



Oak Hills United Methodist Church
6069 Bridgetown Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45248
513-574-1131; oakhillsumc.org
oakhillsumc@fuse.net



December 2025 The Oak Notes

Pastor Article Advent/Christmas

I'd like to start today by asking you a simple question: Are you ready for Christmas? Normally, when we think about our readiness for Christmas, we point to a number of different things. Do we have our tree out? Are the decorations and the lights hung? Have we sent out our cards? Is our house ready for the guests to come over? Is our Christmas shopping completed? Is everything wrapped and under the tree?

One of my favorite things about Christmas morning has always been unwrapping gifts. In many ways, gifts and Christmas have almost become synonymous. Most of us probably could not conceive of Christmas without gifts under the tree and packages to open. Gifts are the thing that defines this season more than any other. We shop for gifts. We give gifts. We receive gifts. We wrap gifts. We unwrap gifts.

This Advent, I'd like to apply that image to the Christmas story and think about what it means to unwrap Christmas. Not quickly, but slowly; layer by layer so we can savor it, one gift and one present at a time.

Each week during Advent, we will unwrap a different part of the Christmas story in Matthew. We'll talk about John the Baptist. We'll talk about the genealogy of Jesus. We'll talk about Herod the Great, Joseph and the Magi, all with the hope of readying our hearts for the coming of Jesus Christ on Christmas morn.

Think about it this way: When you go to put up the decorations around the house, there's one thing that must be done before anything else. You have to prepare the house to receive those things by clearing other things out of the way. Chances are the places that you put your nativities, your snow-globes, the gifts, and your Christmas tree are occupied by other things throughout the rest of the year. So, in order to have space for those things, you first have to prepare by getting the other stuff out of the way.

The same is the case in our spiritual life. If we are going to receive Jesus anew, part of our spiritual preparation during Advent is to clear out other things so that we make space to encounter Christ.

This year, we are inviting you on a 25 Day Unwrapping Christmas Advent Challenge. Each day we will invite you to read a scripture, reflect on it, do a Christmas-related activity, and then post about your experience on social media with the hashtag #oakhillsumccincyunwrappingchristmaschallege.

My hope and my prayer is that as we light candles and unwrap Christmas that we will ready not just our house, but our souls and our hearts to respond to the greatest gift of all—the gift of Jesus Christ.

Have a very blessed and merry Christmas!

Pastor Justin

Pastor Vacation

Pastor Justin will be on vacation from Sunday December 28 through Saturday January 3. Amit Dutta will be our guest preacher on Sunday December 28. If you are in need of emergency pastoral care during this time, please contact Rev. Paul Sittason Stark from Monfort Heights UMC at 513-481-8699 ext. 2007. For all other church related business or questions please contact the church office (513-574-1131), Board Chair Mary Flannery (513-378-7085) or Lay Leader Bob Schloss (513-702-7118).





Administrative Board Topics of Interest

1) Our church conference adopted the proposed 2026 leadership slate and pastoral pay package. This included a 5% merit increase or \$2,600 for our pastor in 2026. This increase is planned in the budget.

2) We adopted the proposed 2026 church budget, projecting income of \$231,050 and expenses of \$233,157, with an expected net loss of \$2,107. A narrative version of the budget is included in this newsletter. A more detailed line item budget is available in the church office upon request.

3) Income for the month of October came in at \$12,473 and expenses at \$22,248, for a loss of \$9,775. Over the last three years, October has historically been a lower income month, so this is expected. Year to date, total income stands at \$201,778 and total expenses at \$191,883 for a net gain of \$9,895.

4) November 9 was our church's annual consecration Sunday. During worship, we made pledges before God for calendar year 2026. 28 pledge cards were turned in totaling \$102,732. In addition, 3 cards were turned in that gave no specific amount. We sent out letters and pledge cards to those who were not present with us in worship, so we expect this number to continue to grow as those cards come back in. Initial pledges are up by \$1,056 from the initial \$101,676 pledge made at our 2024 Consecration Sunday.

5) We are working toward getting the nursery back up and running. Steps have been taken to get the live stream on the TV. We have recruited a group of volunteers and have ordered background checks. Our hope is to have the nursery up and running each week by the beginning of December 2025.

8) We are working on finding a new way to get into the schools through connections with Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Young Life. If you would like to assist, please contact Ali Scully.

9) We have launched a new endeavor in Sissy's Pantry to engage children. A big thanks to our custodian Donna Patrick who has volunteered her time to help lead this endeavor.

10) The trustees have accepted a bid from Zuber for a new keypad access system. It has been ordered.

11) When we were working on our 2026 budget, we discovered that our church insurance was not renewed. The trustees are now in the process of taking quotes and acquiring new church insurance.

12) Sissy's pantry will be closed on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.



UMC NEWS

The Council of Bishops has announced that all four proposed amendments to the United Methodist Constitution met the required 2/3 aggregate majority vote of all Annual Conferences worldwide. Each of the proposed amendments received an affirmative vote of over 90% of all lay and clergy delegates.

