



# Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Fremont, Ohio 43420

Pastor Tim Miller

93.1FM

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**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**

**February 1, 2026**

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Setting 3 with Holy Communion

\*Congregation please stand as you are able.

## **Introduction**

Who are the blessed ones of God? For Micah, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. For Jesus, they are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and those who hunger for righteousness. In baptism we find our blessed identity and calling in this countercultural way of living and serving.

## **Prelude:**

*Blessed Are the Peacemakers*

**T. Birchwood**

## **Welcome & Announcements:** Joys and Concerns

Signing of the Pew Register by all present.

## **\*Opening Hymn:**

*As We Gather at Your Table*

**ELW 522**

## **GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

## **\*Greeting**

**P:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C:** And also with you.

## **\*Confession and Forgiveness**

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✝ one God,  
the Creator of heaven and earth,  
the Word who spoke life into being,  
the Wind stirring the waters.

**C: Amen.**

P: Let us turn in confession to the one who knows us completely.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

P: Mighty God, lover of justice,

**C: you call us to life in community,  
but we have served our own interests  
at the expense of our neighbors.  
We have sown deceit where honesty was needed.  
We say the right words,  
but our hearts are far from you.  
Turn us to seek your face.  
Knit us together and give us the mind of Christ,  
that we may do justice, love mercy,  
and walk humbly with you, our God.  
Amen.**

P: The former things have passed away,  
and new things God now declares:  
Like a spring of water that never fails,  
God covers you in the righteousness of Christ,  
and forgives your sin in ✝ Jesus' name.  
May the Spirit give you strength to live for others,  
and bless you with the gift of peace.

**C: Amen.**

## \*Canticle of Praise

Assisting minister



Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's peo - ple on earth.



Lord God, heav - en - ly King, al - might - y God and Fa - ther,



we wor - ship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glo - ry.



Lord Je - sus Christ, on - ly Son of the Fa - ther, Lord God, Lamb of God,



you take a - way the sin of the world: have mer - cy on us;



you are seat - ed at the right hand of the Fa - ther: re - ceive our prayer.



For you a - lone are the Ho - ly One, you a - lone are the Lord,



you a - lone are the Most High, Je - sus Christ, with the Ho - ly Spir - it,



in the glo - ry of God the Fa - ther. A - men.

## **\*Prayer of the Day**

P: Let us pray.

**C: Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

## **WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

### **First Reading:**

**Micah 6:1-8**

*With the mountains and the foundations of the earth as the jury, God brings a lawsuit against Israel. God has "wearied" Israel with a long history of saving acts. God does not want or expect lavish sacrifices to attempt to earn divine favor. Rather God empowers the people to do justice, to love loyalty to God, and to walk shrewdly in God's service.*

R: A reading from Micah, the sixth chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Hear what the LORD says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

<sup>2</sup> Hear, you mountains, the case of the LORD,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the LORD has a case against his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

<sup>3</sup> "O my people, what have I done to you?  
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

<sup>4</sup> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.

<sup>5</sup> O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,  
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD."

<sup>6</sup> "With what shall I come before the LORD  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

with calves a year old?

<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?

The word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Responsive Reading:**

**Psalm 15**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, who may dwell in your tabernacle?

Who may abide upon your holy hill?

<sup>2</sup> **Those who lead a blameless life and do what is right,  
who speak the truth from their heart;**

<sup>3</sup> they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil to their friends;  
they do not cast discredit upon a neighbor.

<sup>4</sup> **In their sight the wicked are rejected, but they honor those  
who fear the LORD.**

**They have sworn upon their health and do not take back  
their word.**

<sup>5</sup> They do not give their money in hope of gain, nor do they take  
bribes against the innocent. Those who do these things shall  
never be overthrown.

**Second Reading:**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

*According to the world's standards of power and might, the message of  
the cross seems stupid and offensive. Yet this word reveals the paradoxical  
way God has chosen to work power and salvation through weakness,  
rejection, and suffering. Hence the message of the cross becomes true  
wisdom and power for believers.*

R: A reading from 1 Corinthians, the first chapter.

