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## Newsletter for January & February 2026

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### Pastor's Ponderings

I have mentioned before the concept of making “last year resolutions” instead of “new year resolutions.” The idea is to contemplate your death. What if this coming year were to be your last on this earth? What would you resolve to do?

I asked myself that question in earnest twenty years ago as I lay in bed on December 24, 2005, two days after having cancer surgery. Melanoma—just skin cancer, not brain cancer, not involving internal organs or bone marrow, but melanoma is an aggressive and potentially deadly cancer. I should have had that spot on my back examined months earlier. The dermatologist looked at it and ordered an immediate biopsy. The biopsy was positive and they wanted me in surgery the next week. They would cut out a 1-inch margin around the tumor and run further tests to make a stage diagnosis and see what further treatment might be needed. Due to the Christmas holiday and then a weekend, I would wait eight days for results. I had time to think. In 2005, the survival rates for melanoma were lower than today. What if I had only a year to live? I thought about what I would want to leave behind for my daughters; I thought about dear friends I would want to see; I thought about how I was spending my life day to day—my current patterns of living. I thought about what is truly important in life.

I finally got the news the following week that there was no evidence the cancer had spread, so it was unlikely to kill me any time soon. But, I thought, now that I’m going to live, why not go ahead and do the things I had realized I would want to do if I *was* going to die—the things I realized were truly important? After all, we *are* all going to die, we just don’t know when. It is because of that cancer experience and the decision to do in the next year of my life what I would have done if it were my last year, that I am now married to the woman I’m married to, and am a pastor here in Western NY instead of a professor in Atlanta.

The stark thought of dying prompted me to make major life decisions I’m glad to have made, to live in ways that were more life-giving. I do not think God gave me cancer so that I would make those decisions. I don’t think God micromanages the world in that way or goes around handing out deadly diseases. But I do think the decisions I made while contemplating death moved me in directions more aligned with God’s will and with what is truly important in life. The cancer re-emerged twice more with increasing severity half a dozen years later, in 2011 and 2012, giving me fresh opportunities to contemplate death and re-evaluate how I was using my life. I am glad to still be living thirteen years

later and now I try to remember to contemplate death regularly, without the prompt of cancer. There are stories of some monks making their own coffins and then keeping them in their cell or bedroom, not to be morbid, but in order to sustain their resolve to keep their minds focused on what is ultimately important in life. (Rest assured, I do not have a me-sized coffin in the parsonage at this time)!

As we move into this new year, I invite you to consider making some “last year resolutions.” May it be a very good year for all of us, and not our last.

Blessings and peace,

Ted

### **News about our neighbors and friends**

- Barb Fink is currently at Elderwood in Hamburg and appreciates your cards and prayers. Her address is: 5775 Maelou Drive, Hamburg, NY 14075.
- Janet Taber is at home. She appreciates our prayers and calls. Cards may be sent to her home address: 5845 Scherff Road, Orchard Park, NY 14127.
- Eleanor Kraft is doing well following celebration of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in June. She continues to be happy with her living situation at Elderwood Assisted Living. Her address: Elderwood Assisted Living, 76 Buffalo Street Apartment 124, Hamburg, NY 14075
- Sonne Durphy recently had surgery to remove metal from the leg she broke last summer.
- Sally Schutt has recovered well from her broken hip, and is now living with her son D.J. and his wife at 6181 Rice Road, Boston, NY 14025.

### **CONCERNS & PRAYERS**



For peace in our country and the world, for our military, for those whose needs we may not know. For those who have lost loved ones recently and are grieving.

For Vickie Bieger, Shannon Cook, Stephen Dearth, Sonne Durphy, Shay Devinney, Barb Fink, Corky Forney, Brennan Grove, Scot Kish, Eleanor Kraft, Carol Mueller, Dan Owen, Joe Piecuch, Claudia Renzi, Tom & Marilyn Rucker, Joe Ryan, Sally Schutt, Linda Smerka, Sydney Stisser, Janet Taber, Bob Tills, and Friends and family of Bob Winter.

