

## Intro

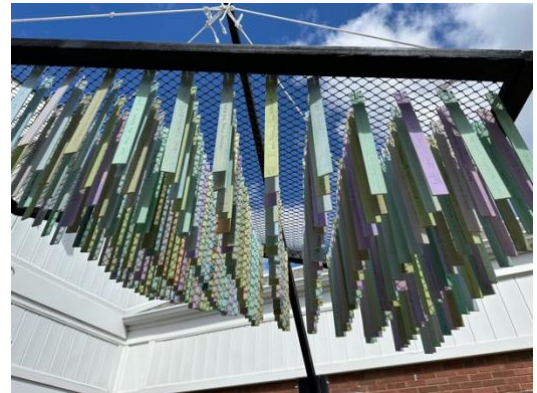
This past Sunday, October 1, marked 12 weeks since Rev. Dr. Ivy Smith, Pastor Tammy Palermo, and I began our appointments at Mentor United Methodist Church. Having been commissioned as a provisional deacon at annual conference in June this year, Tammy's position and role on staff at Mentor UMC transitioned beautifully from Director of Children and Family Ministries to Pastor of Children and Family Ministries. Ivy and I are grateful that Pastor Tammy has been on staff and been a member of Mentor UMC for many years. Though Ivy and I have only been here 12 weeks, we have found ourselves swept up in the movement of the Holy Spirit at work in this place at this time! This Charge Conference Pastor's Report, will provide a summary of key happenings since July and touch on some of the plans that are in process. I invited Pastors Ivy and Tammy to provide their own paragraphs to enhance this report from their own perspectives.

## Worship Schedule Change

After meeting with a group of leaders in May to discuss, pray and discern, the decision was made to go from four weekly Sunday worship services to two services for the summer allowing Pastor Ivy and myself to begin our ministry at MUMC in worship together. The team of about 14 leaders representing all four worship services agreed to follow the new schedule through Labor Day weekend and return to the four services (modern and traditional simultaneously at 9:00 and again at 11:00) starting September 10. The congregation responded exceedingly well to this significant change, demonstrating a high level of flexibility and grace.

## The One Body Prayer Sticks

Our summer worship series and focus was "I Am, We Are". It was an opportunity for us to reflect on our unique identities as individual members of the Body of Christ as well as who we are collectively as the one Body of Christ. We used Jesus' "I AM" statements in the gospel of John to guide us. Each wooden paint stick has words written by church members and friends that complete sentences such as "I am..." and "We are..." The Assembly is located outside for the whole community to see and for all to be reminded of how we are held together by Christ. When the wind blows and the sticks move in formation, we are reminded of the Holy Spirit that moves us as a church.



## Baptism and Communion

On our first Sunday, July 16, we baptized Bentley Sutton, born March 15, 2023. We also celebrated communion by intinction allowing Pastor Ivy, Pastor Tammy, and me the opportunity to serve each person by name (we asked each person to tell us their name) making our first encounters truly a holy, relational experience.

*Written by Rev. Steve Stultz Costello, Sr. Pastor, MUMC October 4, 2023*



**First Wedding**

Shortly after arriving at MUMC, I began meeting with Jessica and Nick, a couple that had scheduled their wedding to be at MUMC on September 16. With our organist and choir director Amy Bender at the keys and church member Sue Miller serving as “Wedding Hostess”, the service went beautifully. It was an example of the standard of excellence this church has set and is able to sustain through its staff and dedicated volunteers.



**Staff Retreat**

For the first time in history (as far as anyone can recall), the MUMC staff went on an overnight retreat for renewal, fun, bonding, and learning. We went to the Lodge at Geneva on the Lake August 24-25 2023. Our retreat leaders, Barry LeNoir and Rev. Gary Heaton from Virginia, led us in worship, communion, singing, games, storytelling, reflections and discussions. We learned about the five dynamics every group experiences: Forming, Norming, Storming, Performing and Transforming. The unanimous spiritual and financial support from SPRC and Endowment (GEM) is a testament to the appreciation and value MUMC has for its staff and pastors. We came away feeling closer and energized for the year ahead.

**Staff Lunches**

The Staff enjoyed its first monthly lunch together on September 20. This new practice, again with the support of SPRC, recognizes the importance of table fellowship on a regular basis for maintaining a strong, high functioning, healthy staff team. The lunches will also be an opportunity to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries.



