

Vine Street Journal

Johnstown, PA

First Lutheran Church

December 2025

A message from Vicar Christy...



*²¹ She will bear a son,
and you are to name
him Jesus, for he will
save his people from
their sins." (Matthew
1:21)*

As we enter the season of Advent, we step into a time set aside for waiting, watching, and preparing. Advent is not simply the countdown to Christmas; it is an invitation to pause amid life's busyness and make space for hope. It marks the beginning of the Christian year – a fresh start rooted in expectation and promise.

During this season of preparation- Advent is more than checking off our to-do lists and tidying our homes. It is the quiet work of preparing our hearts. Advent calls us to slow down enough to notice:

- where we need healing,
- where we long for peace,
- and where God might be inviting us to begin again.

Lighting the candles of the Advent wreath – one for each week – helps us move intentionally toward the light of Christ, allowing *hope, peace, joy, and love to illuminate our daily lives and to share this with others along the way!!*

And the blue color appears in our sanctuary during Advent: blue paraments on the altar, blue stoles, blue banners, and the blue candles of the Advent wreath. This shift in color is purposeful and meaningful.

Blue, traditionally associated with the night sky just before dawn, symbolizes **hopeful expectation**. It is the color of waiting for that first light to break through darkness. It reminds us that Advent is not a season of mourning but a season of anticipation, a season full of promise. Blue also reflects stability and faithfulness, pointing us toward God's enduring presence as we wait for Christ's coming.

So here is your invitation...as these weeks unfold, consider how *you* might prepare:

- Set aside a few quiet minutes each day for reflection and prayer.
- Practice small acts of kindness to bring light into someone's darkness.
- Notice where God's hope is already working in your life.

And may this Advent season be a gentle guide, drawing you into a deeper relationship with God. And as the color blue surrounds us, may it remind you of the hope before us – where the first light of Christmas is already beginning to rise.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Christy



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PASTOR

Christy Harford

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Kim Rauch

LEARNING MINISTRY ASSOCIATE

Barbara J. Pingatore, R.N.

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.

ORGAN RESTORATION

Kim Rauch

Anonymous Donor

~ PASTORAL ACTS ~

Pastor Christy Harford
Funeral Service Geraldine Crist
11/10/25

~ CONTRIBUTIONS ~

CHURCH PRESERVATION FUND

Donna Caprous

Caryl Swanson

Barry A. Critchfield

Ann Furlong

Jane Hanechak

Richard & Patricia Schrott

Nancy Turner

Donald & Beverly Brocius

Barbara Penrod

Sharon Orner

Jennifer Bennear

Polly & William Grubb

Debbie & Lance Shomo

American Association Of University Women

Raymond Gaydos

Greer Koeller

Catherine & Frederick Rohde

WORLD HUNGER

Nancy Turner

Jody Kirk

Barbara Penrod

Jane Hanechak



Next Journal Deadline

Tuesday, December 16th,
2025

Share your news with us!

Income and Expense Summary as of October 31, 2025



| | Current YTD Actual Jan. 1 thru Oct. 31, 2025 | Current YTD Budget Jan. 1 thru Oct. 31, 2025 | Difference over+/under- Budget |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Regular Offering Income | \$131,041.56 | \$136,888.47 | -\$5,846.91 |
| Trust Fund Income | \$0.00 | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Other Income | \$2,132.00 | \$2,605.00 | \$473.00 |
| TOTAL INCOME | \$133,173.56 | \$139,493.47 | -\$6,319.91 |
| | | | |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$135,411.33 | \$139,493.47 | -\$4,082.14 |



Upcoming worship opportunities:

December 17 – Tower
Moments Wednesday
Worship Service.

December 20 – Longest

Night Service 5:00 pm (Sanctuary)

December 21 – Christmas Pageant

December 24 – Christmas Eve

Services. 2:00 pm; 9:30 pm.

Council met on November 12 at 7:00 pm to review reports and conduct new business. Council has regrettably received the resignation of Barbara Pingatore as Learning Ministry Associate after over 45 years of service. The Property committee is working with Raimondo Construction to establish an inspection schedule for the roof to prevent future problems. They also report the organ console should be arriving the week of November 17, after which it will be re-installed. The office computers' Windows 10 operating systems have been renewed for one additional year, after which new computers will need to be purchased with the newer Windows 11.

