

March 2026

1st UNITED METHODIST CHURCH—Aurelia, IA



GIVING



GROWING



LOVING

The Lenten Journey

By: Celeste Cummins

Throughout the forty-day journey of Lent, which began on Ash Wednesday, we contemplate Christ's suffering and death. From a human standpoint, nothing about it makes sense. Why would anyone willingly endure torture and death for someone else? From a divine standpoint, since sin entered the world through one man, God and man could only be reconciled to each other through another Man (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). That Man, of course, was Jesus.

Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday, can be summed up in three words: solemn, somber, and sad. Jesus' week begins with a triumphal procession. Praise was poured out upon him by the crowds. He was adorned a hero. But, by Thursday evening, everything falls apart. The lips that praised him earlier that week, now shouted, "Crucify him!" One disciple betrayed him for a pocket of coins. The disciples who had followed him, listened to him preach, watched him heal people, fled and scattered. Another disciple denied knowing him. Jesus was left alone to be mocked, flogged, ridiculed, and eventually, crucified.

Jesus, as true God, could have said, "Enough! I'm not doing this." Yet, he did not. Jesus' love for you and me motivated him to endure these horrible days. His compassion, his grace for us held him to the cross to save us. Grace means we are able to reap the benefits of God's love, forgiveness, and everlasting life because of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Yet, it does not stop there. His compassion trickles down to us to allow his grace to overflow in our lives and impact the people we meet. We are to share that grace with others.

When the Lenten journey ends, it will be spring. Spring is the time for renewal. Spring is the time for growth. Spring is the time for planting and scattering seeds. This spring, scatter the seeds of God's grace in the world, so that others can see the eternal power of Christ's love.

(This was based off of two devotions written by me titled "Scattering Seeds of Grace" and "The Holy Week Journey" published in A Season of Grace - Lent Devotions for Seniors by Creative Communications for the Parish, copyright 2026; used by permission).

Information Regarding Pastor Lopez

The information regarding Pastor Lopez has been sent out via email to members of AFUMC. It is also being included here for those members who may not have heard or do not have email and would like to read the letters themselves.

This first item is from the DS, Pastor Michel Lundula. It was emailed to members on Sunday, February 15, 2026 and explains that Pastor Lopez will no longer be serving at Aurelia First after February. - Celeste

Announcement from the Bishop & Cabinet the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church

Dear Members and Friends of Aurelia United Methodist Church,

I am praying that the Lord continues to support and encourage you in our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Due to challenges related to transferring Pastor Brenton Lopez's clergy membership from his home denomination to the United Methodist Church, we are unable to move forward with his candidacy in the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church. Consequently, Pastor Brenton Lopez will conclude his ministry at Aurelia United Methodist Church at the end of February 2026. Pastor Lopez will continue to be in the parsonage until the end of March. The possibility of extending the stay in the parsonage will depend on Pastor Brenton, the Board of Trustees, and the District Superintendent.

The SPRC will work closely with District Superintendent Rev. Michel Lundula to begin the process for a new appointment.

Please keep Pastor Brenton Lopez and his family in your prayers during this time of transition. Be assured that the Bishop and the Cabinet are praying for both your congregation and Pastor Brenton's family.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Michel Lundula, DS



A follow-up letter from the Office of the Bishop was emailed to members of AFUMC on February 24, 2026. It is included on the following pages.



**IOWA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

2301 Rittenhouse Street, Des Moines, IA 50321
www.iaumc.org

Kennetha J. Bigham-Tsai
Resident Bishop, Iowa Area
bishop@iaumc.org

Katie Dawson
Assistant to the Bishop
katie.dawson@iaumc.org
515.974.8903

Beth A. Carlson
Executive Secretary to the Bishop
Beth.carlson@iaumc.org
515.974.8902

February 24, 2026

To the SPRC Committee at First United Methodist Church,

Recently, my office has received inquiries from congregants of First UMC in Aurelia regarding the appointive and credentialing process for pastors. Please accept this letter to help clarify the process for the credentialing and assignment or appointment of pastoral leaders to our congregations. This information can be shared with the congregation as you feel appropriate. All paragraph references are to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2020/2024* (the "Discipline").

Though the inquiries to my office arise from the experience of First UMC with its current assigned lay minister, nothing in this letter should be construed as a comment on that individual, but rather—again, is offered as an explanation of the United Methodist process for considering candidates for ministry, generally.

