OTTERBEIN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
176 West Market Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non Profit Org.
U. S. Postage
PAID
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
Permit No. 34

Tidings



December 2026

The *Tidings*
Otterbein United Methodist Church
176 West Market Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Office - (540) 434-7747
oumcharrisonburg.org

Tidings articles are generally due by the 15th of each month. You may either bring articles to the church office or email them to oumcadm@hotmail.com

Sunday Schedule

9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Worship Service

Please check the calendar for times of regular and special events.

Our Staff

Rev. Laura Stratton
Senior Pastor
laurastratton@vaumc.org

Melissa Miller
Office Manager
oumcadm@hotmail.com

Gary Edlind
Director of Visitation

Colin Cossi
Director of Music Ministries
colincossimusic@gmail.com

Dan Curtis
Organist

Drew Dodson
Bell Choir Director

Melvin Falls
Custodian

Bonnie Andrade
Treasurer
oumctreasurer@hotmail.com

Office: 540-434-7747
x200 for Melissa
x201 for Laura

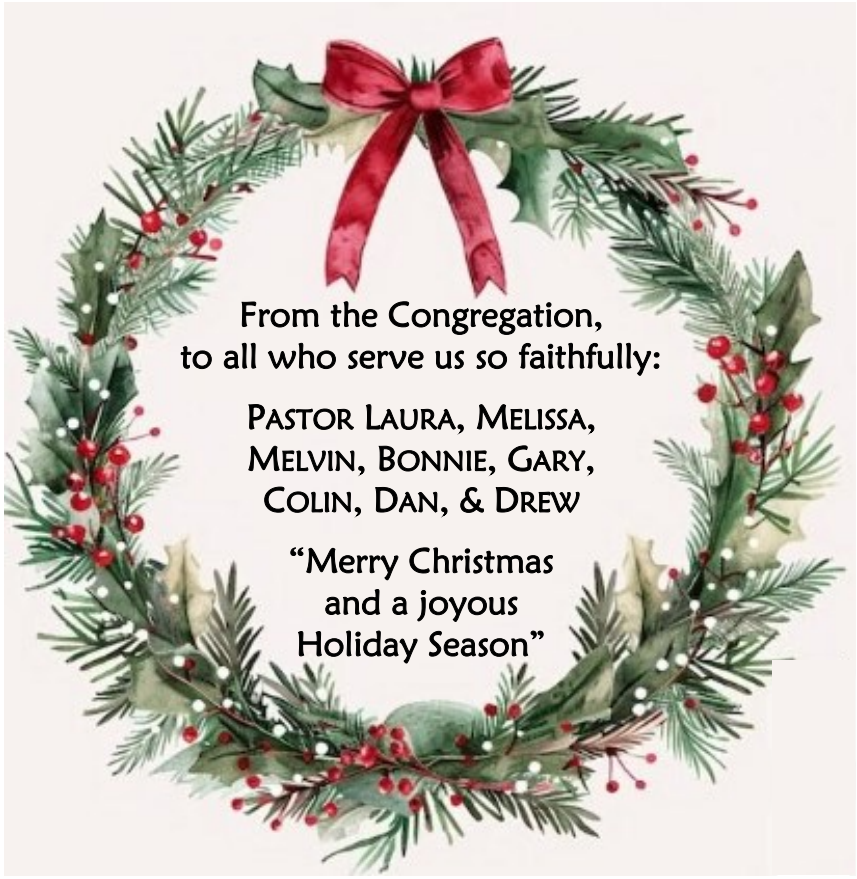
Weekday Office Hours

Monday - Thursday: 8:00 am - 3:00 pm

Have you checked out our Facebook Page? You can find us at facebook.com/OUMCHarrisonburg or through the link on our website. Please check out our page and share with your friends!

Otterbein in Prayer

David Angier
Rosalie Bailey
Gary Billingsley
Whitney Bradley
Rev. Louis Carson
Lt. Col. Sam Cartee
Loretta Crider
Nissa D'Andrea
Cliff Davis
Jo Ellen Dickenson
Mary Earman
Mike Earman
Rev. Samuel & Judith Espinoza
Zach Fickes
Halcie Fishback
Mary Ann Glendye
Ray Griffith
Fred Hopkins
Joel Jordan
Chuck Macklin
Art Mitchell
Eric Mitchell
Maxine Perry
Judy Pruett
Ann Sebrell
Anna Joseph Sheets
Rudy Smith
Dot Swartz
Carolyn Stroop
Michelle VanPelt
Hazel Willi
Keith Wright



For Your Information

***Tidings* deadline** for the **January** issue is **Tuesday, December 15** by **9 am**. All groups, classes, and individuals are welcome to submit articles for the *Tidings*. Plan your activities and bring the written details to the church office or email to the office at oumcadm@hotmail.com by the 15th.

Otterbein United Methodist Church

Grown & Growing

A "young-ish" adult group.
Adulting isn't easy. Neither is faith.
Let's do both together.

