

The United Church
Presbyterian-American Baptist
11 Gibson Street
Canandaigua, NY 14424

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage Paid
Permit No. 26
Canandaigua, NY 14424

Or Current Resident



The Lamplighter

The United Church
11 Gibson Street



Canandaigua, NY
585-394-0503

Worship Service, 8:45 and 11:00 am

January 2024

Rev. Dr. Wade Allen



- Jan 1 – Church Office is closed, Happy New Year!
- Jan 7 – Sunday School and the Cause resume
- Jan 8 – Trustees meeting, 7 pm
- Jan 9 – Stewards, 7 pm
- Jan 9 – Committee Night, 7 pm
- Jan 10 – Youth Club resumes
- Jan 15 – Church Office is closed for MLK Day
- Jan 15 – Official Board meeting, 7 pm
- Jan 19-20 – Youth overnight event, 5 pm-9 am
- Jan 21 – Remembrance Service
- Jan 21 – Annual Congregational Meeting and Potato Bar
- Jan 27 – Sledding at Mertensia Park, 1-3 pm
- Jan 28 – New Leader Orientation, noon

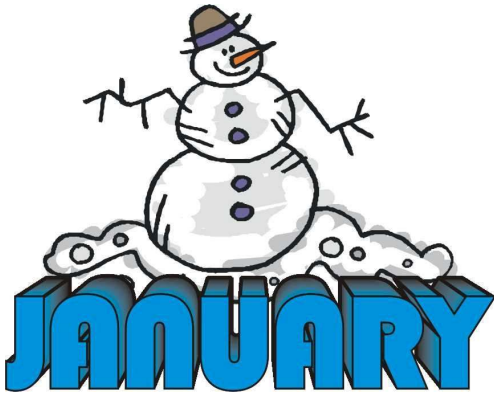


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REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

On **Sunday, January 21st**, the Services will include a special time to remember our church family members who passed away in 2023. A bell will chime after each person's name is read aloud. Families of the deceased members will be invited to worship with us.



Calendar page here...

TO OUR CHURCH "SENIORS" - THE STEWARDS WOULD LIKE TO KNOW...

...which members are turning **90 years old** this year!! If **you** are, or you know of a church member who is, we'd like to know because at age 90, these members become part of our marvelous group of **Special Members**! Please contact Virginia Holroyd at the office or email her at: virginia.holroyd@uccdga.org

We'd also like to know about those who are **ages 87-89** so we know who is on the horizon!

Special Members are those in their 90s, and/or who are homebound, in nursing homes, or need temporary special care. The members of the **Board of Stewards** visit our Special Members regularly.



2023 CHRISTMAS CARD MINISTRY FOR SPECIAL MEMBERS: *Thanks so much to the entire congregation for sending Christmas cards to our Special Members. The Stewards received many thanks from the Special Members for the joyful cards they received!*

The GREETERS SIGN-UP SHEET needs YOU!!

We need **Greeters** for both Services each Sunday in **January**. These volunteers greet people as they enter the church building, they hand out Bulletins, and collect the Offering during the Services. The Board of Stewards Greeter Coordinator for January is: **Rachel Rensberger**.



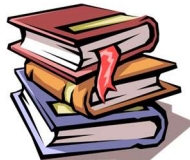
The **Sign-up Sheet** is on the Church Office door. This is a terrific way to serve and connect with your church family! Reminders are emailed the Friday before the Sunday you serve. If you have any questions, please contact Rachel, any Steward, or Virginia Holroyd. ***We really appreciate your help!***

CHURCH LIBRARY: Did you know....

...that we have an updated library near the Gibson St. entrance? New materials have recently been added! Come check it out! **Books, DVDs, CDs** and more are eager to be borrowed during these long winter months.

Book categories include, among others: Christian Growth, Bible Commentaries, Prayer, Christian Novels, Caring and Grief, History, and Daily Devotionals. We also have Bibles, hymnals, and the Bible on audio CD. You'll find books from some favorite authors such as C. S. Lewis, Philip Yancey, Max Lucado, and Warren Wiersbe. DVDs include Bible Studies along with titles for family entertainment.

Just write your name on the inside pocket card and put the card in the silver box. We'll reshelv your items when you return them so leave them in the brown return box.



