

Vine Street Journal

Johnstown, PA

First Lutheran Church

2026

A message from Pastor Christy...

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" (Matthew 2:1-2)

Epiphany reminds us that God reveals Himself in ways both wondrous and unexpected. Guided by a star, the Magi set out on a journey that led them not to a palace filled with power, but to a child wrapped in humility – Jesus, the Light of the world. In this simple and holy moment, God made His promise clear: Christ has come for all people, bringing grace, mercy, love, and hope to a world longing for good news.

After the joyful hustle and bustle of Christmas – decorations, gatherings, cooking, traveling, gift-giving, and perhaps a bit of exhaustion – Epiphany invites us to slow our pace. The carols still echo, the lights may still glow, but now we are given space to breathe, reflect, and rest in God's presence. Like the Magi who paused their long journey to kneel in worship, we are reminded that faith is often strengthened when we stop, pause, notice, and give thanks for what God has already done.

This season also gives us permission to enjoy the quieter joys of togetherness. Faith does not always have to feel busy or serious; it can include laughter, play, and simple moments of delight. With that in mind, I invite you to enjoy something included in this newsletter just for fun – see if you can find them (there are 2) and have fun. Whether it becomes a lighthearted distraction or a peaceful moment of rest, may it bring a smile and a sense of calm after a busy season.

As we continue through Epiphany, may Christ's light shine in both our stillness and our activity. May it guide our steps, renew our hearts, and remind us that God's grace meets us exactly where we are – drawing us ever closer to the joy, peace, love, and hope found in Christ Jesus.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Christy

Word Scramble

1. RENPTSE
2. HIYADOL
3. JULYOF
4. NSWOKELFA
5. TOELSMITE



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PASTOR

Christy Harford

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Kim Rauch

OFFICE MANAGER

Deneillia (Danny) Mitchell

CLEANER

Paul Eisenhuth

CHURCH COUNCIL

Barry Critchfield (Treasurer), Rob Abele (Vice-President), Bill Price (President), James Hargreaves, Karen Hargreaves, Jody Kirk (Secretary), Rick Blackford, Josh Rinaman, Janice Hill, Dick Schrott, Fawn Slonka, Shirley Waclo.

~ PASTORAL ACTS ~

Pastor Christy Harford
Funeral Service
Donald Brocious
12/30/25

~ CONTRIBUTIONS ~

CHURCH PRESERVATION FUND

*Donna Caprous
Caryl Swanson
Barry A. Critchfield
Ann Furlong
Jane Hanechak
Richard & Patricia Schrott
Donald & Beverly Brocious
Barbara Penrod
Jennifer Bennear
Debbie & Lance Shomo
Greer Koeller
Danette & Donald Overdorff
Albert Johnson
Carol Allison
Donna Kovalcheck*

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

*Barbara Pingatore – Tuesday noon recital 2026
Donation.*

Kiser Children- Christmas bulletins

(I.M.O Mom & Dad)

Fundraiser – Cookie Walk.

Caryl Swanson – I.H.O Music ministry.

TNR Crew – I.H.O George E. Fattman.

Carol Allison- WM Holl Trust Fund.

Jody Kirk – I.H.O Pastor Christy Harford.



Next Journal Deadline

Tuesday

January 20, 2026

Share your news with us!

Income and Expense Summary as of November 30, 2025

	Current YTD Actual Jan. 1 thru Nov. 30, 2025	Current YTD Budget Jan. 1 thru Nov. 30, 2025	Difference over+/under- Budget
Regular Offering Income	\$145,345.06	\$149,494.32	-\$4,149.26
Trust Fund Income	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other Income	\$2,856.50	\$2,863.00	-\$6.50
TOTAL INCOME	\$148,202.06	\$152,357.32	-\$4,155.26
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$148,297.90	\$162,886.72	-\$14,588.82

In Honor of Barb Pingatore's service and dedication to First Lutheran Church, church council at the December meeting established The Barbara Pingatore Youth Education Fund.



Upcoming worship opportunities:

**January 18 – JOINT
Worship Service** at First Lutheran Church. Please note the time change...**Service will begin at 10:00 am** with a Potluck Lunch to follow.



Council met on December 10, 2025, at 7:00 pm to review reports and conduct new business.