The Nominating committee continues to search for members to serve on council. Please prayerfully consider serving your church in this rewarding way. Speak to a member of the committee if interested.

The next regular council meeting will be held Wednesday December 10, 2025 at 7:00 pm.

A congregational meeting was held November 15 and 16 to approve the 2025 Nominating Committee. Members of the committee are

Carol Allison

Barry Critchfield

Joel Hoshaw

Heidi Piurkowsky

The motion to accept the committee was approved. The task of the Nominating Committee is to seek members to serve on the 2026 church council.

There will be a Congregational Meeting December 13 before worship and December 14 after worship. The purpose of the meeting is to approve the 2026 budget and elect members to council for the 2026 term.

December Readings and Psalm**December 7 – 1st Sunday of Advent**

- Isaiah 11:1-10
From David's line, a ruler bringing justice and peace
- Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
May the righteous flourish; let there be an abundance of peace
- Romans 15:4-13
Live in harmony, welcoming one another
- Matthew 3:1-12
A voice cries; Prepare the way of the Lord

December 14 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

- Isaiah 35:1-10
The desert blooms as God's people return from exile
- Psalm 146:5-10
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down
- Luke 1:46b-55 (alternate)
My spirit rejoices in God my Savior
- James 5:7-10
Patience until the coming of the Lord
- Matthew 11:2-11
The forerunner of Christ

December 21 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

- Isaiah 7:10-16
The sign of Immanuel
- Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved
- Romans 1:1-7
Paul's greeting to the church at Rome
- Matthew 1:18-25
A God near at hand

December 28 – First Sunday of Christmas

- Isaiah 63:7-9
Israel saved by God's own presence
- Psalm 148
The splendor of the Lord is over earth and heaven
- Hebrews 2:10-18
Christ shares flesh and blood to free humankind
- Matthew 2:13-23
The slaughter of innocent children

Thought for the month. . .

"For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
Isaiah 9:6

A WORD OF THANKS...

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone for your support and encouragement over the past two years. Being part of this church family is a blessing. I am especially thankful to all who helped make my ordination possible.

Thank you for the beautiful flowers – they have a special place on my dining room table. I am also deeply grateful to both First Lutheran and Benscreek Lutheran for the beautiful quilt and stoles. The thoughtfulness, care, and creativity that went into these gifts make them especially meaningful...and I will cherish them always.

To all who joined in person, online, or in spirit, your presence meant more than I can express. It truly takes a village, and I am profoundly thankful for mine.

– Pastor Christy



Worship & Music Notes...

Hanging of the Greens, Advent

Decorating: Thank you to all

who helped make our sanctuary blue and beautiful. John Kiser, Fawn Kiser, Donna Kovalchek, Vicki Price, Donna Caprous, Cindy Fabo, Dick Schrott, Bill Grubb, Vicar Christy

We have a refurbished **Advent Candle Wreath**. Thanks to Wade Meyers, we have added a foundation for our new liquid Advent Candles, ensuring stability and eliminating the wax buildup. Check it out!!

Poinsettia orders should be in, but we can still take additional orders. This can also be **Christmas charity**. Please fill out a form for Danny. Please list contact information so that we contact you with any questions.

December 6 & 7: Pastor **Nancy Hoover** will preside on Saturday and Pastor **Nathan Pile** will preside on Sunday.

December 20: Saturday will be the **Longest Night Service**

December 21: Sunday will be our annual **Christmas pageant**. Following the service, we will have light lunch and **decorate the church for Christmas Eve**.

December 23: Decorating with **flowers and poinsettias**, 9am.

December 24: **Christmas Eve**: Services at 2pm (music 1:45pm) and 9:30pm (music 9pm). Benscreek will have their service at 6:30pm.

Thank you to the **November Altar Guild**: Caryl Swanson, Greer Koeller, Carol Allison, Polly Grubb, Vicki Price, Patty Schrott, Fawn Slonka, and Donna Kovalchek, Annie Hayes, and Carol Massingill.