Walk to the Manger

Saturday, December 19, 2026
Camp Overlook

Meet at **Bar-B-Q Ranch** at **5:00 pm** for dinner.
RSVP for dinner to laurastratton@vaumc.org
by Sunday, December 13.

If you don't want dinner, we'll meet
at Camp Overlook around 6:15 pm.

Wear comfortable shoes and families are welcome!



oumcharrisonburg.org

The Hospitality Committee would like to take this opportunity to say "Thank You" to the congregation for the many delicious dishes that were provided during the year. You are most appreciated!



FROM THE PASTOR

I love the traditions of the Advent and Christmas season. These traditions help prepare our physical space and our hearts and minds for celebrating Christ's birth and anticipating his return.

One of my favorite traditions is watching Christmas movies. I have watched some of these movies more than 20 times. Growing up, we always watched *Miracle on 34th Street* (the black-and-white version), *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *A Christmas Carol* (with George C. Scott as Ebenezer Scrooge). Sometimes we'd also watch *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *White Christmas*, or *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Now, I've also added a newer animated movie called, *The Star*. I love these movies. They fill me with a feeling of love and family, and they remind me of the themes of Advent – hope, peace, joy and love.

Watching these movies, especially *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Carol*, reminds me of the kingdom work God calls us to do – the work of helping those who are vulnerable, of sharing with others and building community, of being generous with our resources and our love, of living with the spirit of our Lord in our hearts year-round, and of seeing the humanity and image of God within each person.

I like this quote from *It's a Wonderful Life*, "Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" These words remind me of the importance of community and how we are connected to one another, even if we can't always see those bonds that tie us together.

While I don't always watch all of these movies every year, I have seen them enough that I can still think about them and

continued next page..

reflect on their messages. So, what movies do you like to watch during the Advent/Christmas season? What other traditions do you enjoy?

I am excited to spend my first Advent/Christmas with y'all! I am looking forward to learning about the new traditions I will get to experience here, such as the Lessons & Carols service, and to seeing the sanctuary decorated for the season.

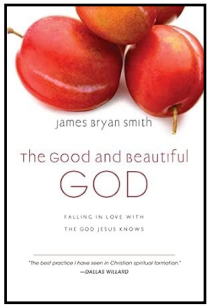
May we all have a holy Advent, a Merry Christmas, and blessed New Year!

In Christ,

Pastor Laura

Faith, Life, and Good Books

Tuesday, January 12, 2027
7 pm, Room 204



Our next book is ***The Good and Beautiful God*** by James Bryan Smith.

We all have ideas that we tell ourselves about God and how he works in our lives. Some are true—but many are false. James Bryan Smith believes those thoughts determine not only who we are, but how we live. In fact, Smith declares, the most important thing about a person is what they think about God. The path to spiritual transformation begins here.

Turning to the Gospels, Smith invites you to put your ideas to the test to see if they match up with what Jesus himself reveals about God. Once you've discovered the truth in Scripture, Smith leads you through a process of spiritual formation that includes specific activities aimed at making these new narratives real in your body and soul as well as your mind.

This deep, loving, and transformative book will help you discover the narratives that Jesus lived by—to know the Lord he knew and the kingdom he proclaimed—and to practice spiritual exercises that will help you grow in the knowledge of our good and beautiful God.

A Warm Welcome to Our New Members

Recently, we were blessed to receive six new members into the Otterbein church family.

Already actively involved in the work, worship, programs, and fellowship of the church, each person came forward on Sunday, November 15, to reaffirm their faith and to officially transfer their membership to Otterbein UMC.

Received into membership were **Dave and Donna Fickes**, from Timber Creek Church, Nacogdoches, TX; **Vickie Hunter**, from Sunrise Church of the Brethren in Harrisonburg; and Pastor Laura's family, husband **J.R. Stratton**, and daughters **Annabelle and Elizabeth**, from Scottsville UMC, Scottsville, VA.

To our newest members, welcome!

We are grateful that God has placed you here. We look forward to growing together in faith, sharing in fellowship, and serving God side-by-side.



Otterbein United Methodist Men's News

On **Sunday, December 6**, everyone is invited to enjoy the **Family Christmas Pancake Brunch** immediately following the "Lessons and Carols" Worship Service. The brunch will feature fluffy pancakes cooked to a golden brown, juicy sausage patties, delicious fruit toppings of strawberries and blueberries, chocolate chips, whipped cream, regular and sugar-free syrup, coffee, orange juice, and milk. All **proceeds go to support the College Chorale Scholarship fund**. So, this is a perfect way to enjoy a delicious family brunch, fellowship with others and support our talented College Chorale students!

The Otterbein Men continue their project to collect donations of 1-pound bags of any kind of dried beans or rice. The one-pound size of dried beans or rice is the perfect size to go into the back packs of Waterman Elementary students each Friday. Through this vital project Waterman families have food to eat over the weekend. Other donated foods are also included in the backpacks. The most recent donation of beans and rice totaled **105** pounds! **WOW!** Thanks for your continued support of this project.