Treasurer Barry Critchfield presented the 2026 spending plan to council for discussion and approval. Predicted total income is \$185,110 with expenses estimated at \$185,009. The budget was approved by council and was presented to the congregation for approval. Council approved a motion to transfer \$6000 from the Trust Fund to the general fund in anticipation of an approximate \$4600 shortfall in the 2025 budget. Council approved benevolent donations to the Synod Mission Support (\$2000), UPJ campus ministry, United Lutheran Seminary-Gettysburg, Sequanota (\$200 each) and West End Food Pantry (\$100); council also is allocating the \$215 donated by members for Christmas/Easter charities to the Food Pantry. Members also donated \$1049 to World Hunger during 2025. Council accepted a proposal from Raimondo Inc. for a yearly inspection of the roof, in order to prevent/mitigate any future leaks/damage. The organ should be fully functional by Christmas Eve services.

A Congregational Meeting took place on December 13 before worship and again on December 14 after worship. During these meetings, the congregation approved the budget for 2026 and elected three individuals—Jessica Boring, Janice Hill, and Vicki Price—to serve on the Council through January 2029.

The next regular council meeting will be January 14, 2026, at 7:00 pm.



The Annual Congregational Meeting:

will be held January 30 and 31, 2026. The purpose of the meeting is to approve the 2025 committee and executive reports. Committee chairpersons are reminded to submit their reports to Danny by **January 16, 2026**.

December Readings and Psalm**January 4 – 2nd Sunday of Christmas**

- Jeremiah 31:7-14
Joy at the gathering of God's scattered flock
- Sirach 24:1-12 (alternate)
Wisdom lives among God's people
- Psalm 147:12-20
Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem, praise your God, O Zion
- Wisdom 10:15-21 (alternate)
We sing, O Lord, to your holy name
- Ephesians 1:3-14
The will of God made known in Christ
- John 1:1-18
God with us: the incarnation of the Word

Epiphany of Our Lord

- Isaiah 60:1-6
Nations come to the light
- Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
All kings shall bow down before him
- Ephesians 3:1-12
The gospel's promise extends to all
- Matthew 2:1-12
Revelation to Christ to the nations of the earth

January 11 – Baptism of Our Lord

- Isaiah 42:1-9
The servant of the Lord brings justice
- Psalm 29
The voice of the Lord is upon the waters
- Acts 10:34-43
Jesus' ministry after his baptism
- Matthew 3:13-17
Revelation of Christ as God's servant

January 18 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

- Isaiah 49:1-7
The servant brings light to the nations
- Psalm 40:1-11
I love to do your will, O my God
- 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Paul's greeting to the church at Corinth
- John 1:29-42
Revelation of Christ as the Lamb of God

January 25 – 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

- Isaiah 9:1-4
Light shines for those in darkness
- Psalm 27:1, 4-9
The Lord is my light and my salvation
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Appeal for unity in the gospel
- Matthew 4:12-23
Revelation of Christ as a prophet

Thought for the month... .

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."

Isaiah 9:2

Complete the song:

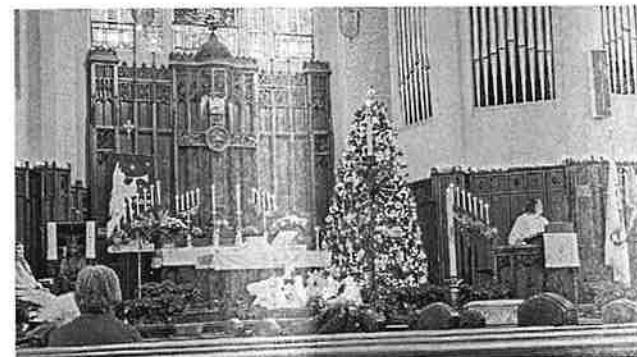
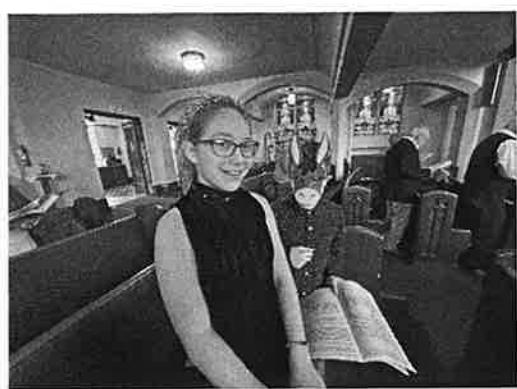
Fill in the lyrics to these holiday tunes.

1. Snowing and blowing up bushels of fun.
Now the _____ has begun.
 - a. Doo wop
 - b. Hip hop
 - c. Jingle hop
2. From now on, your _____ will be out of _____.
 - a. Happiness, mind
 - b. Troubles, sight
 - c. Cares, tune
3. Oh the weather outside is _____. But the fire is so _____.
 - a. Frightful, delightful
 - b. Terrible, nice
 - c. Cold, freezing
4. Said the night _____ to the little _____.
 - a. Candle, light
 - b. Reindeer, boy
 - c. Wind, lamb
5. Sleigh bells _____, are you _____?
 - a. Fall, hearing
 - b. Ring, listening
 - c. Break, throwing

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT 2025...