**Those in the Military:** Zachary Braun, Justin Buczek, Teagan Partridge, Caydan Skinner, Justin Slighter, Jamie-Lynn Smerka, Mary Solak, Joe Solak, Justin Slighter, Aaron Wellman, and Mark Williams.

#### **Prayer Concerns**

Please email your prayer concerns to Pastor Ted ([pastor@faithunitedchurchucc.com](mailto:pastor@faithunitedchurchucc.com)) or stop by the church office when it is open and write your concerns on the prayer request sheet in the narthex.

**Our Annual Congregational Meeting** will be held immediately following worship on January 25<sup>th</sup>. There will be summary reports of activities from 2025 and there will be a vote on new members to the Church Board and the Endowment Committee.

The nominating committee will present a slate of five board members and two endowment committee members:

### BOARD MEMBERS

- Linda Bishop – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
- Gail Berger – 2<sup>nd</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
- Ginny Taber – 2<sup>nd</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
- Ken Ottaway – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Trustee – 2026 – 2029
- Cathy Kobel – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Trustee – 2026 – 2029

### ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Carl Berger – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Endowment Committee – 2026 – 2029
- Kevin Biddle – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Endowment Committee – 2026 – 2029

### Update on Sunday school activities... - Cris Palczak, Sunday School Superintendent



I hope everyone enjoyed the children's Christmas Play. This year's play was Twinkle, the Christmas Star by Mary Brendan Conlon. It had a lot of moving parts. I am very proud of the Sunday school class, they did an amazing job. The play would not have been a success without help.

Thank you to the parents and Linda Bishop for helping with changing costumes. And a special thanks to

Amy McCourt for making the stars. It was great to enjoy delicious treats with everyone during the coffee hour. Thank you to everyone that brought in something to share. Hope everyone had a great Christmas! There's no Sunday school on January 4<sup>th</sup>.



**ANY WEATHER RELATED CLOSINGS** will be posted on TV Channel 2 WGRZ, and WIVB News 4, and on our website and Facebook. If there is ever a question of unsafe conditions on roads near you, please do stay home and safe. If we choose not to cancel the service you can always watch it on YouTube or Facebook.



### Missions

The Women's Group is asking for donations to send to Plymouth Crossroads. Food, personal items for teenage boys, bedding items, cleaning or paper products. Bring to church during the month – there will be collection baskets outside church office.





We are delighted to **welcome Robin Miller as our new Church Musician!**

Initially Robin filled in for us as a temporary organist and pianist for a few worship services in September. She returned again on a temporary basis to provide music for worship in November and December. Beginning January 1, 2026 she will be officially contracted with us as our regular Church Musician.

Robin is a life-long resident of Hamburg. She graduated from Hamburg High School, class of 1977, and received Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Mathematics from Canisius College and SUNY at Buffalo. She was a mathematics professor at ECC's City Campus from 1988 to 2006.

A musician at heart, she has played French horn in many local music ensembles, including over 30 years with the Orchard Park Symphony. She has been a substitute pianist at several local Presbyterian and UCC churches and served as the Music Director at First Congregational UCC in Angola from 2006 to 2018. She is especially devoted to playing piano programs for local nursing and assisted living facilities, adult day centers, and senior housing sites.

Robin lives with her wife, Debi Dinkuhn, and their beloved long-haired dachshund, Frankie. And, a fun fact: Robin is the niece (and god-daughter) of Linda Smerka, and Linda is responsible for Robin becoming aware of the church musician position at Faith!

We couldn't be happier she is here at Faith United Church of Christ.



Note from Robin: I'd like to thank you good folks of Faith for all your gifts, including your support, encouragement, and warmth, as well as your generosity. I am looking forward to serving you, working with you, and contributing to your worship experience through God's gift of music. Blessings to you all! - Robin

## FELLOWSHIP

**Men's Group** – In November the Men's Group: Set clocks back - tested all smoke detectors - tested all emergency lights. Installed new batteries in all above where needed. Cleaned out gutters at parsonage and church. Gas meter reading the end of November - 00-1222. Front elevator entrance – a company came in and re-leveled concrete sidewalk. Set-up manger scene outside/Christmas trees and decorations inside church. Oiled the main re-circulating pump for the boilers and checked oil in the air compressor that controls the thermostats.

