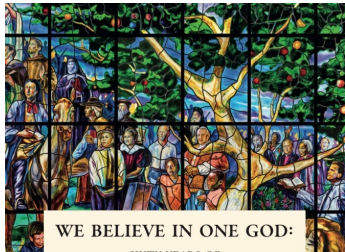
**“Our world is in a climate crisis. As the earth warms, increased floods, droughts, fires and disease threaten the people and the places we love. The poor**

**already experience the impacts of this first and foremost, despite having contributed the least to the problem.**

“Stories from our global neighbors clarify the challenge. This book invites Christians to take climate justice seriously. Through inspiring stories, creative reflection and biblical teaching, readers will come to understand and connect creation and justice to their faith.

“As a climate justice leader and campaigner, mother and pastor's wife, Jo Knight also shares her own story. This is a story of God growing a passion for caring for His creation and how Christians play an essential part. *Publisher*

“Full of **biblical insight and practical stories**, this book gives us hope. Hope that Christians can once again proclaim, “the earth is the Lord's”. In a world where the scale of crisis can leave us feeling weary or uncertain, Jo Knight offers a gentle but prophetic invitation to respond - not with fear or fatalism, but with faith. Rooted in Scripture and rich in lived wisdom, this book reminds us that biblical hope is not passive. It empowers us to act, to pursue climate justice with courage, grace and love. **A timely resource to help Christians reflect deeply and advocate boldly.**” -- Rev. Tim Costello, AO, and Matt Darvas, Executive Directors, Micah Australia.



Joint International Commission for Dialogue between  
the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church  
(MERCIC)

## Celebrating 60 years of Catholic-Methodist dialogue

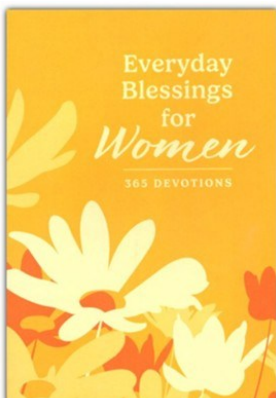
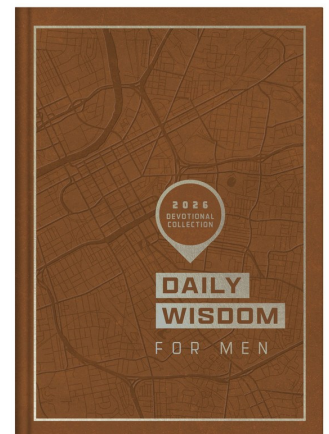
ROME — “We Believe in One God” is the title of a new publication by the Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, detailing progress made over the past six decades toward full visible unity between the two Christian world communions. Printed by the Vatican Publishing House as part of an ecumenical series, the volume draws together the results of 11 reports produced since the formal dialogue began in 1967.

About MEOR: The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is the presence of the World Methodist Council in Rome for ecumenical dialogue, joint action for peace and justice, prayer and reflection, and hospitality.

## “God's Word Offers the Wisdom and Encouragement You Need Every Day of 2026!” (For Men)

“This all-new 2026 daily devotional will help you learn about your identity in Christ: You are accepted, forgiven, redeemed, valued, celebrated, equipped, courageous, capable of great things, created for a purpose, protected and secure in His arms, and above all, deeply and perfectly loved by a Father who knows you better than you know yourself.

“Every day for an entire year, you will be encouraged by scriptures, devotional readings, and prayers. Daily scripture readings follow a Read-Through-the-Bible-in-a-Year plan that you may choose to complete each day. This fantastic book makes a great personal study or gift for any man.” *Publisher*



## “Begin each and every day with a promise from God.” (For Women)

“Find peace, hope, and encouragement anywhere, anytime with *Everyday Blessings for Women*. Small enough to slip into your purse yet beautiful enough to give as a gift or keep next to your favorite reading chair, the daily devotional readings in *Everyday Blessings* will help you begin each day with inspiration from God's Word and serve as a joyful reminder that every day is indeed a blessing.” *Publisher*

## CHURCH CALENDAR

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				<div>1</div>  <div>HAPPY NEW YEAR!</div>	2	3
<div>4</div> 10am Worship/ Communion.	5	<div>6</div> 8:30-9:30 Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.  10-11:30 Faith Study in Peace Room	7	<div>8</div> 8:30-9:30am Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.	9	10
<div>11</div> 10am Worship  <b>POT LUCK LUNCHEON</b>	12	<div>13</div> 8:30-9:30 Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.  10-11:30 Faith Study in Peace Room  <b>FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER DEADLINE</b>	<div>14</div>     5:30 Finance & Trustees	<div>15</div> 8:30-9:30am Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.	16	17
<div>18</div> 10am—Worship	<div>19</div>   11am—Seaside Readers	<div>20</div> 8:30-9:30 Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.  10-11:30 Faith Study in Peace Room	21	<div>22</div> 8:30-9:30am Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.	23	24
<div>25</div> 10am Worship	26	<div>27</div> 8:30-9:30 Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.  10-11:30 Faith Study in Peace Room	28	<div>29</div> 8:30-9:30am Osteo Exercise in Fellowship Hall  9:30—Meditation in Heberton Rm.	30	31



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