



JANUARY 2026



IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA
631 Grand Street, Allegan Michigan



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Joy Winger - January 5
Amarilla Burnett - January 6
Bobbie DeVries - January 7
Lillian Horwath - January 7
Judith Caudill - January 12
Karen Acosta - January 12
Pat Jones - January 15
Pam Kraai - January 17
Keith Scott - January 17
Willow Goodyke - January 24





JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Michael & Maryann Fusillo – January 19



WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS FOR JANUARY

January 4

Reader - Karen Acosta
Assistant - Jim Horwath
Counters - Joyce Davis & Nancy Brauer
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

January 11

Reader - Bernie Lenau
Assistant - Donna Preisler
Counters - Joyce Davis & Mike Aksamit
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

January 18

Reader - Michele Radke
Assistant - Mike Fusillo
Counters - Joyce Davis & Sharon Aksamit
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

January 25

Reader: - Sharon Aksamit
Assistant: - Mike Aksamit
Counters: - Joyce Davis & Karen Acosta
Greeters: - Jim & Marie Combs

WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS: We really appreciate everyone that serves during our worship service and *would love to have more people involved*. If you would like to serve as a reader, worship assistant, counter, or greeter, please talk to Pastor Chris or Ken Kingsbury. We can be reached in the office Monday through Thursday from 9 am to 1pm.

CHRISTMAS EVE POINSETTAS

TO THE GLORY OF GOD.....

Mike and Karen Acosta

Jim and Amy Battaglia

IN MEMORY OF.....

George & Virginia Reeder by Nancy Boysen

Aaron Rinkema by Jeremy Combs

Our Parents by Michael & Maryann Fusillo

Denny Kraai by Pam Kraai

Bruce & Betsy Watts (My Parents) by Pam Kraai

Lyn Kingsbury by Ken Kingsbury

Floyd & Bernadine Kingsbury by Ken Kingsbury

All our family members who have gone to the Lord by Bernie & Laura Lenau

Gene & Grace Melland by Craig Melland

Becky Palmer by Craig Melland

Jerry & Barb Richlich by Alan & Lori Querback

Glenn & June Querback by Alan & Lori Querback

Amado Resendiz by Alan & Lori Querback

IN HONOR OF.....

Scarlett Burnett's first Christmas by Amarilla & Tyler Burnett

Boy Scouts of America by Jeremy Combs

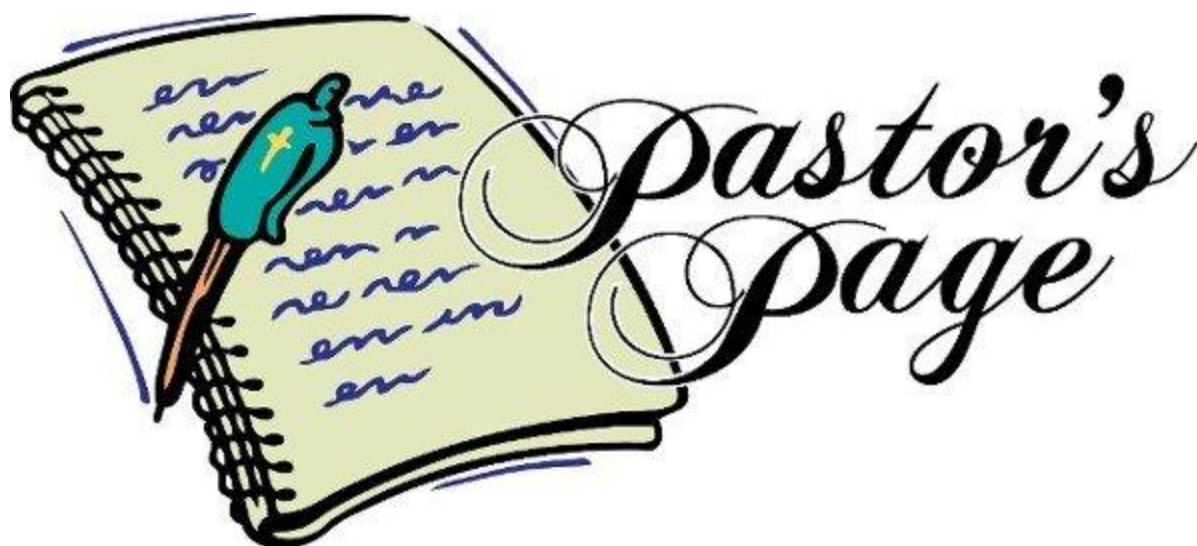
Our Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren by Russ & Joyce Davis

