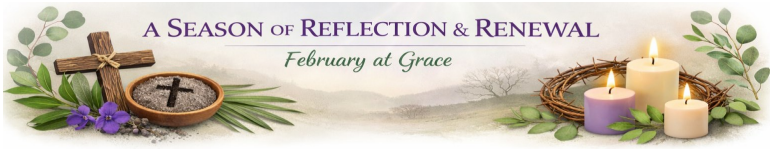
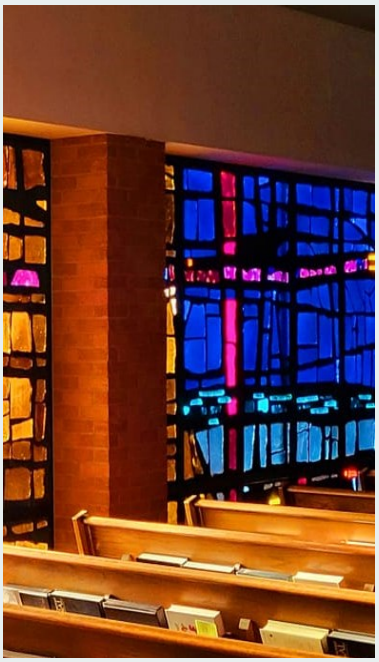
Grace United Methodist Church Newsletter

February 2026



MISSION STATEMENT

Everyone is invited to know and feel God's love, experience spiritual growth, encounter forgiveness, receive respect and gain hope.



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Upcoming Midweek Lenten Services & light lunch

Mid-Week Lenten Worship

Meal begins at 11:30 am
(Freewill donation)
Service to follow

February 25
Faith Lutheran Church
2912 Hwy Blvd, Spencer

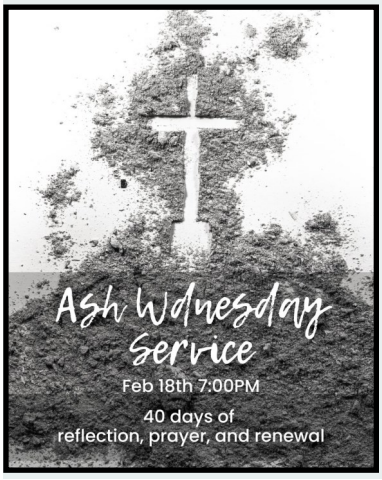
March 4
First Congregational Church
1212 First Avenue West, Spencer

March 11
Grace United Methodist Church
311 Second Avenue West, Spencer

March 18
Foundation Church
1410 West 18th Street, Spencer

March 25
Sacred Heart Catholic Church
1111 Fourth Avenue, Spencer

April 1
Trinity Lutheran Church
900 11th Ave W. Spencer



To contact Pastor Michael

Email:

ThePastor @spencergumc.

Call:

712-262-5970

Pastor Michael's BLOG:

The Bare Church

THOUGHTS FROM PASTOR MICHAEL

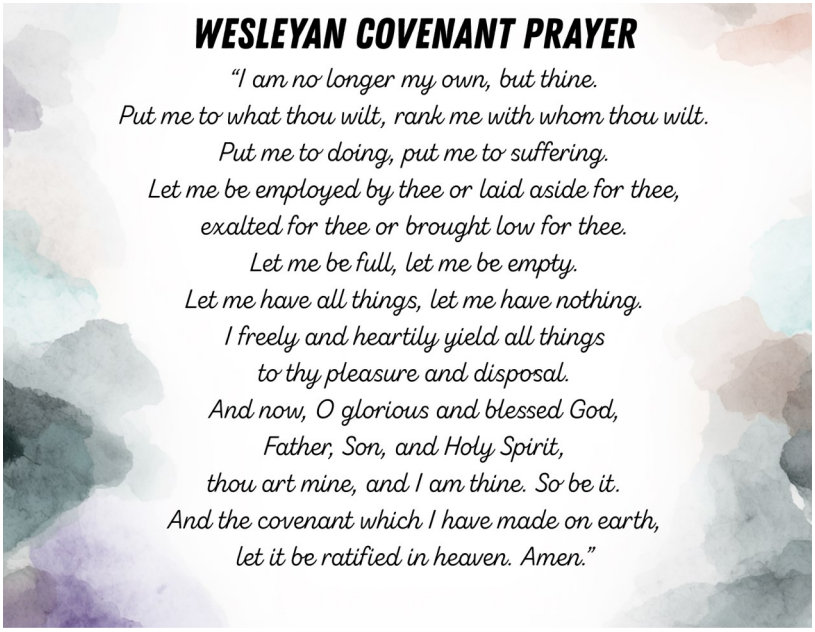
How well are you known? I don't mean in popularity. To phrase the question around popularity would be: how many people know who you are? This question revolves around quantity. It requires a number representing people who know about you regardless of the reason. The first question (how well are you known?) requires depth and is much more difficult to assess. A more specific way to ask the question would be; how well do your closest relationships know you? Or how much do you allow people, particularly those closest to you, to know you?