Our Men's Group monthly meeting is Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. We meet in the Fellowship Hall downstairs. We will gather to take down the Manger and Christmas decorations. In February the Men's Group meeting will be on Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. As always we will talk about the small tasks at hand and then proceed to complete the tasks if possible! Then we gather back in the Fellowship Hall for coffee, pastries and conversation. If you have any questions, feel free to speak to Bruce Lounsbury on a Sunday morning or call him at 716-662-7357.

**Women's Support** – The Women's support group January meeting is soup and game night on Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 p.m. Pat and Karen will host.



We will not have any meeting in February, but are asking for donations to send to Plymouth Crossroads. Food, personal items for teenage boys, bedding items, cleaning or paper products. Bring to church during the month – there will be collection baskets outside church office.

**Library** - Usually when we think of the homeless we think of adults living on the streets. But there is a whole other group of homeless – teenagers that have run away or have been forced out of their home. *Sometimes God Has A Kid's Face*, by Sister Mary Rose McGeady, tells the stories of some of these teenagers, and their struggles to find acceptance. It an example that hope can survive no matter what.

This book can be found in the Church Library, located in the Gathering Room.



## News

**Thank you to the Men's and Women's Group** for decorating the Church for Christmas.

The Women's Advent program was lovely and we thank all of you for participating.

The Sunday school play on the birth of Jesus was a heartwarming performance by our students. Thank you to all of you.

Thanks to everyone for the wonderful job done on the coffee hour. All the goodies were delicious! Special thanks to Kathy Lounsbury for setting up the tables!

## **Faith Church Stewardship Campaign for 2025**

Thanks to everyone that returned their pledge card. If you haven't returned it yet, it is not too late. Just return it to the church office as soon as possible.



## Events

Sunday, January 4<sup>th</sup> – **Communion. No Sunday school, Invitation & Welcome meeting** following worship.

Monday, January 5<sup>th</sup> – 2026 **Mediation classes begin** 7:00 p.m.

Tuesday, January 6<sup>th</sup> – Epiphany

Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> – 9:00 a.m. **Men's Group meeting**, take down decorations.

**Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup> – Annual Reports due.**

Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup> – 4:30 p.m. **Women's support group soup and game night.**

Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> – Inclusivity group coffee hour & **Endowment Meeting** following worship.

Tuesday, January 20<sup>th</sup> – 7:00 p.m. **Board Meeting.**

Friday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> – **6:30 p.m. Movie Night** in our church's Fellowship Hall we invite friends and all to bring a pillow, blanket or comfy chair & join us for popcorn, hot chocolate & fruit punch to watch **"Frozen"!!**

Sunday, January 25<sup>th</sup> – **Congregational meeting** following worship.



## Events

**No Women's support group meeting** in February. Collection for Plymouth Crossroads outside of church office.

Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup> – **Communion, and Installation of New Board Members with coffee hour sponsored by Church Board following.**

Saturday, February 7<sup>th</sup> – **Men's Group** meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Tuesday, February 17<sup>th</sup> – **Board Meeting** at 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> – **Ash Wednesday** 7:00 p.m. Communion service.

Friday, February 20<sup>th</sup> – **6:30 p.m. Movie Night** in our church's Fellowship Hall we invite friends and all to bring a pillow, blanket or comfy chair & join us for popcorn, hot chocolate & fruit punch to watch "**Nemo**"!!

Wednesday, February 25<sup>th</sup> – **Music Meeting** at 1:00 p.m.

## **BOARD MEETING Recap**

**November 18th, 2025**

**Attendance:** Ted Brelsford, Kevin Biddle, Bruce Lounsbury, Tim Plewik, Ginny Taber, Gail Berger, Zach Munger, Mary Beth Dauer and Bob Bishop

**Excused:** Frank (Corky) Forney, Katherine Meckes

**Guests:** none

Board President Kevin Biddle opened the meeting at 7:03 pm.