<sup>18</sup> The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are  
perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For  
it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

<sup>26</sup> Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

The word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **\*Gospel Acclamation**



## **\*Gospel**

## **Matthew 5:1-12**

*Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by naming those who are blessed in the reign of God.*

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 5th chapter.

**C: Glory to you, O Lord.**

P: <sup>1</sup> When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**C: Praise to you, O Christ.**

## **Children’s Sermon**

### **Sermon**

**\*Sermon Hymn:**

*Let Streams of Living Justice*

**ELW 710**

### **\*Apostles' Creed**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.\*  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **\*Prayers of Intercession**

**R:** As God's beloved children united in Christ, let us pray for the church,  
the whole human community, and the well-being of the earth, our  
home.

*A brief silence.*

**R:** God our wisdom, renew the church in the power of the Spirit, that it  
may do justice, love kindness, live humbly, and boldly proclaim Christ  
crucified. We pray for social justice and humanitarian aid ministries.  
Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**

**R:** God our source, we honor you by caring wisely for your creation. We  
pray for the health of old growth forests, ice caps, and ocean currents.  
Preserve the diversity of life on earth. Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**

**R:** God our righteousness, raise up visionary leaders who serve with  
integrity and respect human rights. Increase freedom in every nation.  
Protect educators, journalists, artists, and religious activists who are  
reviled for speaking truth. Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**



R: God our advocate, you give hope to all who suffer because of persecution, poverty, or war. Reunite separated families and bring orphaned children to safety. Comfort any who grieve or suffer in any way. *Especially those we name at this time (Pause for 10 seconds for people to be named).* Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**

R: God our blessing, we pray for the children and youth of this congregation, and for parents, grandparents, mentors, teachers, and youth ministers who model love for their neighbor and care for others. Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**

R: God our joy, we give thanks for the lives of those before us who journeyed humbly with you. Merciful God,

**C: receive our prayer.**

R: Confident that the Holy Spirit receives our prayers and answers us, we commend all for whom we pray to God's loving-kindness made known to us in Christ Jesus our Savior.

**C: Amen.**

### **MEAL**

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

### **\*Sharing of the Peace**

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

**C: And also with you.**

**(10:30) Sr. Choir:**

*Be Thou My Vision*

**B. Logan**

**\*Offertory:**

*Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow*

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise him, all creatures here below;**

**Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;**

**Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

### **\*Offering Prayer**

P: God of majesty,  
no eye has seen, no ear has heard  
what you have prepared for those who love you,  
yet in this meal you reveal the wideness of your mercy.  
Use what we have gathered  
to feed us with the reign of God come near,  
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**C: Amen.**

### **\*The Great Thanksgiving**

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

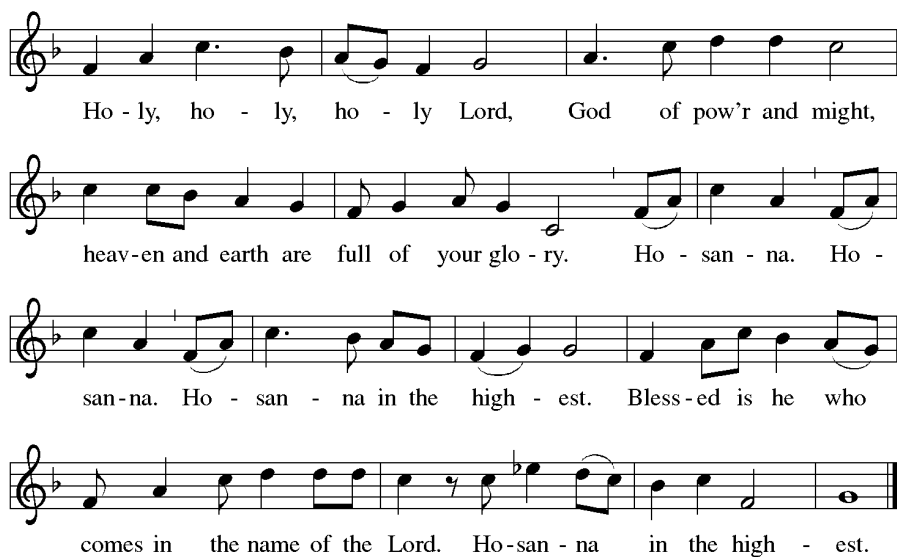
P: Lift up your hearts.

