

# Vine Street Journal

Johnstown, PA

First Lutheran Church

February 2026

## A message from Pastor Christy...

*"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." (Matthew 4:1-2)*

This month often feels like a quiet bridge - we're standing in between seasons. Winter is still hanging on, but we know spring is coming.

In the church, February feels much the same. This month, we are invited into that in-between space of preparation as we turn our attention toward Lent. Lent – the season that invites us to slow down, spend time in prayer and reflection. It is a time that gently calls us back to what matters most and reminds us of God's presence and grace in our everyday lives.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, when we hear these words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." These words aren't meant to weigh us down, but to remind us of the good news: that even in our dust, God meets us with mercy, forgiveness, and new life in Christ.

I hope you'll join us for our Ash Wednesday services at both First Lutheran and Benscreek Lutheran. Service times are: 12:30 pm at Benscreek Lutheran and 7:00 pm at First Lutheran. Walking through Lent together reminds us that faith isn't something we do on our own, but we walk together as the body of Christ.

Thank you for being the church – showing up, caring for one another, praying, and serving in so many ways.

As we all continue this journey, my prayer for each of you is that this February will be a time of reflection, trust, and hope as we prepare our hearts for the joy of Easter.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Christy

## SHARING RECIPES...

Brownie Trifle – Jenny Cruickshank  
13 x 9 pan of prepared brownie mix (according to instructions. Cool)  
Small box of instant chocolate pudding  
½ cup water  
14 oz. can sweetened condensed milk  
2 tubs whipped topping  
½ bag toffee chips (or other candy bars – crushed, shaved chocolate, or M & M's)

Prepare brownie mix according to directions and cool completely.

Mix the pudding mix, ½ cup water and sweetened condensed milk until combined.

Fold in one container of whipped topping.

Layer brownies, ½ chocolate mousse, ½ second container of whipped topping.

Sprinkle ¼ of the candy of choice.

Repeat the layers and top with remaining candy. Refrigerate until serving.



## Vine Street Journal

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FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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### PASTOR

*Christy Harford*

### MINISTER OF MUSIC

*Kim Rauch*

### OFFICE MANAGER

*Deneillia (Danny) Mitchell*

### CLEANER

*Paul Eisenhuth*

### CHURCH COUNCIL

*Jessica Boring, Barry Critchfield (Treasurer),  
James Hargreaves, Karen Hargreaves, Josh  
Rinaman, Janice Hill, Vicki Price, Dick Schrott  
(Vice President), Fawn Slonka (President),  
Shirley Waclo (Secretary).*

### ~ PASTORAL ACTS ~

None.

### ~ CONTRIBUTIONS ~

#### CHURCH PRESERVATION FUND

*Donna Caprous*

*Barry A. Critchfield*

*Ann Furlong*

*Loretta Knapp*

*Richard & Patricia Schrott*

*Donald & Beverly Brocious*

*Barbara Penrod*

*Jennifer Bennear*

*Debbie & Lance Shomo*

*Greer Koeller*

*Albert Johnson*

*Susan & William Hargreaves*

*Linda Prozialeck*

*(I.M.O -Donal Brocious)*

*(I.M.O - Nancy Gay)*

*Given by Jane Hanechak*

*(I.H.O – Barbara Pingatore )*

*Given by Caryl Swanson & Family*

*(I.M.O – Nancy Gay)*

*Given by George & Anne Fattman*

#### Barbara Pinagore Youth Edu Fund

*Karen & James Hargreaves*

*Fawn Slonka – I.M.O Nancy Gay*

*Albert Johnson – I.M.O Nancy Gay*

*Donna Kovalchek- I.M.O Nancy Gay*

#### Special Contributions

*Jane Hanechak – I.M.O Donald Brocious*

*Barbara Penrdo – I.M.O Donald Brocious*



#### Next Journal Deadline

Tuesday

February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Share your news with us!