Outreach Upcoming Events:

Cookie Walk

The annual cookie walk will be held on Saturday December 13 and Sunday the 14th. As before the cookies will be plated and ready to go. If you also wish to donate cookies, sign up sheets are in the lounge and social hall. Donated cookies need to be at the church no later than Thursday, December 11.

Beginnings Baby Shower

How kind and caring you all are! Your response to the "baby shower" for Beginnings, Inc. was overwhelming. We delivered over 80 clothing sets and other clothing items, many many diapers and wipes, plus books and toys and blankets and bath items and lotions and bottles, and on and on. There was even a potty chair! Bless you for helping all of those families in need.

St. Nicholas Day celebration

We will celebrate St. Nicholas Day on December 7 starting with a lunch following Sunday service. Santa will have another chance meeting with God as happened several years ago. And we will have the start of our Christmas campaign to collect new and/or gently used sweaters for Vets. Do come for the food, fellowship, fun and bring a sweater if you can.

Caroling

Caroling will take place on December 19. We will gather in the church lounge at 5:30 to form our car pools. We will proceed to area Care Homes and some private residences also. No tryouts for this chorus. The only requirement is Christmas cheer.

Following the evening of bringing joy to others, we will return to the church and have a party in the Social Hall. Do bring friends and family. The more carolers, the more Christmas cheer.



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 acknowledgements for many of the gifts given. Acknowledgements received are noted each month in the VSJ and posted on a bulletin board located in the

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

Pennsylvania Rural Arts Alliance Grant (TNR Donation)
Rita King (TNR Donation)
Beverly & Donald Brocious(Thanksgiving Offering)
Kim Rauch (Organ Restoration)
Shirley & Wendy Hildbrecht (I.H.O Vicar Christy Harford Ordination)
Lance & Debbie Shomo (Thanksgiving Offering)
Jane Hanechak (Thanksgiving offering)
Susan & William Hartland (Thanksgiving offering)

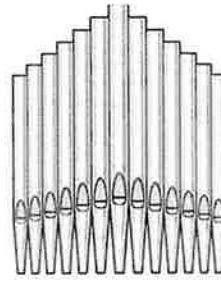
WANTED: ALTAR GUILD

I'M OVERWHELMED

I need 2 to 3 people to help share responsibilities with me on Altar guild. Looking for TLC of altar linens, paraments, silver, acolyte robes and candles. You can choose your tasks and do them at your convenience. There would be some Sunday Set-up and Clean-up training so that you could occasionally help. Please talk to me if you have any interest in any of these tasks. I'm also looking for a banner committee to repair and clean our many banners.

I would love your help!

- Vicki Price 814-659-9792



ORGAN PROJECT UPDATE

The Organ Console Returns

On a blustery Tuesday in late November the Skinner organ returned to Johnstown from its restoration

vacation in Cumberland, Maryland. Electrical connections need to be completed, but the plan is to have organ music for the First Sunday in Advent.

Mark Steiner of the Steiner-Murphy Organ Company has a strong appreciation of our instrument and the builder E.M. Skinner. He is considerate of the work that has been done over the century and desires to maintain the original intentions of the organ builder. In addition to the electronic updating of the console, Mark and Kim have discussed a few tonal changes that will restore some elements of the organ to its 1922 vintage sounds. The organ with 100 memory settings will allow any organist to make registration changes with ease and reliability. The console will look basically the same except for a new array of drawknobs and coupler switches. The general pistons have been increased from six to twelve.

We anxiously await the organ's return.

Kim



TUESDAY NOON RECITALS

Tuesday Noon Recital Task Force has elected Kim Rauch as its chair.

Kim founded the series nearly 35 years ago when he was Minister of Music here at First Lutheran. He recently returned to First in late 2022.

Kim said, "I am amazed that a seedling of an idea has weathered over the years. It is pleasure to see the recitals so well attended recently."

Other officers are Fawn Slonka, assistant chair; Vicki Price, secretary; and William Price, treasurer. The former task force chair, George Fattman, will continue to serve in marketing the series and applying for grants.