Our Daughters and their Families by Michael & Maryann Fusillo

Our Grandchildren; Liam, Mason, Henry, Holland, & Lennon by Denny & Meri Gorr

Emily Ottinger by Pastor Chris Laughlin





January 2026: Things That Jesus Didn't Say and Aren't in the Bible, Part 1:

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

-Psalm 146:7b-9

For the first six months of 2026, I'll cover six common misconceptions about the Christian faith – generally things that Jesus didn't say or things that aren't in the Bible. Somehow, many in the Church have come to believe that these are Christian faith / teaching / doctrine when they are not – and some of them are harmful.

This month, we will start with my (least) favorite saying / aphorism / proverb:

“God Helps Those Who Help Themselves”

First, Jesus did not say this, and it is not in the Bible. Anywhere. You are welcome to double-check me, of course, but you will be looking for what is not there and the Bible is a long book, so set aside a goodly block of time.

(If you aren't interested in the historical origins of this saying, you can skip this paragraph.) It appears to come to us from the ancient Greeks

(Sophocles in *Philoctetes* and Euripedes in *Hippolytus Veiled*, c430 – 409 BC) through the French (Jean de La Fontaine in *Le chartier embourbe*, c1650) to the English Algernon Sidney and finally Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1736).

But there are many Christians who believe this, and it's really a problem. Here's why:

Because Jesus comes to us. He doesn't save us because of what we do – he saves us because of who he is. He initiates the relationship. Or, as he says it (John 15:5, 16):

I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.... You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last...

God doesn't wait for us to get our act together; God comes to us and help us before we can act. As the Apostle Paul puts it (Romans 5:6, 8, 10):

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

In other words, God helps us – saves us – when we couldn't help ourselves, when we couldn't do anything for ourselves. We would be God's *enemies* – but in Christ, God calls us friend (John 15:15).

Strictly speaking, the phrase “God helps those who helps themselves” is heresy (a scary word, I know, but I really just use it to mean “wrong”). It's not new, it was espoused by a theologian called Pelagius around AD 400. The Church decided that he was wrong (the Council of Ephesus declared his work to be heresy in 431), and Luther was very clear about human volition in his explanation of Third Article of the Creed “I believe in the Holy Spirit...”

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers.

Luther's friend, Philip Melanchthon, put it differently in the Augsburg Confession (II):

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God's eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit. Rejected, then, are the Pelagians...

Now, does that absolve us of all earthly responsibility? No. I don't get to blame God if I fail my Army Fitness Test. I still need to run, do push-ups, hold a plank, practice deadlifts with a hex bar, etc. But I don't save myself. And God often helps me when I don't even know what's good for me, not because I earned it, but because God is loving, kind, and gracious / graceful.

God helps those who don't help themselves. And thanks be to God for that, because otherwise, we'd all be up a creek...

SDG,

Pr. Chris

You may have noticed that the translation was a little different on Christmas Eve. The ELCA, and its resources (we use Sundays and Seasons) have switched from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) to the New Revised Standard Version: Updated Edition (NRSVue) (don't blame me – they didn't consult with me on the name). We are no longer able to access the previous translation (you can't even buy the Protestant editions of the NRSV online anymore, as the copyright holder has withdrawn access). I'm still getting used to it as well, as you probably noticed when I stumbled through it on Christmas Eve.