**C: We lift them to the Lord.**

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,  
that we should at all times and in all places  
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,  
through our Savior Jesus Christ.  
By the leading of a star he was shown forth to all nations;  
in the waters of the Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son;  
and in the miracle of water turned to wine he revealed your glory.  
And so, with all the choirs of angels,  
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,  
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:



### **\*Thanksgiving at the Table**

P: Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:

Blessed are you for the birth of creation.

Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.

Blessed are you for your promise to your people.

Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams.

Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.

Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,  
 the Word made flesh.

P: In the night in which he was betrayed,  
 our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
 broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
 Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
 Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
 and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
 This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
 shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
 Do this for the remembrance of me.

P: Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

**C: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

P: With this bread and cup  
we remember your Word dwelling among us,  
full of grace and truth.  
We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection.  
We look with hope for his coming.

**C: Come, Lord Jesus.**

P: Holy God, we long for your Spirit.  
Come among us. Bless this meal.  
May your Word take flesh in us.  
Awaken your people.  
Fill us with your light.  
Bring the gift of peace on earth.

**C: Come, Holy Spirit.**

P: All praise and glory are yours,  
Holy One of Israel,  
Word of God incarnate,  
Power of the Most High,  
one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**\*Lord's Prayer**

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

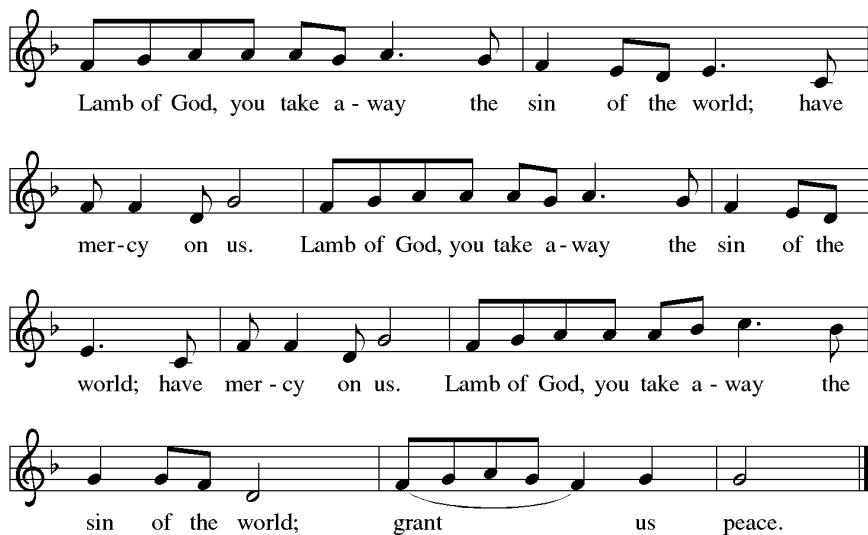
**C: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

**\*Invitation to Communion**

P: Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!  
Come to the table; taste and see.

## Lamb of God



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have  
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the  
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the  
sin of the world; grant us peace.

## Distribution of Communion

*Communion will be continuous. The ushers will invite you to come forward by the center aisle. You will be handed the bread with the words, "The Body of Christ given for you." You may respond with "Amen" or "Thanks be to God!". Step to the Communion Assistant and take the cup. They will speak the words, "The Blood of Christ shed for you." You may respond with "Amen" or "Thanks be to God!" Empty cups may be placed in the basket as you return to your seat by the side aisle.*

*If you prefer gluten- free bread, please let the Pastor know. If you prefer grape juice, please let the Communion Assistant know. If you prefer not to receive or have children who have not yet received, please let the Pastor know and he will offer a blessing.*

## Communion Hymns:

**ELW 496 One Bread, One Body**

**ELW 714 O God of Mercy, God of Light**

## \*Post Communion Blessing

**P:** May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

**C: Amen.**

### **\*Prayer After Communion**

P: Radiant God,  
we have seen your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.  
In the sacrament of his body and blood  
you have drawn us to your heart.  
Send us from this table with delight,  
that our lives may reflect the beauty of your love,  
and bear witness to all we have seen and heard,  
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: Amen.