Through 2026, I plan to use our communication, worship, events, and programs to focus on relationships. My hope is that as the year goes on, we will seek to learn, implement, and practice ways to have healthy relationships within the church and outside of it. To start off the year, I have shared why I think healthy relationships are important. If you haven't heard it enough already, I believe healthy relationships positively transform the world. I believe there is scriptural evidence that Jesus and John the Baptist intended to start a movement within the Jewish religion that focused on developing healthy relationships with God, self, other people, and all of creation. I have shared in recent sermons that there is much study that healthy relationships have a significant impact on health and fulfillment in life. To sum up, there is good reason to do the hard work that is involved in developing healthy relationships.

The first step in developing healthy relationships is to assess your relational health. In a world simmering with social media anonymity, fear inspired isolation, and a lack of informational trust, it is easy to allow ourselves to participate in the bear minimum of relational necessity. I believe Jesus calls us to a form of discipleship that seeks to communicate with integrity, courageously connect with others, and to restore trust and joy in relationships within society. This begins by acknowledging where we have/are falling short. Do you allow people to know you? Do you have, even a few, relationships in which you can share the hardest things you are experiencing in life? Do you have a safe place to share where you have fallen short, confessing mistakes and receiving forgiveness? Are your relationships superficial? Maybe an even more challenging question; does your approach to relationships encourage superficiality?

THOUGHTS FROM PASTOR MICHAEL- CONT'D

In February, we will be entering the season of Lent. This, forty-seven-day, season is intended to be a time of reflection. We are called to reflect on our morality, mortality, and on the sacrifice Jesus claimed through the cross. This reflection is also intended to remind us of our reliance on God. In this season of Lent, I invite you to place a metaphorical mirror to your relational ego. I Invite you to start each day by writing one fear you want to share with someone, one joy you want to share with someone, and then reciting the Wesleyan covenant prayer. I also invite you to end each day writing down something that hurt you, something that helped you, and concluding the day reciting the serenity prayer. Journaling our hurts and helps, and sharing in these two prayer tools create an opportunity to forgive others. Whether it is over something petty or something painful. It also calls you to be honest with yourself in ways you were hurtful or harmful to others (regardless of intention) and seek forgiveness. This season of Lent is a great season to see how forgiving and being forgiven, blesses relationships and life. You may discover how using these practices helps melt superficiality in the relationships around you. The Wesleyan covenant prayer and the serenity prayer will be provided in this newsletter. Come and join the difficult but rewarding work of defining your relational health as God seeks to be relationally connected to you.



MISSION PROJECTS

We are currently collecting:

- Tuna Helper
- Canned Vegetables
- Granola Bars

Drop Off items to the Church by Sunday January 18th.

Bags will be packed after Wednesday coffee on January21st.

Delivered to Head Start on the 22nd .

Mission & Outreach Highlights

Sleep Mats Ministry
We celebrate the completion of 105 sleep mats to date! This ongoing ministry continues to provide comfort, dignity, and care to those in need, thanks to the faithful hands and hearts of our congregation.

Noisy Offering Project – Supporting Young Readers
Our Noisy Offering this Lenten season will support the purchase of reading books for all graduating 2nd graders. This is the third year we have chosen to provide 2–3 books for every student, helping sustain reading skills throughout the summer months. Watch for opportunities to participate and make some joyful noise during Lent!

"FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD"

Home-Delivered Meals Ministry

Grace is blessed with the opportunity to serve homebound neighbors in our community by delivering hot meals and sharing kindness. **March** is our next opportunity to participate in this meaningful ministry.

This mission requires just **two hours a day**, yet its impact is far greater—bringing nourishment, connection, and care to those who need it most. Our assigned delivery days are **Thursday and Friday**.