Fun fact for the Epiphany: How many magi were there? Scripture does not specify. Matthew tells us that there were three gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), but it doesn't say how many magi brought those gifts. Tradition assumed that there was a magi for each gift, but there might have been two and there might have two dozen, and they probably had an entourage (guards, servants, etc.). Tradition later assigned them names (Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchoir) and put them from different regions of the world (Europe, Asia, and Africa, I think), and while this is a nice way to symbolize the peoples of the

world coming to worship Jesus, it's almost certainly nonsense. Magi were likely Zoroastrian priests, clergy of the religion of ancient Persia, and Persia was Rome's enemy.

For the fourth year, we will celebrate the Epiphany with Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell at 5pm on the Epiphany (Tuesday, 6 January); Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas will preach.

While Sandie and I are loathe to cancel worship, we have in the past and we will again if the weather is brutal. If necessary, I will send an e-mail and post to Facebook, WWMT News Channel 3, WOOD TV8, and Fox17. If Allegan schools are closed for weather, church activities (like Bible study) are also canceled. (And when I travel, I will make sure that I take with me the information to post to the news channels, but please note: I will be in Central Time twice in January, so I may not post as early as usual.)

I will be at Fort Hood in Texas from 12 – 17 January (please pray with me that my flights will be on time) to train chaplains who are going overseas; I will travel starting after worship on the 11th. I will be at the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois from 26 January through 1 February. Pastor Jim Foster will lead worship on Sunday, 1 February, and I will be back in the office on Monday, 2 February.

To everyone who makes the ministry at Immanuel possible, from the folks who lead us in singing to the folks who make the slides and the bulletins to the folks who read and assist to the folks who donate to the school to the folks who deliver to the school to the folks who set up the altar to the leaders who make decisions and clean and set up to all the people I'm forgetting... Thank you!

Also, thank you for the wonderful Christmas gift! I plan to take it to the 60th Anniversary Star Trek convention!

As I said last month, many of you were not here four years ago when I arrived. As such, I need to review what I told the congregation back then (leaving out what has changed):

If you have an emergency (in the Army we talk about emergencies as a threat to “life, limb, or eyesight”), please call anytime of the day or night. My mobile number is in the directory. For all non-emergencies, please text or e-mail, and I will reply during business hours.

Every Thursday morning, I have a standing meeting with other clergy to discuss the upcoming readings for two Sundays (ten days); we rotate who leads and that leader chooses the breakfast restaurant where we meet. My Thursday morning meeting is a priority for me because it makes me a better preacher and teacher, and because it is good for my soul.

Sometimes, I’m not in the office because I’m going to be in the office late that day or because I’m at the hospital visiting one of you or because I’m responding to an emergency or because I’m having breakfast with one of you. Ken is in the office Monday through Thursday, 9am – 1pm. I try to send him my weekly schedule (though it might change when three of you are in the hospital), so he *should* know where I am (if I haven’t changed it on him...)

You are welcome to find and friend me on Facebook. I accept all friend requests from parishioners but do not seek out anyone; if you do find me and “friend” me, please let me know in person, as I am *very* aware of scams, bots, and internet ne’er-do-wells. Please know that I spend very little time on Facebook, so it is not an efficient way to communicate with me.

On Christmas Eve, NRSVue



UPCOMING EVENTS

Quilting Group meets every Tuesday in the Quilting Room at 9am.

Bible Study Group meets every Wednesday at 10am in the Study Room. We discuss the Bible Readings for the upcoming Sunday Worship Service. Since Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve both fall on Wednesday this year, there will NOT be Bible Study on those dates

Praise Team Practice meets every Wednesday at 4pm. Watch the Bulletin and the church web page for changes during the holidays.

COFFEE FOR VETS meets on the *second Tuesday* of every month in the Fellowship Hall at 9am for coffee, cinnamon rolls, and fellowship. If you know of a veteran, please invite them to join our group. This is a great way for them to have fellowship and discuss shared experiences.