REMEMBERING:

Our prayers and sympathy are with **Diane Breton**, for the loss of her father, **Robert Williams**, on November 20th. Please keep the family in your prayers during this difficult time.

Our prayers and sympathy are with **Wendy Bacon**, for the loss of her father, **Richard Zimmerman**, on November 24th. Please keep the family in your prayers during this difficult time.

MEMBER CARE: If you are aware of anyone in our church family who is ill, having surgery, who had a death in the family, is having troubles in some way? Are you missing your neighbor who sits in the pew next to yours? **Or** do you know someone who has a happy occasion to celebrate, please let us know!! The Staff works with the **Outreach and Congregation Care Committee** to connect with members of our church family who need encouragement and recognition. ***We care about you!*** Call the church office or Congregation Care Committee Chair: Sue Vadney, at (585) 739-8615

PASTORAL MINISTRY

Our Adult Education Retreat produced a number of takeaways. Over the next several Lamplighters, I aim to share snippets from our retreat to serve as important reminders. The reminders will be focused on the **uncommon approaches** to ministry in a polarized context, as well as the steps suggested for **cultivating a missional posture** (as opposed to an adversarial posture) when planning for dialogue. For those who did not attend the retreat, I still encourage you to consider these approaches within the context of all sorts of divisive issues.

This month, I'd like to share the first step to cultivating a missional (not adversarial) posture of dialogue. Please join me in prayerfully discerning the statement below, and how God may be asking us to respond.

Affirm the full dignity of every person

All persons are created in the image of God and are therefore equally valuable in the sight of God and humanity. Our churches must strive to be places in which every person's dignity is recognized and appreciated, and where the basic human rights of all people are supported and honored.

Pastor Doug Cullum

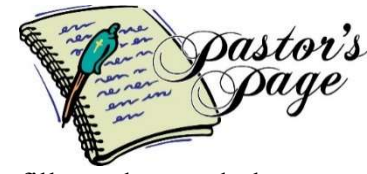
2024 Goals

The new year is a convenient opportunity to establish personal and professional goals. Below I have listed some of my goals for 2024. What are yours?

Prayer – Last year, my prayer life looked quite differently than it ever had before. As a first-year pastor, my prayer life journeyed into depths that were new to me. This season of exploration into a pastoral prayer life has brought with it challenge and curiosity. Moving into the new year, I hope to continue that exploration, both privately and corporately.

Scripture – I cannot overstate how life-giving it has been to have an occupation where engaging the Bible is an integral part of the job. Moving away from professional familiarity of the OSHA General Industry Standards, and moving toward the Holy Scriptures, is the ultimate upgrade. In 2023, I starting re-learning Greek (for the New Testament), began an in depth-study of Galatians, and re-educated myself through a New Testament seminary class. In 2024, I'm looking to do more of the same.

Spiritual Discernment & Relationships – Similar to my experiences in prayer, I am becoming oriented into much deeper areas of spiritual discernment and relationships than ever before. Again, (it can go without saying) there is limited opportunity to exercise these faith elements in the Environmental, Health, and Safety industry. I've greatly appreciated the journey into spiritual discernment and relationships, and earnestly seek to continue my learning in them this year.



New Opportunities

As the calendar turns over to January, we sense a "clean slate" of sorts. For those who use paper calendars, the newness of the pages creates a feeling of opportunity. We trade in overflowing, tattered pages for an empty crisp packet. How will we fill our days and plan our weeks? It is natural to pause for a moment and reevaluate ourselves. It is a new year; how will our lives change? In what ways might we refocus our time and attention?

As a congregation, we have a similar opportunity. I want to share at least a couple of important initiatives for 2024.

First of all, our Official Board is shifting to a smaller, focused group of leaders who will each play a vital role in the functions of our church. While we don't have the details ironed out, we will spend much of this year discussing how the board will function in new ways. Please keep your church leaders in your prayers as we discern how God is leading this group together.

Secondly, a team of leaders will begin discerning the Boyce Memorial gift we received in the fall. God has poured out his blessings on our church in many ways. And this significant financial gift provides an opportunity for our congregation. How is God leading us to respond? In what ways might God be calling us to use this opportunity? Please keep this team in your prayers as we work through a process of discerning in 2024.