In partnership with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank (BRAFB), the canned food drive for 2026 is wrapping up on the first Sunday in December. With the next trip made to Verona to the Food Bank, it is expected that we will **well exceed** our goal this year of providing over 1,000 meals to our neighbors near and far who struggle each day to get enough food. *Thanks to all for your generous donations towards this project.*

The Otterbein UMMen plan to continue our Prayer Breakfast gatherings beginning in January. Look for future announcements in the Worship Bulletin and the OUMC Weekly News email.

United Women in Faith

United Women in Faith *seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.*

Several members of Otterbein UWF will be attending the **Christmas at Overlook Luncheon** in Blessings Lodge at Camp Overlook on **Tuesday, December 8**. Our group will **meet at 11:30 am at Otterbein** and will carpool. The cost is $18/per person. More information is on the bulletin board by the water fountain. We look forward to food and fellowship with women from other churches in our district. Contact Pat Wingert (540-405-2204) for information.

Looking ahead: The next "Book Talk" will be January 12. We will be discussing *Stealing: A Novel* by Margaret Verble. Contact Ginny Whitehill for more information.

As you journey through Advent, may you pay attention to the world around you, be alert for the signs of God's grace, and be always ready to share God's love with everyone!

Grace & Peace,
Pat Wingert

Longest Night Service
Monday, December 21 at 7:00 pm
Trinity Presbyterian Church



This service occurs on the longest night of the year, December 21st, and it provides space to acknowledge the grief and loss in our lives, to be honest about our pain, and to be reminded of the light of Christ that shines into the dark places of our lives. Our service brings together seven congregations (Presbyterian, Mennonite, Methodist, Episcopal, and Lutheran) for a time of Word, song, prayer, and Holy Communion. Join us in-person at Trinity Presbyterian Church at 725 S. High Street, Harrisonburg or via live-stream at https://www.youtube.com/@TrinityHarrisonburg540/streams.

VALLEY INTERFAITH ACTION
Fall Assembly Report

VALLEY INTERFAITH ACTION

VIA's Fall Assembly was held on October 29th at Emmanuel Episcopal Church with 152 members and guests attending; seven members represented Otterbein. The Fall Assembly was to celebrate the successes of VIA during the year and to introduce the four candidates for City Council in hopes of soliciting their support in future endeavors.

This year VIA celebrates:

- Opening of our first childcare center in Parkview! Valley Early Education Reimagined (VEER), a public-private partnership between employers, VIA, and the public sector. In addition to providing quality childcare to families, VEER offers increased compensation and career advancement opportunities for educators.
- Working with delegate Tony Wilt and Senator Mark Obenshain to propose two pieces of legislation – a VIA first!
    1. The creation of an employer tax credit at the state level that when combined with the existing federal tax credit would allow employers to support their employer's children and fund childcare centers like VEER.
    2. $5 million to fund retrofitting and the creation of new childcare centers across Virginia.
- Virginia Early Childhood Foundation invited VEER to be one of nine applicants across the state to submit a proposal to receive a portion of the $25 million fund created by the General Assembly to support innovative public-private partnerships. 3 applicants will be chosen.

VIA holds listening sessions in which members talk to individuals about their stories and concerns. Those issues go back to each institution's core representatives, who vote on which to pursue.

Issues VIA hope to address with officials:

- The fear within our immigrant community facing uncertain federal immigration policies. This has led to children not attending school or not playing outdoors, shopping is at a standstill, and church attendance has suffered.
- Public transportation within the city and county is inadequate, leaving workers with long commutes or walks.
- Harrisonburg transportation workers are not paid a living wage and have fewer benefits than their counterparts in surrounding areas.
- Families with small children do not have access to high-quality preschool and childcare.
- Childcare providers do not earn a living wage nor have a path to further education.
- When schools are closed for students for workdays, parent-teacher conferences, and holidays, it's hard for parents with no family support.

continued next page...

Each candidate was asked if elected, would they join VIA in finding workable solutions to each issue. All responded YES! VIA's hope is to work with city and county officials in a collaborative effort to solve issues their constituents named as important to them.

The evening ended with a call for those attending to be a champion of VIA's work, to spread the word, and continue to support VIA in their efforts to create a peaceful, safe community for all who call Harrisonburg/Rockingham County home.

Bible Study

Bible Study resumes for Advent on **Tuesday, December 1 at 6 pm** and **Wednesday, December 2 at 10 am**! We will meet for four weeks, ending the week of December 22/23. Our focus will be Advent, and we will explore the Biblical understandings of the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. We will then take a break for the holidays and start back up on January 4/5.

Otterbein's Signature Coconut Cakes

Sales of Otterbein's Signature Coconut Cakes are complete, and donations to our Mission Fund total $920.00. Thank you to everyone who ordered, baked, and helped make this fundraiser a success. We hope you enjoy every bite!