The task force presents twelve Tuesday noon recitals a year, each followed by lunch. The next program will be on April 7, when Vox Nova, the Mt. Aloysius College Chorale, will return.

Most of the recitals are repeated at area personal care homes. This special outreach is underwritten by a grant from the 1889 Foundation, which had been part of Conemaugh Valley Memorial Hospital before it was sold to Duke-Lifepoint.

The recitals and lunches are offered without charge. Donations and grants cover all costs.

Volunteers provide lunch after recitals

A free lunch adds to the success of the Tuesday Noon Recital Series.

Caryl Swanson and Greer Koeller head the volunteers who plan, prepare and serve the lunch.

"The food is always good," said a man who was eating chili and muffins after the last recital.

Volunteers during October were Calvin Anderson, Vic Kohler, Robin Kohler, Fawn Slonka, Donna Kovalchek, Jeanne Kuhs, Heidi Staib, Cindy Fabo, Polly Grubb, Bill Grubb, Rick Blackford, Shirley Waclo, Keenan Koeller, Caryl Swanson, and Greer Koeller.

The kitchen crew has developed a list of successful menu items. They include pasta salad, hot dogs with sauerkraut, mac and cheese, chicken salad, and hot ham-and-cheese sandwiches.

The kitchen crew never knows how many people will show up for lunch and has served as many as 135.

Thank you for all your dedication and work serving our recital guests.



Congregational Meeting

December 13th and 14th. This is to approve the Nominating Committee.

Barbara J. Pingatore

November 1, 2025

Dear Beloved Church Family,

I write this with sadness and a bit of bitter feelings, but more importantly my heart is full of gratitude and thanksgiving. Following 45 plus years of ministry as your Learning Ministry Associate and the many other hats the title wore; there were also the years I was a volunteer before joining the staff. All wonderful years filled with so many opportunities and memories. It was during these times that I was constantly supported by children, youth, parents, adults and others in all that we did. Following these 45 years I feel it is time for me to retire from my staff position as Learning Ministry Associate. My retirement will be effective January 1, 2026. This was not an easy decision to make for me. But the recent years my ability to function physically and more recently my illness and complete life change, among other factors led to my decision, I believe the time is right.

I have no idea how just saying thank you is enough to truly express my feelings and gratitude; but it seems like the best I can offer. My ministry was filled with so many opportunities – teaching Sunday Church School (starting when I was in High School), years of awesome Vacation Church School (including turning the social hall into a beach!), teaching Confirmation with groups of beautiful young Christians, memories of being a Youth leader (retreats, clown ministry, servant ministry, annual trips, National Youth Gatherings) and more; each one an experience of its own; helping children, youth, adults and myself youth grow in our faith. Completing the training and serving as a Lay Worship Leader was a dream come true. It began when I was a youth myself, with Pastor Swanson asking me to preach a sermon on Youth Sunday. It was a life changing experience. My faith has grown by leaps and bounds serving in this role. I am proud that I was able to nurture children and youth to be worship leaders in our congregation, many who still serve as adults here at First and in the congregations they now support. Thank you for leading me and supporting me in this ministry opportunity. My ministry has been supported by people who served as mentors to my Christian growth and my growth as a church leader. I was blessed to have Dr.

Walden Holl as one of my Confirmation teachers, what a wonderful way to start my faith journey as a youth! Pastor Swanson was a significant mentor in my journey, he encouraged me, supported me, “redirected” me if I was not doing the right things or making the wrong turns! But he was always there for me. I believe that it is because of him and God’s plan for me that I became the person I am. There were many other adults and pastors who supported me in my journey, as I think about it now too many to mention in this letter.