Finally, we begin a new sermon series in January. We will spend time moving through the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. This study will take us through Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. I hope you will take the time each week to read the selected passages and come to worship with an open heart to hear the Word of God. I pray that God will continue molding us each week as we submit to His Word.

I am thrilled to be your pastor in 2024. May God continue to lead us together as we discern the promptings and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Wade

Worship Schedule and Readings

- January 07 - Jesus' Baptism (Mark 1:1-11)
Additional Readings: Psalm 29, Acts 19:1-7
- January 14 - Jesus' Testing (Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13)
Additional Readings: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- January 21 - Jesus' Calling Disciples (Mark 1:14-20)
Additional Readings: Psalm 62:5-12, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31
- January 28 - Jesus' Authority (Mark 1:21-28)
Additional Readings: Psalm 111, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The QR code to the right will also take you to the streaming page



The Annual Meeting of the United Church will be held after the second service, in the Dining Room, on **Sunday, January 21, 2024**. Immediately after the 11:00 service the youth will host a baked potato and salad lunch. This will be followed by the Annual Meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to approve the 2024 budget, elect officers, review the activities of 2023, and do any other business appropriate to the meeting.

Financial Items

Treasurer's Financial Summary for Nov 2023

Description	Jan-Nov 2023 Actual	11 month Budget
Income		
Total Giving	405,989.93	377,208.33
Other Income	12,962.59	44,855.86
Total Income	418,952.52	422,064.19
Spending		
Education and Ministry	31,660.19	33,000.00
Operating	58,440.40	56,420.83
Personnel & Related	321,034.63	332,643.36
Total Expenses	411,135.22	422,064.19
Net Income Year to Date	7,817.30	0.00

From January through November, we have taken in \$7,817.30 more than we have spent. We are still doing better than anticipated. We have spent \$213,749.24 on capital projects including the downstairs renovation, drinking fountains, concrete repair, gutter replacement and new exit doors. This funding comes from a separate account and is not included above.

Thank you for your faithful giving!

Nancy Lamberson
Treasurer

Online Giving

Our new church management program makes online giving very easy! Access it through our website, app, or scan this QR code. You can give one-time gifts or set up recurring giving to happen on whatever schedule you choose.



Stewardship



If you have not sent in your pledge for your 2024 giving yet, pledge forms are available at church or by scanning this QR code. Paper forms can be brought on Sundays or mailed to the church office. Our Goal is 150 families pledging! Check the status on the scarecrow poster outside the main office. As of this printing (12/12/23) we’ve had 106 families pledge.



BIBLE & THEOLOGY

As messengers of the Good News, we are called to “live a life worthy of the calling we have received” (Eph. 4). Sometimes, people outside the faith may notice our different way of living, and become intrigued. Even back to the very beginnings of our Christian community, people noticed how the faithful lived their lives differently.

Below, I have pasted snippets of a translated correspondence between a Roman Governor named Pliny and an Emperor named Trajan, about how to deal with Christians. Pay special attention to the boldened text – the behavior of the early Christians, even when faced with death by persecution. (forgive the dense writing...)

PLINY'S CORRESPONDENCE TO TRAJAN (112 AD)

Sir,

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offences it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent.

...They asserted...that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, **but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not to falsify their trust, nor refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and assemble and to partake of food – but ordinary and innocent food.**

... I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved... for the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms.

TRAJAN'S REPLY TO PLINY

My Pliny,

You observed proper procedure, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians... They are not to be sought out; **if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished**, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it – that is, by worshipping our gods – even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance.



ADULT ED MINISTRY

Reflections & Learnings

The **Adult Education Sunday School Hour** continues! Starting in January, we will have the following groups available: Bible Study (Downstairs Dining Hall); Parenting Coffee Hour (Fellowship Room); and the Young Adult group (Bell Tower Room).

Our **Young Adult** lunch continues on Sundays, 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM, after service (and before football!). If you have an interest in providing (and/or hosting) a meal for this special group, please contact Mark Slomski. The **Young Adult** group is also discerning together a possible Saturday evening connect at the church. Depending on when you are reading this article, a group of 6 young adults are planning to attend (of have just recently attended) the **Passion Conference** in Atlanta, Georgia (January 3-5). An estimated 60,000 young adults are expected to attend.