We invite you to prayerfully consider serving. Whether you have participated before or this would be your first time, your presence can make a lasting difference. Please stop by the **Narthex to sign up**, invite a friend to serve with you, and help us fill every delivery slot.

For more information or questions, contact **Sheryl Larson at 512-657-1288**.

FINANCE REPORT

Finance Committee Update: A Year of Faithful Stewardship

We have much to celebrate as we reflect on GUMC's financial life in 2025!

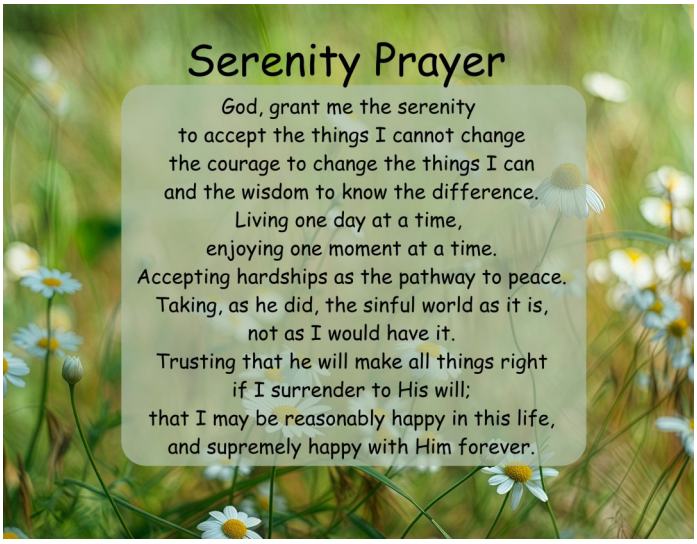
The 2025 Ministry Funding Report shows that our church finished the year in a strong and balanced position. Total income for the year was $264,509.46, with expenses of $263,824.38, resulting in a positive net income of $685.08. This is a meaningful sign of faithful giving and thoughtful stewardship.

We are especially grateful for the generosity of the congregation. In 2025, $187,391.00 was received through fulfilled pledges, along with $74,401.00 in unpledged gifts, for total receipts of $261,793.00. (There is a small difference between this figure and the ministry funding report totals, which is still being reviewed.)

Since our reorganization and the flood events of June 24, 2024, GUMC has gained a clearer sense of its financial identity and sustainability for the future. The 2025 budget reflects this growing stability. While overall giving was slightly lower, expenses were also reduced, allowing us to finish the year on solid ground.

In years past, extraordinary "rescue" gifts were sometimes needed to balance the budget. We are joyful to report that no such bailout was needed in 2025. A successful pledging effort and lower apportionment expenses helped make this a year of balance and confidence.

The Finance Committee offers heartfelt thanks for the faithfulness, generosity, and commitment of this congregation. Together, we continue to steward God's gifts with care and hope as we look toward the future.



A MESSAGE FROM LAY LEADER SANDY HEERDT

A Special Place & Time

I created something new in early January: a special area near our fireplace that incorporates beauty, comfort, and hope. It is my meditation, learning, and prayer space. This space features a 100-year-old family wicker chair with a neat pillow that my daughter gave me. The pillow has sketches of mountains, trees, rainbows, and a camping scene. Enscripted on the pillow is this sentence: How COOL is it that the same GOD that created OCEANS and MOUNTAINS and GALAXIES looked at YOU and thought the WORLD needed one of YOU, too.

This small sanctuary also has a very unique table that my mom had constructed from a lovely slab of stone for the top, with two thick wooden columnar legs and a wooden base. It is a beauty. Mom gave it to me several years ago. On top of this small table are a variety of cherished items. Three family photos, a painting, a small lighted water fountain, a candle sketched with evergreen trees and deer, a small porcelain bird, and a favorite large coffee mug decorated with a photo of our three granddaughters. Finally, I have a journal, pen, three devotional books, and a stack of 40 small meditation cards with topics such as patience, courage, charity, success, and inspiration. You can imagine: it's a comfortable, lovely space.