### Income and Expense Summary as of December 31, 2025

	Current YTD Actual Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31, 2025	Current YTD Budget Jan. 1 thru Dec. 31, 2025	Difference over+/under- Budget
Regular Offering Income	\$158,889.50	\$163,700.00	-\$4,810.50
Trust Fund Income	\$6,000.00	\$15,000.00	-\$9,000.00
Other Income	\$2,856.50	\$3,125.00	-\$268.50
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$167,746.00</b>	<b>\$181,825.00</b>	<b>-\$14,079.00</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$166,937.08</b>	<b>\$181,426.00</b>	<b>-\$14,488.92</b>

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:

**February 1 –**  
*Annual Meeting.*

**February 7 –**  
*Installation of Bishop-*

*elect Kevin Shock. No Saturday evening service.*

**February 8 –** Souper/Super Bowl Party following worship.

**February 17 –** Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner at 6:00 pm.

**February 18 –** Ash Wednesday. Service times: 12:30 pm Benscreek; 7:00 pm First.



Council met on January 14, 2026, at 7:00 pm to review reports and conduct new business.

The Audit Committee conducted an audit of the 2025 accounts and found no discrepancies; the accounts were balanced.

Bishop-elect Kevin Shock has suggested that the Synod purchase the garments and items needed for his installation, with the plan to use them again for future installations. He has requested contributions from congregations for these expenses. In the past, each bishop kept these items themselves. The Council agreed to donate money collected over the years in their 'council box,' which was originally meant to cover the annual council dinner. As there have been no dinners recently, the \$553 collected will now be donated to the Allegheny Synod for this purpose.

Council elected officers for the 2026-2027 council year. They are:

President: Fawn Slonka  
Vice President: Dick Schrott  
Treasurer: Barry Critchfield  
Secretary: Shirley Waclo

The council members and officers will be installed on January 31, 2026, at the worship service.

The next regular council meeting will be February 11, 2026, at 7:00 pm.

**February Readings and Psalm****February 1 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

- Micah 6:1-8  
*The offering of justice, kindness, humility*
- Psalm 15  
*Lord, who may abide upon your holy hill*
- 1 Corinthians 1:18-31  
*Christ crucified, the wisdom and power of God*
- Matthew 5:1-12  
*The teaching of Christ: Beatitudes*

**February 8 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

- Isaiah 58:1-12  
*The fast God chooses*
- Psalm 112:1-10  
*Light shines in the darkness for the upright*
- 1 Corinthians 2:1-16  
*God's wisdom revealed through the Spirit*
- Matthew 5:13-20  
*The teaching of Christ: salt and light*

**February 15 – Transfiguration of Our Lord**

- Exodus 24:12-18  
*Moses enters the cloud of God's glory on Mount Sinai*
- Psalm 2  
*You are my son; this day have I begotten you*
- Psalm 99 (alternate)  
*Proclaim the greatness of the Lord; worship upon God's holy hill*
- 2 Peter 1:16-21  
*The apostle's message confirmed on the mount of transfiguration*
- Matthew 17:1-9  
*Revelation of Christ as God's beloved Son*

**February 18 – Ash Wednesday**

- Joel 2:1-2, 12-17  
*Return to the Lord, your God*
- Isaiah 58:1-12 (alternate)  
*The fast that God chooses*
- Psalm 51:1-17  
*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love*
- 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10  
*Now is the day of salvation*
- Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21  
*The practice of faith*

**February 22 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent**

- Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7  
*Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*
- Psalm 32  
*Mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord*
- Romans 5:12-19  
*Death came through one; life comes through one*
- Matthew 4:1-11  
*The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness for forty days*

Thought for the month. . .

"All go to one place. All are from the dust,  
and to dust all return"

Ecclesiastes 3:20

Joint Worship  
Service 2026





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

Dear First Lutheran Church Members,

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for all the gifts on the Angel Tree that were given to Special Needs Kids,

They are already wearing the gloves, scarves, mittens, socks, underwear, and outfits. The children were so excited to receive these gifts!

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me".  
Amen!

Thank you for your Christian generosity.  
tyna Kaltenbaugh



### *Worship & Music Notes...*

**Church undecorating:** Thank you to all who helped undecorate the church after

Christmas. Fawn Slonka, Donna Kovalchek, John Kiser, Vicki and Bill Price, Donna Caprous, Cindy Fabo, Dick Schrott, Bill and Polly Grubb, Karen Bennett, Heidi and Chuck Staib, Paul Eisenhuth,

Our **Joint Service** with Benscreek on January 18<sup>th</sup> was well received. It was a little cold that day, but we still had 54, with a nice lunch afterwards

**Ash Wednesday:** February 18<sup>th</sup> is Ash Wednesday. First Lutheran service will be at 7pm. Benscreek Lutheran service will be at 12:30 pm.