Our **Corporate Prayer Initiative** continues! After a season of discernment, we have combined our corporate prayer sessions into the 9:00 AM time slot. The activity is quite simple: *come, pray, and leave!* It is a wonderful time for us to pray to God, praise God and asking for guidance (and other things!).

The **Adult Education Ministry Team** continues its efforts and planning for the 2024 Sunday school groups. Please continue to keep this team in your prayers as they serve in this important ministry.

Looking Forward

Sunday School Hour – Weekly 9:45 AM – 10:45 AM

Young Adult Lunch – Weekly 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM

Men's Breakfast – Wednesday's @ 7:00 AM

Young Adult Saturday Evening Connect – Saturday, December 30

Young Adult Conference Trip – January 3-5



Mark Slomski | Pastor of Youth & Adult Ministry | Mark.Slomski@uccdga.org | 585-455-7491



“We have come to worship him” Matthew 2:2

January 6 is the anniversary of the Magi arriving seeking Jesus and wanting to worship Him. Gentiles were seeking to worship Jesus.

In 2024 we continue to worship God and give witness to His glory. As the body of Christ on earth we become the hands and feet of Jesus in Canandaigua and beyond our borders.

We are a mission focused congregation. In 2023 the generous contributions of prayer, time, and finances have supported more than twenty regional programs, provided extra support to our missionary families, and connected with our denominational ministries. Praise be to God.

In 2024 mission trips to Joplin (MO), Nicaragua, Newark (NY), and Mexico are planned. Christian camps continue planning programs for our children's faith to increase. Services with Christian compassion and human connections will be provided with a loving smile to people needing a safe place to sleep, food, medical services, and clothing. Pray for these programs and continue to give faithfully.

Our four experienced missionary families continue to connect people across cultural, language, and distance barriers in their search for safety and love. Each family is laboring with refugees pushed away from their ancestral homes. ZOOM enables Alethia and Ryan White to connect with churches in western Europe, the BGs connect with churches in Central and South America, Patti and Tim Long connect with educational unit serving Central America and Mexico, and Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather seek to bring reconciliation with displaced people from Sudan and South Sudan.

Working together in 2024 The United Church will continue to help seekers find Jesus. We will continue to:

- Clothe the babies (In November we provided 715 diapers and 17 individual packages of wipe. Moms and babies are very grateful. Thank you)
- Feed the hungry with contributions to food pantries and by assisting with food distribution.
- Provide clean water and health services in Mexico and Nicaragua.
- Welcome the refugee and strangers arriving in our area.
- Use Christian camp to provide experiences for our youth and Christian leadership training for college students.
- Assist with medical services.
- Listen to the discouraged.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. MAY ALL SEEKERS FIND JESUS.

Nicaragua Mission Trip Support

On February 8-17, 2024, Mike Walker and Lynn Bernard and our Elmira team will be going to Nicaragua on a mission trip. Our team has been going to Nicaragua since 2015. Their goals are to install solar in their medical clinic, do water testing and evaluation, and first aid training to cover burns, wounds, and dehydration. They also will have three days of VBS for the children.

In January there will be a donation box in the Welcome Center to offset the cost of this mission trip. Thank you in advance for your support.

Please join us for a “Day of Service” on Monday, January 15th in the dining room at the United Church. In honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Presbytery of Geneva is offering a “Day of Service” to pack Church World Service (CWS) Hygiene Kits and School Kits. Let's meet and greet around 10:00am. We'll begin packing at 10:30 and break for a fellowship lunch around noon. Area Presbyterian and Baptist Churches will be invited to come together in fellowship and service and our Mission Committee is providing the lunch.

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Psalm 133

Called to Care, Canandaigua has had a busy 2023 and is looking forward to the year ahead. We have already welcomed and resettled eight families from either Ukraine, Haiti or Guatemala. We look forward to two more families arriving around the first of the year. Apartments are being furnished for them and Good Neighbor Teams are preparing for the welcome and resettlement tasks. Our volunteers find this rewarding work and the families coming from situations of war and violence are appreciative to find the safety and friendships that the community of Canandaigua offers them.