CHRISTMAS EVE 2025...





The generosity of First Lutherans reaches beyond our church walls, into the community, the church at large and globally. We receive notes of thanks and acknowledgement for many of the gifts given. Acknowledgements received are noted each month in the VSJ and posted on a bulletin board located in the

Christmas At Heritage Ridge

Thanks, You So Very Much to Everyone Who Volunteered to Give the Residents an Extra Nice Christmas. The Entire Building Looks So Festive and Each Resident received a gift Bag Filled with A 2026 Wall Calendar, Tissues , Snacks , And Socks. Bless you for Your Help & Care.

Caryl Swanson

Annual Cookie Walk

A Great Big Thank You to All the Women, and Some Men, Who Baked and Donated Cookies. Thanks Also to Those Who Helped Make Up Over 60 Plates of Cookies for Our Annual cookie walk.

Due To Your Generosity, We Were Able to Raise Over \$600. This Will Be Placed into The Fund – Raising account and Will be Donated to Local Community Needs and Projects. **Cindy Fabo**



Worship & Music Notes...

Hanging of the Greens, Christmas Decorating: Thank you to all who helped decorate the church for Christmas Eve and feed the volunteers. Fawn Slonka, Donna Kovalchek, Vicki and Bill Price, Donna Caprous, Cindy Fabo, Dick Schrott, Bill and Polly Grubb, Kathy Stephenson, Caryl Swanson, Karen and Harry Bennett, Heidi and Chuck Staib, Stephen Griffith, Shirley Waclo, Paul Eisenhuth, Jody Kirk, and Mary Blackford. We had much work to do, but with so many hands, we were done in 2 hours. Beautiful!!

We are now using White Grape Juice for communion. This helps distinguish from the wine. We also have new Cruets for the juice. Check it out!

January 3 and 4: We celebrate Epiphany. We will also be using *Of the Land and Seasons* Liturgy to celebrate the change of seasons.
January 10 and 11: We celebrate the Baptism of our Lord

January 18: We will have a combined service with Benscreek Lutheran at 10AM to celebrate finishing our painting project and the new Organ console. There will be a combined choir for this service. Practices for the combined choir will be on January 4 and 11 after church.

I will be starting a banner committee to evaluate, repair, and rejuvenate our banners. Please let Vicki know if you are interested.

Thank you to the December Altar Guild: Caryl Swanson, Greer Koeller, Vicki Price, Kathy Stephenson, Karen Bennett, Karen Hargreaves, Patty Schrott, Fawn Slonka, Donna Kovalchek, Annie Hayes, and Carol Massingill.

Thank you to the new volunteers to the altar guild. We have teams learning many tasks including Candle filling and care, and Sunday Setup. Training will continue through January. Monday morning at 10am for Candles and Sunday mornings at 10am for Setup.



During this past Advent season, our congregation engaged in two highly successful service projects, demonstrating remarkable generosity and compassion. The contributions received will make an impact on those in need, and we extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who participated.

Our first initiative focused on collecting essential items for children with special needs through the IU08 program. The response was overwhelming, with donations exceeding expectations. We gathered over 290 items, including hats, gloves, scarves, socks, underwear, undershirts, T-shirts, leggings, and complete outfits. These items were available in various sizes to ensure they meet the diverse needs of the children. We are confident that the children who receive these gifts will experience joy and comfort, knowing they are cared for and supported.

The second project involved collecting sweaters and coats for veterans, a cause that resonated deeply within our community. We successfully collected 90 sweaters and 2 coats, with a balanced distribution of 40 sweaters for women and 50 for men. The collection featured a wide array of colors and designs, reflecting the diversity and individuality of the recipients. Each sweater was either tagged or accompanied by a Christmas card, adding a personal touch to each gift. One notable tag read: "I'm not lost: I'm here to spread some love. Please take me to keep you warm," embodying the spirit of kindness and warmth that defined this initiative.

The Outreach Committee wishes to express heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed their time, effort, and resources to ensure the success of these projects. Their collective generosity has made a tangible difference in the lives of many. As the saying goes, "in Whoville, the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day," and through these donations, we hope to inspire similar growth in compassion and community spirit. The recipients of these gifts will undoubtedly feel the warmth of our collective kindness, and their hearts will be touched by the knowledge that they are valued and cared for.





Organ Report

Hopefully, by now, you have heard the Skinner

organ played in worship. For a few weeks in December only a few stops were available. Then some major effort brought much of the organ online for Christmas Eve services. The fullness of tone and the special tone colors brought the carols to life for those celebrating here.