### **SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

### **\*Blessing**

P: May the triune God,  
who has put a new song in your mouth  
and tuned your heart for praise  
✠ bless you now and forever.

C: Amen.

**\*Closing Hymn:**                      *Rise Up, O Saints of God!*                      ELW 669

### **\*Dismissal**

P: Go in peace. Do justice. Love mercy.

C: Thanks be to God.

**\*Postlude:**                      *The Greatness of the Lord*                      R. Miles

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**WELCOME! WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE FOR WORSHIP TODAY.** Our prayer is that you experience God's presence in a meaningful way. Take a moment to greet someone nearby — we're a family in Christ, and we're grateful you're part of this gathering.

**CONGREGATIONAL MEETING** has been rescheduled for **TODAY**, February 1, 2026 in the Fellowship Hall beginning at 9:15 a.m. Please plan to attend. Thank you.



**BELL RINGERS NEEDED** – The Bell Choir is in need of a few extra members at this time. Please consider adding yourself to create some inspirational music of praise. Rehearsals are held on Wednesdays from 6:30 – 7:20 p.m. (Thursdays during the Lenten season) in the Fellowship Hall. You may contact Darla Brown at 419-680-6717 for more information. Thank you!

**2026 TRIPS PREVIEW POTLUCK WITH 2025 TRIP SHARING AND FELLOWSHIP** – If you wish to hear about the 2026 bus trips we have planned, then gather your friends, relatives and neighbors who may want to join us on the trips and come join us on **Sunday, February 15<sup>th</sup> from 3:30 p.m. – 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.** Everyone brings their own table service, beverage and a dish to share with others. Please RSVP to Yvonne Vogel at 419-307-1774 by February 8<sup>th</sup>. Hope to see you there!

**GIVING STATEMENTS** for 2025 are on the table in the Narthex for you.

**UPDATED CHURCH TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES AND THE F.L.C.W. PROGRAM BOOKLETS** for 2026 are also available in the narthex for you.

**REMINDER...** *When Sandusky County is under a Level 3 Snow Advisory the church will be closed. This includes Sunday services as well as all weekday events, meetings and activities for that day. If we are under a level 1 or 2 snow emergency, the church will be open and if it's on a day of worship, we will have worship.*

**CHRIST CARE NEWS - Beginning Saturday, February 7 at 9:15 a.m.** our Christ Care group will gather to begin a study on the Gospel of Luke. Great news is woven throughout this gospel that perfection is not a prerequisite to a deep and personal relationship with Jesus. Luke shares with us the extent to which Jesus is so very fond of ragamuffins in need of a safe place to lean into and linger. Come join us as Jesus embraces the outcasts, outsiders and overlooked. See Noelle Leutenegger or give her a call at 419-307-1063. We look forward to seeing you and growing in God's amazing love for each one of us.

### **The Chosen, Season 4**

- The viewing of *The Chosen, Season 4* will begin at Faith Lutheran Church **Lounge or Sanctuary** on **Wednesday, February 18th at 5 p.m.** and will continue Wednesdays at 5 p.m. through Lent.
- If you are interested in *The Chosen, 40 days with Jesus, Book FOUR* devotion, sign up on the bulletin board by Sunday, Feb 8th.
- You can find *The Chosen* at a library or stream through Chromecast, Amazon Firestick, Apple TV, and Roku or TheChosen.tv/app for more information.
- Questions should be directed to Cheryl Paeth at 419-205-3659.

**TRINITY UMC ANNUAL SUPERBOWL SUB SALE FUNDRAISER** – Three types: Turkey & Cheese, Ham & Cheese, and Turkey/Ham/Salami & Cheese. Dressed (in a separate bag) lettuce, tomato, pickle, and mayo packet OR plain. 6 inches long for \$6.00 each. **Orders taken now thru TODAY, Feb. 1, 2026.** Pickup Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> Noon to 1 pm or Sunday, Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> from 11:30 am to Noon. To order, call 419-332-8167. Trinity UMC, 204 N. Wayne Street, Fremont, Ohio.