Our organization has been blessed with help and support from many in the community, including from United Church members. As we move through our second year and prepare for a third, we recognize some in leadership will be stepping down and others will be stepping into these roles. And the “asks” for your support may be a bit different. We find we lack some volunteers to help in important ways. We are seeking more volunteers to help with our varied fundraising activities. You might want to serve on the committee that meets monthly, or you might simply help with a specific fundraiser like the “Chasin’ the Blues” coming up in February. Or you might be available to help at our Spring or Fall “Chicken BBQ’s.” Or you might help the task group in writing grants or annual appeal letters.

We find ourselves currently in the important work of advocacy. The Ukrainian and Haitian families are here under the two-year temporary Humanitarian Parole Program meaning that after their two years they would return to their countries. We cannot envision that for them! We have brought in lawyers to advise them on ways that they can change their status. We, under Wendy Stoddard’s leadership, are offering ways for volunteers to appeal to our legislators to provide for sound immigration policies for these vulnerable families.

We are also looking for another “health advocate.” Someone retired from the health care field would be our choice. Nancy Garrison has served us well and will continue, but someone to assist her to set up health care appointments for new families, be on call to give health advice, and accompany family members to their appointments would be ideal. Could this be you? Or do you know of someone?

We would also be served well with some volunteers who could assist us in helping our families with budgeting and preparation to file income taxes. You do not have to be a CPA but maybe you handle your own family’s budgeting and tax prep and might want to share that knowledge and experience.

Our education committee is re-energizing itself and will be assisting families to find childcare or activities for our preschool children, preparing to register school age children, and offering adults opportunities for English Classes. Currently we are driving family members to Geneva for FLCC classes. Would you be able to drive one day of the week for a month at a time so that our new families can become fluent quickly?

Please reach out to me or to Sonya Brooks, Cathy Bush, or Wendy Stoddard if you would like to learn more about any of these volunteer opportunities.

As always, we appreciate your prayers for us, our families and for peace around the world. As you make plans for your year-end giving, please consider *Called to Care, Canandaigua*.

With gratitude and hopefulness...
Linda Werts

Silent Auction 2024

The Mission Committee is planning a Silent Auction for June 2-June 9, 2024. The funds raised for our Trip Fund will assist our Youth and Adults as they go out into the mission field. For example: Group Workcamp trips by the Youth Group, Mission Trips to Mexico to install clean water plants through Living Waters for the World, and Mission Trips to Nicaragua with AMOS to provide health clinics, Computer labs and libraries.

We are asking you to prayerfully consider how you can help us raise money for our Trip Fund by participating as a donor of an auction item, a member of the planning committee, a bidder at the auction, or an auction worker. It takes much planning and many hands to make this happen. We would appreciate any help you can give us.

Donations for the auction can be home crafted items, store bought items, gift baskets, pledges of your time or talents to help someone [such as 1 or 2 hours of gardening or babysitting time]; antiques, a boat ride on Canandaigua Lake, a home cooked meal for a group of people, etc.

To volunteer to help plan, please contact Regina Allen at 585-398-3918



YOUTH MINISTRY

A year in review, with contributions made by our youth.

The new year always brings another opportunity to reflect. With one year officially completed in my pastoral role, I recall a number of wonderful experiences and learnings. As you can imagine, working with youth produces quite a few funny memories. Our youth are quite aware of this fact, and have asked me to start writing a book on my experiences. While I am not yet prepared to pursue a book, a lamplighter article seems like a reasonable first step. What you will read below is a very small sampling, reviewed and approved by our students. Our wonderful youth are quite eager to share these experiences with the rest of the church family, and are proud of their accomplishments!

Pray for me!
Mark

A Rookie Youth Pastor Never Thought...

...He’d Have To Say:

*(Context intentionally **not** provided)*

There is a child on the roof? **Quickly followed by:** There should be no children on the roof!

Do not throw rocks at humans!

Do not climb that waterfall! **Quickly followed by:** Please get down off that waterfall!

How many **hours** have you all been carving those sticks?

...He’d Have To Experience:

Having my PowerPoint formatting graded by the students before teaching... Every week

Trying not to get trampled by our eager middle schoolers as we “walk” to Bible study... Every week

Being included in a middle school email group chat, which now has officially over 550 email messages (at the time of this writing).