First, unlike some other denominations, Local Churches in the United Methodist Church do not choose or hire their pastors.

- Rather, ordained or licensed ministers are appointed by the Bishop, or the Bishop may assign laypersons for up to one year to do the work of ministry in a charge. Discipline ¶ 205.1,4.
- It is the responsibility of the Bishop "to make and fix the appointments in the annual conference." Discipline ¶ 416. What that means is that a Local Church, through its SPRC, works together with its District Superintendent (as part of the Cabinet), who in turn works with the Bishop on assignments and appointments from those who are eligible to serve. Discipline ¶ 258.2(g)(11).
- The Discipline states, in relevant part, that "the role of the bishop is to uphold the discipline and order of the Church by consecrating, ordaining, commissioning, supervising, and appointing persons in ministry to the Church and the world." Discipline ¶ 403. The ending of any appointment or assignment to the Local Church is the decision of the Bishop and Cabinet, and is final.

Second, Local Churches are not the setting where credentialing of candidates for ministry happens within our denomination.

- In Iowa, like in all other United Methodist conferences, credentialing is done by the District Committee on Ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry, which are made up of lay and clergy members of the Iowa Annual Conference. The full candidacy process is described in Discipline ¶ 310.

The letter from the Bishop continues on the next page...

- The candidacy process is extensive and involves different committees within an annual conference. The process includes, and requires, recommendations from the Local Church SPRC where the candidate is a member, the candidate's Charge Conference, the District Committee on Ministry, background checks, psychological assessment, credit checks, education transcript evaluation, candidacy retreats, and ministry recommendations. This evaluative process examines theological fit, professionalism, and evaluation of the candidate as a person to determine fitness for ministry.
- All of these requirements help the various bodies responsible for evaluating the candidate for ministry to determine an individual's gifts, evidence of God's grace, fruitfulness, call to ministry, as well as considering the fitness of individuals to exercise their influence as clergy.
- Before someone is ordained, there are eight different entities that must say, "yes." This process requires those who oversee these processes to take seriously their responsibility to a careful and thorough examination of candidates. We are people of grace and possibility, however sometimes the most faithful result from this lengthy process is to decide that a candidate does not meet the requirement for United Methodist ordained ministry.
- As the District Committee on Ministry, Board of Ordained Ministry, and Cabinet evaluate the information that is received as part of the candidacy process, ministry candidates are required to meet standards set by the United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which provides guidance for further exploration as well as recommendations for action. Sometimes, the recommended action is that the candidate may no longer move forward in the process toward ordination.
- Before someone can become a certified candidate, who is then eligible for an appointment, the District Committee on Ministry has to approve certification with a three-fourths majority vote, a high bar. If a candidate does not receive the votes to move forward, there is not an appeal mechanism for this phase of the candidacy process.

All the persons involved in the candidacy process act with grace and integrity along the way, and I want to assure you have followed all of the processes as outlined in the Discipline. While the specifics of any personnel decisions are confidential, we hope that this clarification of process might be helpful as you continue to work through this transition in the life of your community. Thank you for your service and faithfulness.

In Christ,



Rev. Katie Z. Dawson
Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

CC: Rev. Dr. Michel Lundula, Northwest District Superintendent



Introducing Pastor Paul Evans

Pastor Paul Evans is a retired UMC Pastor who has been appointed by the DS to serve Aurelia First until July 2026. It is our hope that by then the Cabinet will have found a new appointment to serve in our congregation. Here is a little information that Pastor Paul wrote for us about himself.

In the Bible the call of God comes in many different ways and in its own time. Samuel hears God's voice calling while sleeping in the Temple. The Apostle Paul experiences the blinding light on his way to Damascus. David is anointed king as a small boy years before he actually takes the throne of Israel. Abraham is called by God in his old age to pull up stakes and go to the place God will show him.

I myself was not ever expecting to go into ministry in the beginning. I was raised on a dairy farm right on Highway 20 just east of Correctionville, Iowa. My parents had eight children (seven boys and one girl) and I am number seven. After graduation from Eastwood High School I worked for my Dad for six years and then took over the operation in partnership with my youngest brother for another six years.