I've developed a rhythm over the past 30+ days that I look forward to each morning. First, I turn on some soft music (currently Acoustical Chill). I make my coffee, get seated, turn on my little water fountain, and light my candle. I open my journal and write the date. Then I read the day's quote from Whispered Words of Encouragement, and I usually rewrite the quote in my journal. Next, I open a year-long devotional on the Book of Proverbs: God's Wisdom for Navigating Life, given to me by Sheryl Larson. I always summarize in my journal. Next, I read from my very favorite devotional, Jesus Calling, by the late Sarah Young. This devotional always lifts my spirits and inspires me. Again, I jot down my summary. I do take my time to contemplate as I read and to visit with God (including many thanks). Taking this time every morning has truly brought me comfort, a bit more wisdom, and peace. Every night as I settle down to sleep, I look forward to doing it all again the following morning,

If you aren't already in a similar habit, consider finding a special place and time to do so. You might prefer reading and contemplating in your comfy La-Z-Boy chair or before you go to sleep. The benefits are priceless. Take the time. I know I'll never regret spending this time with my Savior and Guide.

Psalm 77:12

I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.

Proverbs 4:20-22

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ears to my words.
Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;
For they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

MUSIC MINISTRY

Grace UMC offers several opportunities for singers and musicians of all ages and skill levels:

Grace Band – We're always looking for new singers and musicians! Practices are Thursday afternoons and Sunday mornings before worship. Interested? See Pastor Michael to sign up.

Chancel Choir – Rehearsals are Wednesday evenings from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. Join us as we lift our voices in praise and worship.

Bell Choir – Practices are Wednesday evenings from 7:00 to 8:00 PM, following choir rehearsal. No need to be a professional musician—you just need to be able to count from 1 to 4 (sometimes 3!).

If you are interested in joining the Praise Music Team, the Sound Team, the Video Team, the Visual Arts Team, the nursery team, etc., please be in touch with Pastor Michael and he will get you set up with the right person!

"Perfect February" 2026 Goes Viral: Why This Calendar Layout Has Everyone Obsessed

February 2026 is being celebrated as a "Perfect Month" due to its symmetrical calendar layout, starting on a Sunday and ending on a Saturday, creating a visually appealing four-by-seven grid.

A rare calendar quirk has gone viral online as February 2026 begins, with users across social media calling it a "perfect February" for its clean, symmetrical layout.

The month, which has 28 days in this non-leap year, starts on Sunday, February 1, and ends on Saturday, February 28. This alignment creates a precise rectangular grid on standard calendars: four full weeks with exactly four occurrences of each weekday and no partial rows or spillover days.

With February activities like Valentine's Day (February 14, a Saturday this year) or local Groundhog Day observances, the tidy structure offers a visually appealing—if fleeting—sense of order.

The trend took off in early January when people shared calendar screenshots on platforms, describing the layout **as** "oddly satisfying," "calming," and ideal for planners or habit trackers.

UNITED METHODIST MEN

Please join us for the UMM Breakfast on Saturday, Feb. 14th.
Kevin Brown from The Outreach will be the speaker

This gathering is **open to everyone**. Hope to see you there.

UNITED WOMEN OF FAITH

United Women in Faith will hold their first meeting of 2026 on Thursday, February 5, 2026, at 1:30 pm in the church narthex. This will be an Installation of Officers; all officers have agreed to retain their positions except for Sandy Heerdt becoming our Spiritual Growth Coordinator. We will also be holding a Pledge to Missions program.

The programs for the year will be based on Practicing Hope by Tabatha Holley This study will invite us as individuals and a group to define hope and how to cultivate it as well as develop a practice toward co-creating a different reality. We will try to discern and do the will of God together by examining the patterns of this world that lead to suffering and injustice and instead live out positive transformation in the world.

We also participate in the District and National UWFaith organization. Through our pledges and fundraising in the past year, we have met our District pledges of $1,500.00 and are making donations of $300.00 each to the local CHART agency, Midwest Christian Services, Women at the Well, and Mason's House. All organizations provide services for our focus areas of women, children, and youth.