Remembering how to say my very, very long nickname:
Reverend Pastor Mister Markarious Arelius Iksmols Kram VII

Youth Pranks – A Small Sampling

My phone and car keys went “missing”

I was ambushed by 8 high school students with nerf guns

The youth decided to lock us out of a youth room



Mark Slomski | Pastor of Youth & Adult Ministry | Mark.Slomski@uccdga.org | 585-455-7491

YOUTH MINISTRY

Reflections & Learnings

The Cause youth program continues their journey together through the “Can I Ask that curriculum”. Recently, they have discussed the contents of the chapter titled “Does God discriminate against women?”. At the time of this writing, we are approaching our Christmas party at our last Cause event before Christmas. Our youth band is also preparing special music for a Sunday service in December.

Our Youth Ministry Team continues their faithful work in youth ministry! There is much work coordinated around our programs, fundraisers, special events, trips, and more. We are blessed with our members, who graciously use their gifts to support our youth. In 2024, we will be inviting our Youth Sunday School teachers to join our team as we discern together how we continue our ministry for our youth.

Our Youth Sunday School continue their activities between church services! For our High School students, they are journeying through a series titled The Outsiders, where our group will learn about how to live in the Kingdom of God every day.

The Middle School Youth Club group has recently covered sessions about forgiveness, community, being known by God, and remembering the God is with us. These sessions are all produced by Hyfi curriculum.

For December, our Special Events included our annual Christmas Mall Shopping Trip. We also concluded our 2024 Calendar fundraiser, selling out our calendars in three weeks! This fundraiser aids our students in covering some of the cost for their 2024 mission trips, including Camp Barnabas and Group Workcamp Week of Hope. In January, we will be hosting our Potato Bar fundraiser during the annual meeting, to support the trips as well.

Our Monthly School Youth Connects continue! All of our school districts are completing their third round of connections. These mid-week connections are aimed at providing positive connections with their faith family. This is also a great time for the parents to connect with one another, as well! Check out the dates below for the next connection dates, times, and locations.

Looking Forward

- Connect Marcus Whitman – January 8 @ 2:30 PM (Gorham Free Library) (moved because of MLK holiday)
- Connect Canandaigua – January 10 @ 6:45 AM (North Road Tim Horton’s)
- Connect Victor – January 17 @ 6:45 AM (Main Street Tim Horton’s)
- Princess Pajama Party & Young Lions Event – January 19 – Overnight Event!
- Potato Bar Fundraiser – January 21 @ Annual Meeting (after service)

Miscellaneous Things...



I would like to thank everyone who sent me cards, delivered some homemade food and said prayers for me while I have been recovering from my accidental fall in October. They were very much appreciated. It is taking longer than I anticipated but Chuck has been doing a good job and I hope to see you all soon.

Sharon Meyer

Did you know that Rev. John Tharp has written a book?

Look for a display copy near the office and if you’d be interested in buying one, put your name on the list (they’re also available on Amazon or Walmart).



John R. Tharp was issued a challenge while preparing for a class reunion: Could he bicycle all the way to the event? The author's wife, however, decided to make it more interesting. "Why don't you just cross the whole country?" she asked. After all, she knew her husband was no stranger to adventure. Scuba diving, mountain climbing, skiing, and trips to Hawaii, Africa, the Middle East, numerous islands in the Caribbean, Panama, St. Luci, Australia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the Bahamas have kept life exciting. Taken in tandem, the two challenges left the fifty-one-year-old pastor with only one choice: He decided to brave the wilds of the western deserts, thrill to the steep verticals of the Rockies, take in the sweeping vistas of the Great Plains, and make his way to the lush hills of the eastern seaboard. Along the way, he was deeply touched by the marvels of nature, interesting people, and amazing coincidences that ignited his faith and brought a deeper hue to the rich colors of the adventure.



Stampin’ Up!

The next Stampin’ Up class is scheduled for January 20th from 9 - 12. We will be making the cards pictured below! If you have any questions or are interested in signing up by Janaury 14th, contact Sharon Meyer.



CHILDREN’S AND FAMILY MINISTRY

What’s happened...