Amendment 1 allows for each region of the church to adapt certain portions of the Book of Discipline to their ministry context, including ordination requirements, standards for membership, standards for marriage, funeral rites, and adaptations such as are necessary for local laws. It does not permit changes to the sections on doctrine, our theological task, the ministry of all Christians, and our social principles.

Amendment 2 adds the words "gender" and "ability" to our existing statement on inclusiveness.

Amendment 3 takes a stronger stance against racism by naming white privilege, white supremacy, and colonialism, and taking an active anti-racism stance.

Amendment 4 adapts the statement on clergy education to allow for an M.Div. equivalent overseas.



2026 Faith Based Financial Plan (Approved at November 10, 2025 Board Meeting)

I hope you share my excitement about the many worthwhile ministries taking place at Oak Hills UMC. One significant factor behind the fruitfulness of these ministries is your continued faithfulness to fund ministries through your generous financial support. Money itself is a lifeless thing, but when put to use by dedicated disciples who seek to do great things for God, great things can and will happen. As a part of our continued effort to improve communication, you will find here a narrative version of our 2026 faith-based financial plan (budget), which shows how your gifts will go to support the work of God at Oak Hills over the course of the next year. If you would like a line-item version of the budget, it is also available in the church office upon request. I look forward to seeing what God will do through us in the coming year!

Total Estimated 2026 Operating Expenses: \$233,157 (Decreased by \$6,794 from 2025 Budget).

1) Team 1: Radical Hospitality: \$4,750 Decreased by \$1,200 from 2025 Budget)

1 John 4:7-8 says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Love is the supreme virtue of the Christian life. We exist to love our neighbors as ourselves. The radical hospitality team focuses on loving the people of our community the way God loves them. This portion of the budget supports both our Sunday morning hospitality (cookies) and the outreach we do into the community whether that be through Sissy's Pantry, our community dinners, advertising, blessing bags, or simply offering gifts of appreciation to show teachers and first responders how much we really care. In addition, this portion of the budget

includes our hobby based outreach groups, including our craft group, our game group, and our proposed pickleball group. A \$5,000 community outreach grant from the district helps to support this work, with the remainder covering Risk Taking Missions expenses.

2) Team 2: Passionate Worship: \$6,821 (Increased by \$1,059 from 2025 Budget)

Jesus calls us not only to love our neighbor as ourselves, but to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). The primary way we love God is through worship. We were created for worship. Our worship services, both in person and online via Facebook and YouTube, help us to grow in our love for God. This portion of the budget covers our worship service, communion elements, music and licensing, decorations, banners, candles, and technology for media, sound, and streaming online.

3) Team 3: Faith Forming Relationships: \$9,750 (Reduced by \$5,988 from 2025 Budget)

A disciple is an obedient follower of Jesus, who becomes more like Jesus in word and deed. This happens as we spend time in the word of God and in relationship with others. That begins with our children and youth, and continues on into adulthood. In every phase of life, we learn to be more and more like Jesus. This portion of our faith-based financial plan supports curriculum and supplies for all of our children's, youth, adult Sunday School, and small group ministries, including our Grief Support Group. It also supports Jesus and Me (JAM), Vacation Bible School (VBS), our puppet ministry, our youth after-school program, youth trips and outings, and our family outreach events. It is supported by a \$8,000 district grant. We did not receive the UM Discipleship Grant for 2026; this accounts for most of the decrease.





4) Team 4: Risk Taking Missions: \$1,500 (Same as in 2025 Budget)

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus called his disciples to follow him and to fish for people. As we spend time with Jesus, he sends us back out to be involved in his mission in the world. This happens through our risk taking missions team. While most of our mission endeavors are supported by special donations (Operation Christmas Child, Festival of Sharing, Angel Tree), we did budget some money to assist with our charitable projects in the schools and our Helping Hands gift card ministry to the needy. These funds are supported by the remainder of the \$5,000 community outreach grant from the district.

5) Pastor and Staff Salary and Benefits: \$135,076 (Decreased by \$438 from 2025 Budget)

We employ a full time pastor, a part time youth pastor, a part time administrative assistant, and a part time custodian. This portion of the faith-based financial plan represents their salaries, reimbursable expenses for ministry, housing allowance, continuing education, pension, health insurance, workers compensation, and taxes. We also budgeted to hire a Sunday morning nursery attendant in 2026.

6) Property and Utilities: \$58,220 (Decreased by \$2,810 from 2025 Budget)

Oak Hills UMC owns a church and one rental house (the Bridgetown house). This portion of the church budget includes our utilities, property taxes, insurance, maintenance, lawn care, landscaping, and snow removal. We have applied for a \$8,000 Go Grant from the conference to cover the pickleball court. Our budget anticipates income and expenses to come in at 50% of the total grant application (or \$4,000).