Zumba meets in the Fellowship Hall every Wednesday at 6pm and every Saturday at 10am, unless there is a conflict with a church function.

BIBLE AND BREW will meet on Monday January 12th at 5:30pm at the Trestle Stop in Hamilton. This is a great time to get to know one another better over a good meal and the individual discussion of interesting questions. Please come and join us. The signup sheet is on the Round Table.



THE CHURCH COUNCIL will meet at 6:30pm on Monday January 19th in the Adult Bible Study Room. This will be our first meeting with new officers and members.

BOOK GROUP will meet on Monday January 26th at 1pm in the Fellowship Hall. This month we will read and discuss *The Ugly Cry* by Danielle Henderson. We always choose the next month's reading at each gathering so join us and share your favorite book.



DEGREENING OF THE CHURCH: will begin immediately after worship on Sunday January 4th. If you are able and willing to help out it will be greatly appreciated. Many hands make the task easier and faster.

COUNTERS, READERS, & WORSHIP ASSISTANTS are needed. We really enjoy having our laity participate in the service and the financial accountability of our church. But we really need more volunteers; *especially counters*. Please consider volunteering and let Ken Kingsbury in the office know.



CLASSES RESUME: The Confirmation Class will resume on Sunday January 11th and the Adult Study Group will resume on Sunday January 18th.

EPIPHANY WORSHIP SERVICE will begin at 5:00pm on Tuesday, January 6th at Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell (290 12th Street). Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas of the Lower Southwest Michigan Synod (ELCA) will be preaching. Everyone is invited to attend, and it may be wise to be early as this will be a well-attended event.



LIFE SAVING DEVICES: We have all three on the shelf just outside the kitchen area. The AED (Automated External Defibrillator) is a portable, life-saving medical device that analyzes heart rhythms and delivers an electric shock (defibrillation) to reset the heart during sudden cardiac arrest. Designed for use by laypeople, it provides clear instructions and voice prompts, guiding users to place pads on the chest and deliver shocks if



needed, often in conjunction with CPR, significantly increasing survival chances. The **LifeVac Choking Device** assists someone choking. Choking is a scary thing. It can happen to anyone, at any time. And if you're unlucky enough to be choking and no one knows how to perform the Heimlich maneuver



correctly, the LifeVac is handy little device. It uses suction power to remove any obstruction from an airway. And for any Opioid overdoses we have the NARCAN Nasal Spray Emergency Treatment Single-Dose Devices. Please become familiar with where these devices are located.

ARMY DUTY: Pastor Chris will be at Fort Hood, Texas from Monday January 12th through Saturday, January 17th. Then he will be at the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois from Monday January 26th through Sunday February 1st. During both of these events, please contact Pastor Nicole Smith at Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell if there is any pastoral emergency.



GIVING TREE UPDATE: You amaze me again by your generosity toward five children and their parents with toys and needs this Christmas season. We got them bedding, socks, throw blankets, hats, gloves, clothing, something fun (from a fishing pole to Legos to art supplies!) and more. Oh they also got lots of food including a turkey and ham and a big plate of leftover cookies from the youth fundraiser. Thanks to the mission and outreach team who helped in many ways from getting the tags prepped to delivering all that YOU donated.
Thank you Immanuel, Sharon



PAUSITIVITY: Earlier last year several made donations to the cause to bring a special dog to the students of L.E. White school. They now have their dog and we wish to thank everyone who contributed to make this happen. Immanuel always seems to find a way to bring peace, joy, and ministry to our community. So **THANK YOU!**

TIGER ROARS

Quick updates on great things happening at APS

Middle school welcomes Wiley



The staff and students at L.E. White Middle School were thrilled to welcome their facility dog, Wiley, to campus in October. Since arriving, Wiley has been busy stealing hearts and supporting students throughout the day, offering comfort, encouragement, and a calming presence when it is needed most.

Students love “Squirt”