United Women in Faith meets every other month (February, April, June, August, October and December) on the first Thursday of the month at 1:30 pm. There is also the option of belonging to either the Ruth or Esther Circles. We always welcome women to join us in Christian fellowship. If you have any questions, please contact Cyndi O'Hara (712-363-3185), Shurmaine McAlpine (712-592-1636), Jane Ingledue (712-262-2596) or Lisa Elliott (712-240-0929).

https://uwfaith.org/

2026Officers

Cyndi O'Hara
(712)363-3185

Lisa Elliott
(712)240-0929

Shurmaine McAlpine
(712)592-1636

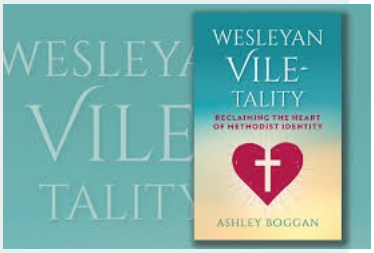
Jane Ingledue
(605)413-7034

Next meeting is scheduled
February 5, 2026, at 1:30 pm

SMALL GROUP OPPORTUNITIES

Lenten Book Study

Looking for something meaningful (and interesting!) this Lent? Join **Pastor Michael** for a Lenten Book Study on **Monday evenings** or **Tuesday mornings**—come when it works best for you!

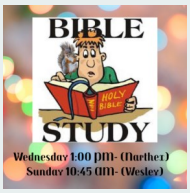


Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, February 18**, and we'll be diving into
Wesleyan Vitality: Reclaiming the Heart of Methodist Identity by **Ashley Boggan**, a leading scholar of United Methodist history and professor at Perkins School of Theology.

Book cost: $12

Tuesday mornings: Beginning **February 24 at 10:00 AM**
Monday evenings: Beginning **March 2 at 7:00 PM**

Whether you're a lifelong Methodist, a curious reader, or just looking for a thoughtful way to journey through Lent, this study is for you. Come ready for good conversation, growing faith, and a deeper look at who we are as Methodists.

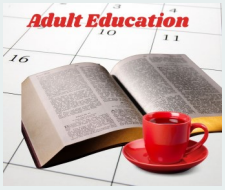


Men's Bible Studty

Wednesdays at 1:00–12:00 PM
Narthex

Adult Education

Sundays at 10:45 AM
Wesley Room



Our Adult Education group gathers each Sunday morning following worship. Together, we take time to revisit the scripture passages and sermon from the service, sharing insights, questions, and personal reflections. This welcoming discussion group offers a chance to grow in faith, deepen understanding, and build meaningful connections with others in our church family.

PrayerGroup

You are invited to a Prayer Group at Grace United Methodist Church. Starting Saturday, February 21st at 2 pm. We will meet in the Wesley Chapel the 7 Saturdays of Lent after Ash Wednesday

If you have prayer requests let Crystal Handy (712-346-7107), Shurmaine McAlpine (712-592-1636) or Pastor Michael (712-262-5970) know.

You may also leave prayer requests in the church office or place them in the offering plate on Sunday.

Join us for a time of prayer. You are welcome to pray out loud or topray silently.

"*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition,with thanksgiving, present your requests*

UMYF

United Methodist Youth Fellowship is being revamped to care for youth seeking confirmation or simply seeking a peer group of faith. Meets every Sunday 10:45am in the fellowship hall.

Greeters Wanted!
Seeking friendly faces to smile, say hello, and possibly hold a door open. Must enjoy people. Coffee appreciation a plus. Training provided. Halo not required!

November 5th &19th

Coffee @ Grace

1st & 3rd Wednesdays | 9:30–11:00 AM
Fellowship Hall

Come enjoy good coffee, delicious food, and warm fellowship! It's a great place to catch up with old friends—or make new ones.

Everyone is welcome—we'd love to see you there!

Fitness Classes at GUMC: Essentrics & Chair Yoga

We're excited to offer **two fitness classes** at GUMC.

Mondays & Wednesdays
9:30–10:00 AM – Essentrics
10:00–10:30 AM – Chair Yoga
Held at the church, Wesley Room

Essentrics is a strength training method that uses slow, controlled muscle-lengthening movements (eccentric contractions) to help build strength, improve balance and flexibility, and reduce injury risk.

Chair Yoga offers gentle stretching and movement using a chair for support—ideal for all fitness levels, especially those looking for a low-impact option.

