

JANUARY 11, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

SERMON "Transitions" Exodus 36:2-5, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

This week we look at the year past to grab hope for the year coming. 2025 was a year of transition for our congregation in a big way. Our scriptures will remind us that this time is a cause for hope and proves out what God shows in both the Old and New Testaments about the bodies of faithful men and women.

Coming off of the pandemic and then the decision in the 2024 General Conference in our denomination regarding same gender marriage took a toll on us. In truth it took a toll on many congregations in many ways around the country and around the world.

To begin transparently I continue to be befuddled by this. Particularly with the General Conference decision, literally nothing affected our congregation in terms of how we do ministry. Nothing. This is true for the vast majority of congregations.

That congregations and pastors are given license to follow their conscience on subject matter that has so much honest discussion and debate is odd. Not one of us would want anyone telling us we have to believe something that we do not agree with.

Yet many have switched churches as a result. I have difficulty grasping parting with good, loving, Christ loving, Spirit led, community serving congregations over something that has no bearing on anything.

I am so grateful we have been able to carry on as we have in faithful ministry. Please continue to remember something. I urge this not just in religious drama, but all drama that swirls around above our heads and around us. In many cases, and the denominational drama is one such case, the only way it affects us is if we allow it.

In the end, most times and places we are able to faithfully carry on just as we have. To speak our minds. To minister as we are called. To faithfully love God and neighbor as we are called.

Keep focusing on that!

2025 we were challenged in this. There were concerns about how the roles left vacant by some departures might be filled. What would happen to children's Sunday School? What about the Egg Hunt and the Fall Fun Fest? Who will lead singing in worship. What about the Christmas Eve play?

We have been a full year's cycle of this. And here is what we've seen.

People have stepped up and reinvented the Children's Sunday School. Now we need to get out in the community and bring the children in.

A Sunday School class has reinvented its way of self guiding and leading.

Our two big community events, the egg hunt and fun fest, went off wonderfully and served our community well.

Mary has led our worship music with new life and vigor that I appreciate so much.

And the Christmas Eve play was done well, and as I shared that evening I believe was as appropriate and correct for our current day as could possibly be.

This isn't diminishing what was before. Not at all. It is uplifting that we have transitioned through concern and questioning amazingly well.

We aren't as big as we used to be. We are still mighty in ministry. Just listen to Janet's minute for mission every month.

Our scriptures bear out exactly what we've seen. Or perhaps better stated our 2025 has born out what scripture shows us. God provides.

In Exodus, Moses gets some pretty serious instructions for building the sanctuary, tabernacle, and more. Of course he is concerned how it will get done. God reassures him that there is ample skill and resources in the community. God is correct. There is more than enough of it all. It just took people to step forward to do the work and they did.

In Corinthians we have Paul's famous description of the church, the body of Christ. Everyone has a role. No role is more or less important than any other. All of us are gifted and empowered by the same Spirit to complete the needs of the church. All we have to do is listen to the Spirit and follow our calling. If everyone does this, the body is complete. The needs are met. The ministry is full and fulfilled.

You demonstrated this in 2025. The needs opened up. The ones who were called stepped up and we kept on ministering as we have and in some ways even more than we have before.

The scriptures were made real in our time and our day.

Well done.

Our work isn't done. We have a gift to give this community and world around us.

Church isn't about entertainment and emotion, it's about elevating our connection to God. It isn't about self service. It's about service to God and neighbor.

A personal relationship with Jesus isn't the end all and be all as so many today push. A personal relationship with Jesus is the beginning. Yes, we cultivate and pursue it, but that's the jumping off point.

The real plunge is what comes next. Look at the disciples turned apostles. They had a personal relationship with Jesus but they didn't rest there. They went out and invited others into their faith and belief. How did they do it?

For those with whom they already shared a foundation of belief they went straight at preaching and scripture. Some believed, others didn't.

For others, including in the literal beginning of the church in Acts, it was because people saw their lives and experienced their love and servanthood. They saw something beyond self-absorption and self-interest. They saw a desire to see all the world lifted up. They saw love of God EMBODIED in love of neighbor.

Look around. This is what we enjoy day in and day out in our congregation. It isn't flashy. It isn't trendy. But what it is is what matters. It's real. It's scriptural. It's transforming.

This is what we invite the world into. This is the great gift of a local congregation like ours. Believe it or not there are lots of big churches who crunch the numbers of marketing. What look is "in"? What message tracks as palatable to our area? What politics will draw folks in if we slap Jesus on them? How do we "sell" our version of Jesus?

This isn't Marion. Our job is to embody Jesus in our lives, words, and deeds. Our calling is to show people the love of Christ. Our Achilles heel is humility to a fault. Don't talk too much about ourselves because that's bragging and pride.

NO! That's witness! That's testimony! These are the personal stories that rise above entertainment and fad to actually plunge deep into heart and where the rubber meets the road with faith and life!

What have we transitioned to in 2026? We've proven that we can hear the Spirit and continue in ministry despite bumps in the road.

I want you to find the people the church has forgot. Find the ones the church has called "irritating", or "not like us", or "different", or "uncomfortable". Find the ones that the Pharisees used to call, and the modern church itself calls the "sinners" that we're not supposed to hang out with.

Then hang out with them.

Show them the Jesus of the gospels and invite them into a place where they can grow a personal relationship AND put that relationship into scriptural, disciple, apostle action through service.

This is our 2026. There are a lot of folks who want a place to worship and serve but have been turned away. Like the master who had the "good enough" turn down the invitation to the party, go out there and find everyone else. The ones the other folks wouldn't invite because they weren't "good enough". Or at least not good enough to be welcomed enough to stay even if they walked in the door.

Find THEM! Invite them. Sit with them. Let them know they are loved by us, and in that they will learn they are loved by God. And then the world changes for them and for us.