Pastor Ted led us in an opening prayer.

### **Consent Agenda**

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from October 21, 2025.

All in favor. Minutes approved

### **Reports:**

**Financial Secretary's Report:** October Income report: \$8,154.97

**Treasurer's Report:** October Expense report: \$15,455.18

Noted: Ted's Salary is being deferred until 2026. Down payment was made for parsonage windows.

A motion was made and seconded to approve all reports.

All in favor- All reports approved.

### **Old Business:**

- **Music Director Update** – Robin Miller will be our pianist/organist for November and December. Mary Beth made a motion to offer Robin a contract as a permanent pianist/organist for \$800/month starting January 2026. The motion was seconded by Gail. All in favor – motion approved.
- **Profile Committee Update** – The committee will have a zoom meeting with Rev. Gary Ferner Associate Conference Minister, NY Conference UCC ([gferner@uccny.org](mailto:gferner@uccny.org) 315-882-8627) on Wednesday, November 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm. Committee members :Kevin Biddle, Ginny

Taber, Katherine Meckes, Frank (Corky) Forney, Sandy Jordan, Priscilla Granville, Derek Grove & Zach Munger.

Derek ran the profile through A I and has really jump started the process. Thanks Derek!

- **Nominating Committee (5 board 2 endow.) Update**
  - Linda Bishop – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
  - Gail Berger – 2<sup>nd</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
  - Ginny Taber – 2<sup>nd</sup> term – Deacon - 2026 – 2029
  - Ken Ottaway – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Trustee – 2026 – 2029
  - Cathy Kobel – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Trustee – 2026 – 2029
  - Carl Berger – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Endowment Committee – 2026 – 2029
  - Kevin Biddle – 1<sup>st</sup> term – Endowment Committee – 2026 – 2029

A motion made and seconded to accept the slate of candidates as presented by the nominating committee. All in favor – motion approved.

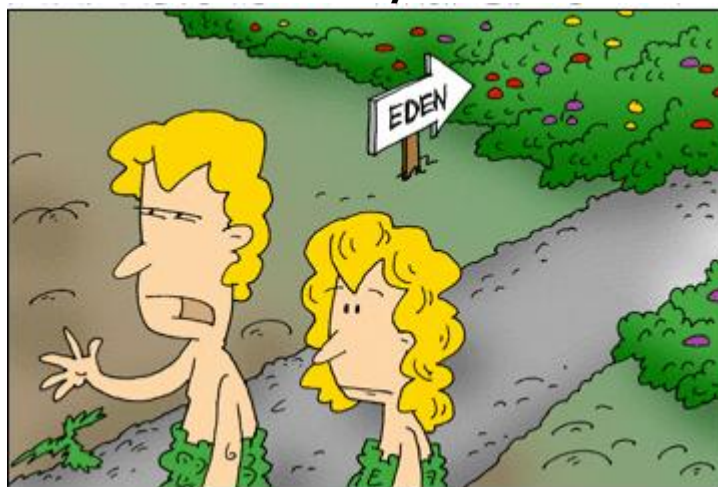
- **Parsonage repair committee** – Committee is being asked to walk through the parsonage to make a list of possible repairs/upgrades that may be needed. Ted has volunteered to work with the committee to point out some things. Committee members: Kevin, Zach, Bob, & Bruce. Committee will get quotes and make recommendations.
- **Church Refreshening Committee** – Gail will be on the committee, recruit other members.
- **Youth Group Fund** -Tim reports that the Youth Group checking account has been closed. As agreed previously by the board, the funds will be kept at the church and monitored by the Financial Secretary. Funds in the account \$709.14.

#### **New Business:**

- Stacy Szlachetka has asked permission to use the kitchen for a Girl Scout project. The Board approved. No date has been set yet.
- Gail asked if there were any groups that would be willing to create the bulletin board for October 12 – November 26, 2026. Tim offered to have the Stewardship Committee create one.