With the updating of the electronics in the console Mark Steiner and his crew check each individual pipe to assure that it plays properly. Soldering connections, checking valves, repairing pipes, and tuning pipes are all a part of the process. With an instrument with around 3000 pipes this is a tedious and time-consuming process.

Mark Steiner brings technical expertise, musical sensitivity, and an understanding of musical worship leadership to his work here at First Lutheran. Work will continue into the new year with connections of the solo and echo divisions, as well as trouble shooting a few problem areas. The console works beautifully and I am enjoying playing a reliable instrument.

Kim Rauch

Stewardship pledge drive ends for now

The stewardship pledge campaign has ended satisfactorily, with 42 pledges toward the regular offering, one fewer than last year.

The total, which accounts for about half the operating budget, is down \$2,600. There were six new pledges and 12 increased pledges; three decreased., and seven returns showed no monetary pledge.

Talent pledges covered nearly all the lay volunteer ministry, which is quite substantial, said George Fattman, stewardship chair. He said the stewardship emphasis would broaden in 2026, urging faithfulness in all aspects of life.

"A good steward is a happy Christian," he said.

Volunteer Page - Month of January

ALTAR GUILD**Saturday**

3 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
 10 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
 17 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill
 24 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
 31 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill

Sunday

4 Donna Caprous, Greer Koeller,
 Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson
 11 Donna Caprous, Greer Koeller,
 Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson
 18 Donna Caprous, Greer Koeller,
 Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson
 25 Donna Caprous, Greer Koeller,
 Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson

ACOLYTES

4 Ushers
 11 Ushers
 18 Ushers
 25 Ushers

COMMUNION ASSISTANT

4 Josh Rinaman
 11 Calvin Anderson
 18 Jody Kirk
 25 Barry Critchfield

LECTORS

3* Fawn Slonka
 4 Josh Rinaman (Cantor)
 10* Fawn Slonka
 11 Abbie Savering
 17* George Fattman
 18 Jody Kirk
 24* Heidi Staib
 25 Ann Furlong
 31* Vicki Price

*Saturdays

SATURDAY PIANISTS

3 Vicki Price/Joel Hoshaw
 10 Linda Prozialeck
 17 George Fattman
 24 Heidi Staib
 31 Vicki Price

SOUND

4 Rick Blackford
 11 Harry Bennett
 18 Calvin Anderson
 25 Rob Abele

VIDEO

4 Rob Abele
 11 Bill Grubb
 18 Bill Price
 25 Bill Hargreaves

TOWER BELLS

Heidi Staib	Sunday 4, 11, 18, 25
Vicar Christy	Monday 5, 12, 19, 26
George Fattman	Tuesday 6, 13, 20, 27
Anne Fattman	Wednesday 7, 14, 21, 28
Vicki Price	Thursday 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Kim Rauch	Friday 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
George Fattman	Saturday 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

COUNCIL GREETER – William Price**FLOWER DELIVERY** – William Price

January 2026

First Evangelical Lutheran Church – Johnstown, Pennsylvania

814-536-7521 email: firstlutheran@wpia.net

Office Hours: Mon. thru Fri. 9 am – 2:00 pm

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
4 2nd Sunday of Christmas 10:45 – Sunday School 11:00-Word & Sacrament OLAS Noon – Joint Choir Rehearsal Noon Hospitality	5 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	6 9:30 a – Undecorating 6:30 – Bell choir 6:30 – Bible Study	7	8 2 – Johnstown Conference Meeting 6:30 – Outreach Planning Meeting	9	10 Baptism of Our Lord 5:00-Word & Sacrament
11 Baptism of Our Lord 10:45 – Sunday School 11:00-Word & Sacrament Noon – Joint Choir Rehearsal Noon-Hospitality	12 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	13 6:30 – Bell choir 7 – Council	14	15	16	17 Epiphany 2 5:00-Word & Sacrament
18 2nd Sunday after Epiphany 10:00-Joint Worship Service Word & Sacrament Potluck to follow in the Social Hall	19 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting 6:30 – Joint Worship & Music - BLC	20 12-VSJ Deadline 6:30 – Bell choir 6:30 – Bible Study	21	22 6:30 – Worship & Music	23	24 Epiphany 3 5:00-Word & Sacrament
25 3rd Sunday after Epiphany 10:45 – Sunday School 11:00-Word & Sacrament Bell Choir Noon-Hospitality	26 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	27 6:30 – Bell choir	28	29	30	31 Epiphany 4 5:00-Word & Sacrament