7) Office, Administration, and Finance: \$9,040 (Increased by \$112 from 2025 Budget)

The church office, administration, and finance teams provide the necessary support for the pastor, the staff, and the ministries of the church to thrive. This portion of the budget includes regular office expenses including supplies, copies, postage, bulletins, newsletters, equipment, website, background checks, stewardship campaign, giving envelopes, payroll, banking charges, and funds for the fundraising team. In addition, this includes a small budget to cover our lay delegate's annual conference expenses.

8) Connectional Giving: \$8,000 (Increased by \$2,516 from 2025 Budget)

As United Methodists, we are part of a larger work of Christ through district, conference, national, and global ministries and missions of the church. Through connectional giving, we support the ministries of local, national, and global missions, United Methodist colleges, universities, seminaries, hospitals, and homes, and provide for new church starts and congregational revitalization, among other things. While we desire to pay our apportionments in full, we do not have the funds to do so yet. We are, however, intentionally building our yearly payments toward apportionments with the goal of 100% payment.

Total Estimated 2026 Income: \$231,050 (Increased by \$3,249 from 2025 Budget)

Total anticipated income includes \$175,100 from tithes, offerings, and seasonal offerings, \$10,600 from designated giving, \$18,250 in grants from the Great Miami River District, the West Ohio Conference, and Thrivent, \$14,100 in rental fees, \$5,100 from room use fees and fundraisers, and \$7,500 from interest.

This projected budget results in a net loss of \$2,107.

We continue to ask for your prayerful and faithful financial support as we seek to impact our world! We believe our best days are ahead of us, but it requires faithfulness and sacrificial generosity from us all.



DECEMBER

Announcements

12/1 – Trustees, 6 pm
12/3 – UMW Lunch, 12 pm
12/3 – Grief Relief, 6 pm
12/7 – SPPRC, 12 pm
12/8 – Finance, 6:30 pm; Church Board, 7 pm
12/10 - Dinner and Devotions, 6 pm
12/10 – Grief Relief, 6 pm
12/13 – Birthday Party for Jesus/Breakfast with Santa, 9 am – 12 pm
12/14 – Disciplemaking Practitioners, 12 pm
12/14 – Family Game Night, 6-9 pm
12/14 – Giving Tree Gifts Due
12/17 – Grief Relief, 6 pm
12/19 – Young at Heart, 7 pm
12/24 – Christmas Eve Worship, 5:30 pm
12/24 – Sissy's Pantry Closed: Christmas Eve
12/25-26 – Office Closed: Merry Christmas
12/28-1/3 – Pastor Vacation
12/31 – Sissy's Pantry Closed: New Year's Eve
1/1 – Office Closed: Happy New Year's

Worship – Sunday, 10:30 am

Sissy's Pantry – Wednesday, 6:30-8:00 pm

Zoom Prayer – Thursday, 11 am

Weekly Bible Studies

Sunday School 9 am

Women's Group: Monday 10 am

John's Study: Tuesday, 6 pm

Pastor's Study (Romans): Wednesday, 2 pm

John's Study: Thursday, 10:30 am

Youth After School Program, Thursday, 3-4:30 pm

Kroger Rewards

Oak Hills United Methodist Church is currently set up as a beneficiary on Kroger Community Rewards. This gives a small percentage of each purchase you make at Kroger back to the church. If you have not already done so, we would encourage you to connect your Kroger card to Oak Hills UMC online. Step 1: Get a Kroger Card. Step 2: Create a digital account at Kroger.com and link your Kroger card. Step 3: Go to www.kroger.com/communityrewards and click where it says search for your organization here. Step 4: Search for Oak Hills United Methodist Church. When the church comes up, select it and click save. From now on, when you use your Kroger card a small percent of what you spent is given back to the church.

Vanco

Did you know that you can give to the church through your phone? Simply download the free Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app on your phone, search for Oak Hills United Methodist Church, and then set up an account. Once it's set up you will be able to give either a one time or reoccurring gift. You can also contact Linda Wise (513-205-8104; lpwise@fuse.net) to set up an automatic payment to the church.

Online Giving

Do you know you can now give on our church website? Simply go to www.oakhillsumc.org and click give in the bar at the top of the page or scan the QR code below and go directly to our online giving portal.



OHUMC Family Ministries



Family Ministries



Birthday Party for Jesus/Breakfast with Santa

Our annual Birthday Party for Jesus and Breakfast with Santa will be held on Saturday, December 13 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. We are in need of donations of cupcakes and need volunteers to help serve breakfast, greet and welcome people, and assist with games and crafts. If you can help in any way please see Kathy Cramerding.



The youth group spent time this month packing gifts for Operation Christmas, learning how to glorify God and preparing for Advent.

As we enter the Christmas season, let us reflect back on this year and be grateful for all that God has given us. May he continue to bless all of us in all the seasons to come. Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.



Upcoming events:

Perfect North Slopes Monday December 29, 11am-1pm

Teen movie night. February. Official date TBD