Friends it has been an awesome journey together with each of you and with God by our side. *THANK YOU!*

If permitted I would still like to be able to volunteer as able and as tasks allow. In the mean time I ask that you keep me in your prayers and I will surely keep you in mine. God’s blessings.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

2

Thessalonians 3:16

Together in God’s Work with Love,

Barbara J. Pingatore

Volunteer Page - Month of December

ALTAR GUILD**Saturday**

- 6 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
 13 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill
 20 Fawn Slonka and Donna Kovalchek
 27 Annie Hayes and Carol Massingill

Sunday

- 7 Polly Grubb, Greer Koeller, Vicki Price,
Caryl Swanson
 14 Polly Grubb, Greer Koeller, Vicki Price,
Caryl Swanson
 21 Vicki Price
 28 Polly Grubb, Greer Koeller, Vicki Price,
Caryl Swanson

ACOLYTES

- 7 Ushers
 14 Ushers
 21 Ushers
 24 James & Josie Hill (2:00)
Abby Saverling & Lillian Boring (9:30)
 28 Ushers

COMMUNION ASSISTANT

- 7 Howard Bennett
 14 Rob Abele
 21 Jody Kirk
 24 Rick Blackford (2:00)
Jim Hargreaves (9:30)
 28 Rick Blackford

LECTORS

- 6* Fawn Slonka
 7 Howard Bennett
 13* George Fattman
 14 Rob Abele
 20* Heidi Staib
 21 Dick Schrott
 27* Joel Hoshaw
 24 Rick Blackford (2:00)
Jim Hargreaves (9:30)
 28 Rick Blackford

*Saturdays

SATURDAY PIANISTS

- 6 Linda Prozialeck
 13 George Fattman
 20 Heidi Staib
 27 Joel Hoshaw

SOUND

- 7 Calvin Anderson
 14 Bill Grubb
 21 Rob Abele
 28 Chuck Staib

VIDEO

- 7 Bill Grubb
 14 Bill Price
 21 Bill Hargreaves
 24 Bill Price (2:00)
Rob Abele (9:30)
 28 Bill Weible

CRUCIFER

- 24 James Hill (2:00)
Abbie Saverling (9:30)

TOWER BELLS

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

COUNCIL GREETER – Shirley Waclo**FLOWER DELIVERY– Janice Hill**

December 2025

First Evangelical Lutheran Church – Johnstown, Pennsylvania
814-536-7521 email: firstlutheran@wpia.net
Office Hours: Mon. thru Fri. 9 am - 2 pm

| <i>Sunday</i> | <i>Monday</i> | <i>Tuesday</i> | <i>Wednesday</i> | <i>Thursday</i> | <i>Friday</i> | <i>Saturday</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 11:00 Staff Meeting 11:45 Communion 12 Prayer Meeting | 2 | 3 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm Feast of Abundance | 4 Pastor Christy on vacation | 5 | 6 Advent 2 5:00-Word & Sacrament Pastor Nancy Hoover |
| 7 Advent 2 11:00-Word & Sacrament Pastor Nathan Pile Noon – St. Nicholas Day | 8 11:00 Staff Meeting 11:45 Communion 12 Prayer Meeting | 9 6:30 Bell Choir 6:30 Bible Study Pastor off | 10 7:30 pm Council | 11 Pastor off | 12 | 13 Advent 3 5:00-Word & Sacrament Congregational Meeting Cookie Walk |
| 14 Advent 3 11:00-Word & Sacrament Congregational Meeting Baptism – Makenlei Dietz Cookie Walk Noon - Hospitality | 15 11:00 Staff Meeting 11:45 Communion 12 Prayer Meeting | 16 6:30 Bell Choir 12-VSJ Deadline | 17 11:00 am Tower Moments | 18 Pastor off | 19 5:30 pm Christmas Caroling | 20 Advent 4 5:00- Longest Night Service No Holy Communion |
| 21 Advent 4 11:00-Word & Sacrament Christmas Pageant Noon - Hospitality | 22 11:00 Staff Meeting 11:45 Communion 12 Prayer Meeting | 23 6:30 Bell Choir 6:30 Bible Study | 24 Christmas Eve 2:00 pm First 6:30 pm Benscreek 9:30 pm First | 25 Merry Christmas Office Closed | 26 | 27 Christmas 1 5:00-Word & Sacrament |
| 28 First Sunday of Christmas 11:00-Word & Sacrament “ABC” Service Noon - Hospitality | 29 11:00 Staff Meeting 11:45 Communion 12 Prayer Meeting. | 30 6:30 Bell Choir Pastor off | 31 Pastor off | | | |