I met my wife, Sandy from Merville, Iowa, on a blind date and we were married on June 23, 1979. We have one son, Luke, who was born in April of 1987 and is now the pastor of the Clear Lake United Methodist Church.

In the fall of 1983 Sandy and I took over the leadership of the UMYF in Cushing and from there I experienced a call to ministry. I left the farming operation to my brother and began my educational journey at Westmar College in LeMars. While attending Westmar I served the Seney United Methodist Church my last three years until graduation. From there we moved to Colorado where I attended Iliff School of Theology earning my M.Div. in 1994. While attending Iliff, I served two small country churches in northeast Colorado—LeRoy & Pleasant Valley UMC's.

After graduating from Iliff we moved back to Iowa and served Bedford/Gravity UMC's (1994-1998) and was ordained as a elder at Annual Conference in 1996. I then moved to Kingsley UMC (1998-2006) where Luke graduated from Kingsley-Pierson High School. Next I served Ogden Community UMC (2006-2011), Garner UMC (2011-2019), and finally serving Independence UMC until I retired in July of 2024. We now live in Laurens, Iowa.

We are looking forward to meeting you and serving these next few months as we all prepare for your new appointment in July. May God continue to bless the ministry and service of Aurelia 1st United Methodist Church in the coming months and into the future as we all bear witness to the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Pastor Paul Evans

Aurelia First UMC 2026 Leadership & Committees

Administrative Council

Chair	Chris Carr (<u>4</u>) [^]
Vice Chair	Bob Bryant (3)
Recording Secretary	Mary Dowdy/Deb Galvin (May 2026)
Treasurer	Celeste Cummins
Financial Secretary	Deb Galvin (3)
Lay Leader	Tammy Willfong
Lay Member <u>to</u> Annual Conference	Jeff & Tammy Willfong (1)
Finance chair	Steve Gustafson (4)
Trustee Chair	Nathan Anderson (3)
Staff Parish Relations Chair	Shelley Flaherty (<u>5</u>) [^]
Worship Chair	Dan & Lisa Bringle (1)
Christian Education Chair	Steph Fordyce
Mission Chair	Diann Meendering (3)
Memorial Chair	Gayle Gustafson

Committees

Trustees

2026

Nathan Anderson ([3](#))^{*}
Kevin Flaherty (6)
Tim Galvin (3)
Brad Gustafson (1)
Gayle Gustafson (8)
Linda Hines (3)
Glen McCannon (3)
Mark Sangwin (1)
Liz Smith (2)

2027

Nathan Anderson ([4](#))^{*}
Brad Gustafson (2)
Gayle Gustafson (9)
Mark Sangwin (2)
Liz Smith (3)

2028

Nathan Anderson ([5](#))^{*}
Brad Gustafson (3)
Mark Sangwin (3)

Finance

Chair Steve Gustafson (no official committee, business will be discussed in regular board meetings)

Staff-Parish Relations

2026

Sarah Anderson (3)
Bob Bryant (4)
Allan Feekes (2)
Shelly Flaherty (5)
Steve Gustafson (1)
Barbie Sherwood (5)

2027

Bob Bryant (5)
Allan Feekes (3)
Shelley Flaherty (6)
Steve Gustafson (2)
Barbie Sherwood (6)

2028

Bob Bryant (6)
Allan Feekes (4)
Steve Gustafson (3)
Shelley Flaherty (7)
Barbie Sherwood (7)

Lay Leadership/Nominations

Rhonda Handy (1)

Nancy Webb (1)

Worship

Amanda Bengtson
Chris Carr
Deb Galvin

Dan Bringle*
Heather Carr

Lisa Bringle*
Shelley Flaherty

Mission

Diann Meendering*
Dee Nelson

Deb Galvin
Charlene Peterson

Janet Kai
Denise Reed

Christian Ed

Sarah Anderson
Brooke Noble

Steph Fordyce*
Liz Smith

Bryanna Nissen

Memorials

Gayle Gustafson*
Barbie Sherwood

Sue Jones

Charlene Peterson

College Loan

Sue Jones*

Tammy Willfong

Head Usher

Diann Meendering

Auditing Committee

Kent Ahnemann*

Rhonda Handy

Notes and Explanations

* Committee Chair

^ The number in parenthesis means how many years they have served of a three year term. Example: At the end of 2025, Chris Carr will have served 3 years of his 3 year term as Ad Chair, but he agreed to stay on, so he's now 4 of his 6 year term. Bob Bryant will have served 2 years, so in 2026, his number will change to 3 (numbers increase each year). Shelley Flaherty is on her second term, so her number is 4 (which will increase to 5 in 2026).