During the month of December, our Youth Club kids learned about Advent during Bible time and Worship time. We also made Advent wreaths during Recreation time. On **December 13**, the Youth Club kids and some adults went to **Elm Manor** to sing **Christmas carols** and hymns for the residents there. What a privilege to share the joy of the season through song. **Youth Club ministry** will take an extended **break for the holidays**, and we will **meet again on January 10, 2024**.

The **Sunday school** children and youth shared a **Christmas Pageant** with our church family on Sunday, **December 17 at 10am** (during the Sunday school hour). The beloved annual tradition is a fun way to involve preschool through High School aged kids in the retelling of the Christmas story from scripture. Each year, a variety of children are able to participate with both speaking and non-speaking roles. Thank you for supporting the children of our church by attending this pageant. **Sunday school classes will resume on January 7, 2024**.

Thank you for your generosity in helping others during the Christmas season! Our congregation fulfilled 100 gift tags through St. Benedict’s Parish (St. Mary’s) as well as some tags through Family Promise on the Christmas Angel Tree.

What’s happening...

Since we were unable to have an Intergenerational 5th Sunday school class on December 31, due to the holidays, please **mark your calendar** for “**Coffee and Connection**” on **Sunday, February 18, 2024** during the **Sunday school hour (9:45-10:45)**. This will be an informal time of connection, along with coffee and light snacks, open to all in our church family. Coffee and Connection will be held in the fellowship room.

Youth Club kids will **invite friends** to join them for one night of **Youth Club** on **January 24, 2024**. Each year, we invite friends to join us for one night. It is exciting to share the fun we have at Youth Club with our friends – and some of them even decide to join Youth Club for the rest of the year!

Our church family is invited to **Mertensia Park** for **sledding** on **Saturday, January 27, 2024** (weather permitting). We will be there from **1pm-3pm**. Bundle up, bring a sled, invite friends and family, and join the fun!

Upcoming Events...

Sunday, December 31 – *No Early Service or Sunday school*; **Prayer service at 11am**

Sunday, January 7 – 8:45am service, 9:45am **Sunday school resumes** for all ages; 11am service

Wednesday, January 10 – Youth Club resumes

Wednesday, January 24 – Youth Club **bring a friend night**

Saturday, January 27 – **Sledding** at Mertensia Park (weather permitting), 1-3pm

Sunday, February 18 – No Sunday school; **Coffee and Connection** in the **Fellowship room at 9:45am**

CHILDREN’S AND FAMILY MINISTRY

Save the dates...

Make plans to jump in to Scuba VBS!! **July 8-12, 2024, 9am – 12noon**; Kick-off: Sun., July 7, 2024 at 6:30pm



All children, ages 4 years old through those who completed 5th grade, are welcome to participate! Children/teens who completed 6th – 12th grade are encouraged to volunteer!

Personal reflection...

Now that the holidays are winding down, we step into a new year. A new year often marks a time to reflect on the past and make plans for the future. Many people, including myself, may make a New Year’s Resolution; those more ambitious may make many resolutions. Of course, it’s important to reflect on the past, to learn and grow from it. But we do have to be careful not to let it define who we are and who we can be. We have all made mistakes, big and small. For us as Christians, we have the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He forgives our sins (mistakes), no matter what. And He offers us freedom and a new life in Him. Thank God for His grace so freely given!

I love to make plans. One could say I am a planner. I like to make lists for my day and plans for my week. I enjoy planning what I will be doing in 6 months and plan and dream about what I might be doing in 6 years. I thrive with a good plan. I love to check things off the lists I make for myself. There are two problems with my love of planning. First, I don’t like my plans to be changed or interrupted. And, as a wife and a mom with 3 kids, that happens a lot. Over the years, I have learned to deal with these unexpected changes more graciously, but I am still learning. Second, though I certainly pray for God to guide and direct my daily life, I’m not always a great listener to Him and His Spirit. I get arrogant thinking I know the best way and the most efficient way to go about my day and ensure all my tasks are completed. But God often shows me a better way, as long as I am willing to see it. So, while it’s good to have a plan and be organized, it’s even better to truly lay it all down and let Jesus lead me each day in the way He would have me go. I think I know what my New Year’s resolution will be, what’s yours?

“*We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.*” Proverbs 16:9 (NLT)