No matter your experience, these 30-minute sessions are a

Wednesday night meals

Feb 4	Scalloped Ham & potatoes
Feb 11	Spaghetti & Garlic Bread
Feb 18	No Meal or Grace Kidz
Feb 25	TBA

You Might be a United Methodist if…

1. "Coffee hour" literally takes an hour…and lots of times more.
2. No one has to say that there will be food at a church function—it's just a given.
3. People are thrown into a panic if the coffee and donuts aren't out by the time church lets out.
4. Joys and Concerns are a focal point of the service.
5. You think God's presence is strongest in the back 3 pews.
6. The word "fellowship" immediately has you running into your kitchen to make your famous potluck dish.
7. You forgive trespasses, not debts.
8. You think you have to have a potluck dish to get into heaven.
9. You have never sung the third verse from any hymn.
10. You think someone who says "amen" while the pastor is preaching might be a charismatic.
11. There's at least one person in every church meeting who say, "But we've never done it that way before".
12. You hold friendly competitions to see which table goes first at the church meal.
13. You walk into church on Sunday morning and someone is sitting in your pew and you feel uncomfortable sitting somewhere else.
14. Instead of indigestion, your heart is strangely warmed.
15. You need a committee to start a committee.
16. When the pastor hits the 61 minute mark the congregation begins to look at their watches and cough.
17. If you're watching Star Wars and someone says "May the force be with you", you automatically respond "and also with you".
18. You know what the Cross and Flame means.
19. Someone raises their hand in praise during church and the pastor asks if they have a question.
20. You look at anyone who doesn't know exactly when to sit down or stand up with suspicion.
21. Your pastor actually has a sense of humor.
22. You know what to reply to: "This is the word of God for the people of God".
23. You know why, after communion, all the small kids run to the kitchen (and some adults too).
24. You sit while singing "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus".
25. You've ever sipped Welch's grape juice out of a plastic shot glass during Communion.
26. You realize that sprinkling, pouring and immersing are not ways of seasoning food.
27. You're asked to donate money to a "special offering" every other Sunday.

Sunday Worship

9:30 AM Worship Service (Sanctuary)
10:45 AM Fellowship (Narthex)
10:45 AM Adult Education (Wesley)
11:00 AM UMYF

Wednesday Night schedule

5:30 - Community Meal (free-will offering)
6:00- Grace Kids
6:15 - Choir Practice
7:15 - Bell Choir Practice—

Committee Meetings

Children's & Youth Ministry	February 10	March 10	6:30 PM	Library
Church Council	February 23	March 23	6:30 PM	Fireside
Finance (Qtrly next mtg March)			5:30 PM	Wesley
Grace Cares	February 25	March 25	3:00 PM	
Missions	February 2	March 2	3:30 PM	Library
SPRC	February 2	March 2	6:00 PM	
Trustees	February 9	March 9	6:30 PM	Library
Worship	February 4	March 4	4:00 PM	Library

Chair Yoga	Monday & Wednesday		10:00AM	Wesley
Coffee @ Grace	February 4 & 18	March 4 & 18	9:30AM	Narthex
Essentrics Class	Monday & Wednesday		9:30AM	Wesley
Esther Circle	No meeting this month	Sat. March 28	5:00PM	
Grace Band Practice	Thursdays		3:00 PM	Sanctuary
Loom Work Session	Wednesday		2:00-4:00 PM	Fellowship Hall
Men's Bible Study	Wednesday		1:00 PM	Narthex
Ruth Circle	February 19	March 19	1:30 PM	
UMM	February 14	March 14	8:00 AM	BenTena Room
UWFaith	February 5			
Weighted Works with Love	February 24	March 24	9:00 AM	Fellowship Hall
Adult Study Group	Sunday		10:45 AM	Wesley

The complete calendar may be accessed here.

CHAIR PERSON OF MINISTRY BOARDS:

Church Council: Ben Pullen
Co-Lay Leaders: Sandy Heerdt, Ben Pullen
Lay Member to Ann. Conference: Jenn Ingledue, Bri Pullen
Treasurer: Sue Burdick
SPRC: Ric Guerrero
Trustee: Gary Small
Finance: Paul Kassel
Missions: Brownie Small
Memorial: Judi Calhoon
Grace Cares: Cyndi O'Hara
Worship: Linda O'Clair
Children's & Youth Ministry: Lisa Elliott
UWF: Cyndi O'Hara and Pastor Shurmaine McAlpine
UMM: Bill Elliott
Youth Rep:
Church Council Secretary: Joan Waller
Finance Secretary: Sandy Thomas
Director of Communications: Alison Herman

GRACE
United Methodist Church

JOIN US FOR...
Inperson/Live Stream Worship
Sundays @ 9:30 AM- Sanctuary

CONTACT US
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Spencer, IA 51301
Phone: 712-262-5970
office@spencergumc.com

OFFICE HOURS
Monday - Thursday
9:00 AM - 3:30 PM
Friday - Sunday
Closed