Meeting closed with prayer.

#### **A Little Holy Humor**



**OUR RESOLUTION LAST YEAR COULD HAVE BEEN "EAT LESS FRUIT," BUT NO... WE WENT WITH "TRUST PEOPLE MORE"**





### **JANUARY GREETERS 2026**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Elevator Entrance</b>	<b>Main Entrance</b>
January 4	Carol & Ken Ottaway Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Ginny Taber
January 11	Donna Lisowski Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Helen Zittel
January 18	Lois Thurnherr Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Karen Winter
January 25	Linda Bishop Katherine Meckes Herb Berlin, Bobby Bishop, Bruce Lounsbury	Pris Granville Kathy Lounsbury

### **February GREETERS 2026**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Elevator Entrance</b>	<b>Main Entrance</b>
February 1	Linda Bishop Herb Berlin, Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Leslie Brelsford
February 8	Mary Beth Dauer Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Michele Rappl
February 15	Sharon & Corky Forney Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop, Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury	Sandy Jordan
February 22	Kathy & Bruce Lounsbury Herb Berlin, Linda & Bobby Bishop	Pegge Cook

Please call the church office, 716-941-3529, or Lois T., 716-941-3248, should you need to change the schedule. We appreciate you taking time to share your love of Christ with others by welcoming them to our worship service.

**Publicity:** Pictures taken at church events are often used for publicity, especially on the church's website. If you do not want you or your child's picture used, please contact the church office. It will be assumed that it is okay to use your picture if we do not hear from you.

### *Devotional Meditation: A meditation from Quiet Your Mind*

*Devotional meditation is a spiritual practice of quiet contemplation, prayer, and reflection focused on connecting with God. Fostering intimacy, faith, and a transformed life, moving from mere information to deeper, heart-felt experience with God.*

*God is within the silence. Find a quiet spot, sit comfortably, breathe deeply to relax and invite stillness, inhaling God's goodness and exhaling fear or tension.*

*Then bring your attention to scripture (Psalms 46:10 or John 15:4) Or repeat the Mantra "God loves me." Come into a deeper connection with each breath, each repeated Mantra, finding God within your still, loving heart. Listen more than you talk; allow God to speak to you.*

*Then reap the benefits of a strengthened relationship with God. Finding hope, peace and purpose within. Growing in inner transformation, living more intentionally with the response of God's love.*

Quiet Your Mind, Find Your Peace: Intro to Meditation starting on Mondays January 5<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.  
Email Katherine to Register or for questions at [Quietyourmind.km@gmail.com](mailto:Quietyourmind.km@gmail.com).

## **January Birthdays & Anniversaries**

### **Happy Birthday To:**

5 – Tracy Thauer  
6 – Meredith McEwan  
7 – Bev King  
10 – Nora Lounsbury  
14 – Angella Bennett  
21 – Gail Burdick  
22 – Reagan Elizabeth Grove  
Steve Gustafson  
Ivy Lyn Szlachetka  
Carol Tirado

23 – Jay Dean  
25 – Carol Mueller  
27 – Bert Gustafson  
28 – Brett Williams  
29 – Kara Mae Brown  
Lucas Forney  
Derek Grove  
30 – Emilie Roman

### **Happy Anniversary To:**

12 – Michael & Sandy Jordan  
16 – Bruce & Kathy Lounsbury

## **February Birthdays & Anniversaries**

### **Happy Birthday To:**

4 – Pegge Cook  
Pat Minnick  
7 – Charolette Evers  
9 – Nick Roman  
Matthew Forney  
10 – Brock Blackwell  
Bill White  
Sierra Pyle  
11 – Gary Cook  
14 – Madison Sheffield  
17 – Shay Kellerman  
21 – Eric Meyer  
22 – Becky Whited  
24 – Kaitlyn Lounsbury  
26 – Derek Forney  
27 – Joe Karb  
28 – Pam Roman

### **Happy Anniversary To:**

20 – Michelline & Ken Partridge