Welcome, Pastor Paul and Sandy Evans!

If you would like to speak to Pastor Paul
for any reason, you may contact him via

Phone (712) 490-9693

--- or ---

Email – paul.evans@iaumc.net

Please do reach out to him if you are
undergoing any health issues, find your-
self in a hospital, or experience the
death of someone close to you.

40th Annual Sermons Ala Carte

Memorial Presbyterian Church—127 E Willow St—Cherokee

Invites you to...

Worship and Lunch Wednesdays during Lent

Service: 12:05 pm

Lunch: 12:30 pm

Cost: \$5.00

Prayer Focus

This month, please pray for Aurelia
First United Methodist Church that
our journey to finding a new Pastor
may be brief.



Noisy Offering
for March
AFUMC VBS

"Experiencing the Heart of Jesus"

This is the title of the Bible
study by Max Lucado that we
are studying on Wednesday
evenings from 6:30—7:30
pm. All are welcome to
attend the Bible study.

Ladies Hour

The ladies will meet on Thursday,
March 19th at 1:00 pm. All are
welcome to come!



Confirmation will be on Sunday, March 29th

The following students are preparing to be Confirmed that day...

- * Sadie Bengtson
- * Allie Fordyce
- * Aubree Noble
- * Brody Pressley
- * Brantley Sargent

Please pray for them during their last month of instruction and as their Confirmation approaches.

March 2026

Aurelia First United Methodist Church - Aurelia, IA

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:30 am Worship Sunday School 10:45 -11:45 am Confirmation Class	2	3	4 5:30 – 7:00 pm Youth 6:30 pm Bible Study	5	6	7
8 9:30 am Worship Sunday School 10:45 -11:45 am Confirmation Class Trustees Meeting after Worship	9	10	11 6:30 pm Bible Study	12	13	14
15 Lily Orders Due! 9:30 am Worship Sunday School 10:45 -11:45 am Confirmation Class Ad Council Meeting after Worship	16	17	18 6:30 pm Bible Study	19 1:00 pm Ladies Hour	20	21
22 9:30 am Worship Sunday School 10:45 -11:45 am Confirmation Class	23	24	25 6:30 pm Bible Study	26	27	28
29 Palm Sunday Confirmation Day 9:30 am Worship Sunday School	30	31				

Aurelia First United
Methodist Church
**FUNDRAISER
MEAL**

Pulled Pork
Cheesy Potatoes
Green Beans
Dessert

FREEWILL
DONATION

APRIL 26TH, 2026
11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

*All proceeds support the
purchase of a new lawn mower*



Lent Word Scramble

ROYTF ASDY _____
PTENAEENR _____
SIGTNAF _____
MURALEJSE _____
TEBYARLA _____
NIRE\$ _____
SEDTRE _____
ODGO DIFYRA _____
HSA NDYASEDWE _____
CILSIPEDS _____
OSRCS _____
GRISFOVNESE _____
H\$ASE _____
EAPNECN _____
YOHL USDYRTAH _____
REYARP _____
XCIRONUIFCI _____
ATRESE _____
MPAL ASYDUN _____
SUJSE _____
FIC\$RECIA _____
NORSURITECRE _____
LOYH EKEW _____
LSBES _____

Word Bank:

ASHES	DESERT	GOOD FRIDAY	PENANCE
ASH WEDNESDAY	DISCIPLES	HOLY THURSDAY	PRAYER
BETRAYAL	EASTER	HOLY WEEK	REPENTANCE
BLESS	FASTING	JERUSALEM	RESURRECTION
CROSS	FORGIVENESS	JESUS	RISEN
CRUCIFIXION	FORTY DAYS	PALM SUNDAY	SACRIFICE



Contact Information

Aurelia First UMC:

31 Valor Rd.
Aurelia, Iowa 51005

Pastor:

Paul Evans

Sec/Treas:

Celeste Cummins

Telephone: 712-434-5994

Website: www.aureliafumc.org

Office Email: afumc4all@newulmtel.net