**Joint Choir:** We will have a Joint Choir for Ash Wednesday at the 7pm service. Practices on Sunday February 8<sup>th</sup> and February 15<sup>th</sup> after church.

Thank you to the **January Altar Guild:** Caryl Swanson, Greer Koeller, Donna Caprous, Vicki Price, Karen Bennett, Fawn Slonka, Donna Kovalchek, Annie Hayes, and Carol Massingill. We will continue training for Altar Guild at 10:15am on Sundays in February for: Set up and Clean up.

Thank you to Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek for buying food in the right size can for our altar flowers! We have 10 new cans for flower delivery.

Thank you to Barb Miltenberger for sewing new anti-tarnish bags for the Missal on the altar and the baptism Pitcher.

## Outreach...

### February Community Outreach

In February we will be collecting items for the UPJ Food Pantry. The Pitt-Johnstown Provides Food Pantry is open to students who may be struggling with food insecurity.

The Pantry accepts the following:

Cans of tuna, cans of chicken, canned stews, canned chili, hash, pork and beans, soups, spaghetti sauce, kidney beans, and jars of peanut butter.

Canned Vegetables: carrots, peas, tomatoes, corn, and boxes of instant potatoes.

Fruits: canned fruits, fruit cups, dried fruits, jelly, raisins, juice boxes, rice, pasta, macaroni and cheese, crackers, cans of ravioli/spaghetti O's, hamburger helper, boxed meals.

Boxes of cereal, instant oatmeal (individual packets), cereal bars, pancake mix, syrup, pop tarts, muffin mix.

Snacks such as tortilla chips, salsa, pringles, cookies, granola bars, microwave popcorn, easy mac, microwaveable non-frozen meals.

Donated items may be left in designated containers in the Lounge or Social Hall. We will also collect at the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper.

### Souper/Super Bowl Party

The Super Bowl Party has become one of the church's most popular gatherings. Following the Church Service on February 8<sup>th</sup> we will have our Tail Gate Party. And of course, collect cans of soup for the local Food Pantries. Please plan to stay after church and have a good time with all, football fans or not.

### Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday falls on February 17<sup>th</sup>. We are all looking forward to the pancake supper and Howard's special dish. And as an extra treat, the Sunday School children will reprise the Egg skit. Plan on coming at 6:00 PM for Pancakes, New Orleans Cajun food and good fun. Following dinner, we will have the Burning of the Palms to end the evening and prepare for the beginning of Lent.

**Daffodil Sale:** Support the "Walk of Hope" by purchasing daffodils. Sign-up sheets are located under the Walk of Hope display in the lounge. Brighten your day with a bunch of these cheerful flowers.

**Walk of Hope Sponsorship:** Sponsorship forms are also available under the display. Consider supporting our team, the "First Lutheran Walkers," by becoming a sponsor. Come join our team!

Church news....

**HELP WANTED**

We are currently seeking volunteer office assistants to cover when Danny is away or needs a day off. The hours would be between 9:00 am and 2:00 pm.

Danny would contact you the evening before/or that morning to ask for coverage.

If you are interested or in need of further information – please contact the church office to be added to the volunteer list.

Thank you for your willingness to serve.



Once again, we held our annual Thanksgiving Dinner, and it was a nice evening. We made 150 dinners.

Thanks to all that contributed cranberry sauce, pies, cool whip, and tea to complement the dinner.

We received compliments from just about everyone as they were leaving on how tasty and filling it was.

I want to say a special thank you to the following volunteers for helping to make, serve, and clean-up:

Jody Kirk, Ann Furlong, Rick Blackford, Bill Weible, Bill & Polly Grubb, Dolores Bennett, Marilyn Pepley, Tyna Kaltenbaugh, Gretel Kaltenbaugh, Vicar Christy, Heidi Purikowsky, Donna Kovalchek, Jen Bennear, Callie Bennear, Joyce Spangler, Jenny Cruickshank, Kathy Howanek, and Fawn Slonka.