9:00 Worshippers – Modern and Traditional



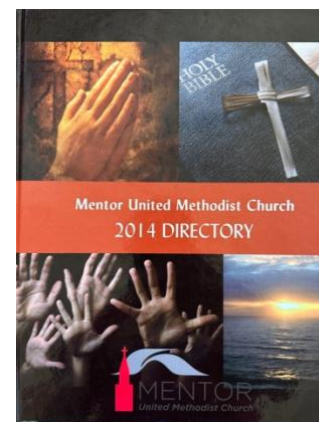
11:00 Worshippers – Modern and Traditional

**Congregational Pictures**

“I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together...” This familiar song lyric says it all! And, a picture is worth a thousand words. On September 10, when we launched our fall season, the congregation was invited to gather for a picture after the 9:00 services and a picture after the 11:00 services. The pictures captured a snapshot of the congregation at this point of new beginnings.

**New Church Directory**

Within my first two weeks at Mentor UMC, I had several people independently share with me that we need a new pictorial directory. I shared this cry with our Office Manager, Stephanie Lee and less than a week later, she had formed a team of five strong leaders to make it happen! Pictures are scheduled to take place in November and December. The new directory, to be printed early in 2024, will replace the last one that was published in 2014! We will also use this as an opportunity to update our church database. The swift action to accomplish this goal speaks to the value this church places on relationships. The new directory and updated database will help the whole congregation know one another and contact one another more easily.



**Meet and Greet Gatherings**

To get to know the congregation and to live into our value for relationships, Pastor Ivy and I have made ourselves available every week for “Meet and Greets”. These gatherings happen in the community at restaurants and parks with a “Ya’ll come” invitational approach. Attendance has ranged from zero to eight. The other approach to our meet and greets is scheduled in groups of eight to fifteen at the

church or in someone’s home. All our meet and greets have allowed us to learn about the church, its people, its history and the hopes and dreams of its members.

### **Pastor Capture**

On September 13, we launched a new weekly video short called "Pastor Capture". The weekly 5-7 minute video features Pastors Ivy, Tammy and myself reflecting together on the scriptures and key aspects of our sermons and Children and Family programming from the previous Sunday as well as giving a teaser for the upcoming Sunday's focus. This video has been well received with 244 views the first week and over 100 views each week following. It is a weekly visual sample of the collaborative, unified spirit among the pastoral team.



### **Shepherding Summit – Leadership Strengthening**

The Nominations Team began meeting in September. I shared with them that I would like their help with organizing a leadership training/strengthening event. I suggested the event take place on a weeknight for two hours sometime in January or February 2024. The team showed support and enthusiasm requesting instead that we have the event on Sunday, November 19 from 4:00 to 7:00 with dinner provided! We hope to have 100+ people in attendance from those serving in recognized leadership positions to those serving on various ministry teams and program activities to those who worship with us but are not yet involved in any ministries. The Summit will build on and strengthen best practices for healthy and vital congregations that I have observed already functioning among our leaders.

### **Visioning**

Just before I started in July, I received an email from my predecessor, Rev. Sondra Snode. It included an email reply from Rev. Beth Ortiz, Strategic Ministries Director for the East Ohio Conference, providing information about a consultant with Church Unique who could be helpful to Mentor UMC's goal of engaging in church-wide visioning. Our Administrative Council Chairperson, Dan Gallagher and I met with the consultant by zoom and have since put together an initial Visioning Study group tasked with researching and reviewing various resources, programs and consultants and making a recommendation to the Administrative Council for a visioning process best suited for Mentor UMC at this time. The Holy Spirit is guiding us into a future of growing vitality, bringing more people onto a path of Christ-centered discipleship for the transformation of our communities and the world!

### **Embracing Big Goals**

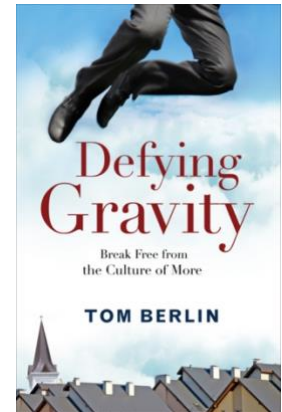
At our first Administrative Council meeting on July 19, several goals that had been on hold were resurrected for consideration. A task group was appointed to review the goals, consider other possible goals and their level of urgency, and recommend the best process, timing, and path forward. The task group met and after careful review, open dialogue and prayerful discernment, decided to recommend we move forward with the one goal we all agreed is most urgent and has the greatest impact - renovations and upgrades to the fellowship hall to enhance and better support all of our ministries that use that space including our Modern Worship service, theater arts program, and More-than-a-Meal monthly meal program. The recommendation is currently being reviewed by GEM (Endowment) and Finance Teams and is expected to be presented at the Administrative Council meeting for vote on October 18. MUMC is a church that makes decisions through healthy, transparent, and collaborative processes that keeps the church's mission front and center.