As always, New Day and I will be in talks for next year's dinner. This made my 26<sup>th</sup> year doing this. When we started this, there were 6 different locations. It is now down to just three. Others stopped for various reasons and said mostly it is too much work. I think this speaks a lot about what we do here at First!

I am happy to lead this each year for us and look forward to many more!

Thank you all!  
Howard Bennett



## Volunteer Page - Month of February

**ALTAR GUILD****Saturday**

- 7 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill
- 14 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill
- 21 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
- 28 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek

**Sunday**

- 1 Greer Koeller, Barb Penrod,  
Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson
- 8 Greer Koeller, Barb Penrod,  
Vicki Price, Caryl Swanson
- 15 Greer Koeller, Barb Penrod,  
Caryl Swanson
- 18 Fawn Slonka, Caryl Swanson
- 22 Greer Koeller, Barb Penrod,  
Caryl Swanson

**ACOLYTES**

- 1 Ushers
- 8 Ushers
- 15 Ushers
- 22 Ushers

**COMMUNION ASSISTANT**

- 1 Bill Hargreaves
- 8 Barry Critchfield
- 15 Tom Roberts
- 18 Fawn Slonka
- 22 Jody Kirk

**LECTORS**

- 1 Bill Hargreaves
- 7\* Heidi Staib
- 8 Anne Fattman
- 14\* Joel Hoshaw
- 15 Tom Roberts
- 18 Fawn Slonka
- 21\* George Fattman
- 22 James & Josie Hill
- 28\* Fawn Slonka

**\*Saturdays****SATURDAY PIANISTS**

- 7 Heidi Staib
- 14 Joel Hoshaw
- 21 George Fattman
- 28 Linda Prozialeck

**SOUND**

- 1 Bill Grubb
- 8 Chuck Staib
- 15 Harry Bennett
- 18 Chuck Staib
- 22 Rick Blackford

**VIDEO**

- 1 Bill Weible
- 8 Bill Grubb
- 15 Rob Abele
- 18
- 22 Bill Price

**TOWER BELLS**

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

**COUNCIL GREETER –****FLOWER DELIVERY–**

# February 2026

**First Evangelical Lutheran Church – Johnstown, Pennsylvania**  
**814-536-7521 email: [firstlutheran@upia.net](mailto:firstlutheran@upia.net)**  
**Office Hours: Mon. thru Fri. 9 am – 2:00 pm**

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
<b>1 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany</b> 10:45 – Sunday School <b>11:00-Word &amp; Sacrament</b> <b>Installation of Council Members</b> <b>Annual Meeting</b> Noon Hospitality	<b>2</b> 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7 Eve of Epiphany 5</b> 2:00 – Installation of Bishop-elect at Mt. Calvary 5:00-No Saturday Service
<b>8 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany</b> 10:45 – Sunday School <b>11:00-Word &amp; Sacrament</b> Noon – Joint Choir Rehearsal Noon SouperBowl Party	<b>9</b> 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	<b>10</b> 6:30 – Bible Study	<b>11</b> 7 – Council	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14 Eve of Transfiguration</b> 5:00- Word and Sacrament
<b>15 Transfiguration of Our Lord</b> 10:45 – Sunday School <b>11:00-Word &amp; Sacrament</b> Noon – Joint Choir Rehearsal Noon Hospitality	<b>16</b> 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	<b>17</b> 6 – Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner <b>VSJ Deadline</b>	<b>18</b> Ash Wednesday 12:30 pm BLC 7:00 pm FLC	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21 Eve of Lent 1</b> 5:00- Word and Sacrament
<b>22 First Sunday in Lent</b> 10:45 – Sunday School <b>11:00-Word &amp; Sacrament</b> Noon Hospitality	<b>23</b> 11:00 – Staff Meeting 11:45 – Communion 12 – Prayer Meeting	<b>24</b> 6:30 – Bible Study	<b>25</b> 6 – The Chosen Season 1	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28 Eve of Lent 2</b> 5:00- Word and Sacrament