## Staff Hiring

Mentor UMC currently has four open staff positions: Full-time Youth Director, Full-time Modern Worship Leader, Part-time Treasurer and Part-time Visitation Pastor. I have been impressed by the dedication of the search teams working under the direction of the SPRC to advertise, review applicants, organize interviews, contact references, conduct interviews and above all tenaciously hold to the vision they feel God has provided for these positions, refusing to offer a position to candidates who do not fit that vision. Equally inspiring is the dedication of church members and staff who have filled interim positions and made other accommodations to ensure the church's mission and ministries continue to thrive.

## Stewardship

In August, I met with Rich Elwell and Jack Oliver, two long-time, dedicated leaders in the congregation who have led the annual stewardship focus for many years. Their openness to consider new ideas and practices while at the same time champion the many tasks involved in running a church-wide stewardship program, has been remarkable. Our Stewardship series based on Bishop Tom Berlin's book "Defying Gravity – Break Free from the Culture of More" launches this Sunday, October 8 and will culminate with Consecration Sunday on October 29. I am told and have seen evidence that this church is very generous. Over the past 20 years, there has been only one year when the church ended with a deficit. Even then, the deficit was less than 1% of the budget!



## Looking Ahead to 2024

I have heard many people at Mentor UMC independently share with me their hope of seeing the congregation come together more often and become even more unified. One idea that is currently being explored is a mid-week dinner with informal 20-minute worship, and programming. The vision is to provide table fellowship that includes singing a few "camp songs", sharing prayers and reflecting on the previous Sunday's scriptures followed by opportunities for children, youth and adults to engage in faith formation. If everything comes together, this vision could become a reality beginning in January 2024.

## New Members

More than a few people have asked about becoming a member of Mentor UMC. My hope is that beginning in January, perhaps as part of the mid-week dinner and programming, Pastors Ivy, Tammy and I will provide a "Welcome to Mentor United Methodist Church" class that would be followed by a new member Sunday.

## Rev. Dr. Ivy Smith, Associate Pastor

Mentor proves to be a church of extreme hospitality and warmth. Since coming in July 2023, I feel comfortable, included, and valued in all areas of Mentor UMC. The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) members have connected with me often on my transition and welcome. Working with the staff members is working smoothly at a comfortable space. The committees and other leadership have welcomed me to the regular scheduled meetings. Mentor has wonderful worship services and a strong, flourishing set of Journey Groups (Bible Study). The Lead Pastor sets time to plan and review the work week. I work closely with the Pastor of Children and Family Ministries. My overall impression of Mentor

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UMC is that this church values intentional fellowship, strong worship, Christian education, and local/global missional outreach. And I am glad to be in service to Mentor.

### **Rev. Tammy Palermo, Pastor of Children and Family Ministries**

Children and families have been engaged this past year through Sunday school at both service times. There were community events for our church families, our preschool families, and the greater community. These included Treat Street, the Easter Egg Hunt, Vacation Bible School, Theatre Arts Camp, and Middle School Mission Week. Pastor Tammy returned to Memorial Middle School Theatre producing *Matilda, Jr.* Several of the Memorial MS students participated in the Christmas play and TAC. Youth have been encouraged to gather on Sunday mornings throughout the year. They also participated in the youth retreat at Camp Wanake and Youth Annual Conference as well activities at Mentor UMC. Moms continue to meet for MOMCo at Mentor UMC. The Mentor UM Preschool has increased from three to four morning classes this fall.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly the Holy Spirit is on the move at Mentor United Methodist Church. I am grateful for the leadership of my predecessors, Rev. Sondra Snode and Rev. Mikayla Doepker for leading this church through the pandemic and setting the stage for a new chapter of planting, watering, and harvest at Mentor UMC. What a blessing to get to serve with Pastor Ivy and Pastor Tammy, with an amazingly dedicated and grace-filled staff and among a spirit-filled people!