**TRINITY UMC IS HAVING A CARE & SHARE FOUR COURSE DINNER** – on Saturday, February 28, 2026 at the church (204 N. Wayne Street, Fremont) at 5:30 p.m. Includes: appetizers, salad, entrée course with sides, dessert, and beverage. Entrée choice is Ham Loaf or Salisbury Steak. **Reservations (Prepay please) must be made by February 21<sup>st</sup>.** Cost is \$17 per person or \$16 for two or more. To make reservations call 419-332-8167. This is a great way to share a caring moment with your family, your best friend, your neighbor, as a couple, with a grandchild, or a child during February!



**LIGHT SUPPERS FOR LENT 2026:** Light suppers will be provided prior to the Lenten services on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m., on February 25<sup>th</sup> through March 25<sup>th</sup>.

**THANK YOU** to the following groups that have volunteered to provide a meal before the Wednesday Lenten services in the Fellowship Hall!

February 25	Faith Church Council
March 4	Both Adult Sunday School classes
March 11	Faith Fellowship Group
March 18	Faith Women of the ELCA
March 25	Christian Worship Committee

Many hands make light work. **Please join us and consider bringing a dish to share!** A sign-up sheet to assist these groups with additional salads, sides, and desserts will be posted on the bulletin board in the coat room area for anyone who wishes to share their culinary talents.  
**Thank you for sharing with others your bountiful blessings from God!**

### **PRAYING DAILY**



**For healing and hope:** Joan Bolen, Mary Ann Diekman, Denny Fahle, Millie Fetterman, Pat Forsyth, Della Humbarger, Denny Krumnow, Bill Leutenegger, Dean May, Stan Moyer, Nancy Mylander, Betty Nielsen, Gary Overmyer, Sandie Reed, Ken & Gloria Root, Letty Rusch, Bob Schneider, Janet Tressler, Linda Woessner. Adeline Bame, Jackie Mowry, Eric Paul, Kathy Spanfeller, Teri Titkemeier.

**For the Family of:** William Seibert

**For our Bishops:** Bishop Christian Ndossa, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, and NWOS Bishop Daniel Beaudoin and Staff

**For our partner congregation in Bumila, Tanzania**

**And its pastor:** Pastor Peter Magasi

**PRAY FOR OUR**  
**★ ★ ★ ★ ★**  
**MILITARY**

**For our Military:** Noah Egbert, Troy Halfhill, Jade Kayser, Daniel Linder, Tony Rozzi, Christopher Templeton, & Joshua Tooman.

## Ushers Needed

## ASSISTING TODAY

## ASSISTING NEXT WEEK

18

## **FAITH ACTIVITIES FOR THE WEEK OF – Feb. 1 to Feb. 8**

### **Sunday**

Feb. 1-----8 & 10:30 a.m.    Worship with Holy Communion  
                                  **9:15 a.m.    Congregational Annual Meeting in Hall**

### **Monday**      **OFFICE OPEN**

Feb. 2-----8 a.m.      Prayer & Conversation at Wendy's  
                                  10 a.m.      Valley View – Worship & Holy Communion  
                                  7 p.m.      FLCW Board Meeting  
                                  7:30 p.m.    Dartball – Home vs. Elmore

### **Tuesday**

Feb. 3-----

### **Wednesday**

Feb. 4-----6:30 p.m.    Bell Choir  
                                  7:30 p.m.    Praise Choir  
                                  7:30 p.m.    Senior Choir

### **Thursday**      **OFFICE CLOSED**

Feb. 5-----9-3 p.m.    Fellowship & Sew Day  
                                  3 p.m.      Christ Care

### **Friday**

Feb. 6-----

### **Saturday**

Feb. 7-----9:15 a.m.    Christ Care

### **Sunday**

Feb. 8-----8 & 10:30 a.m.    Worship with Holy Communion  
                                  9:15 a.m.    Sunday School & Fellowship Time

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2026: ATTENDANCE: 137 – OFFERING: \$7,871.52

NOISY OFFERING, SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, 2026: \$122.60

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2026: SERVICES WERE CANCELED

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## **GOSPEL MESSAGE**

**February 1, 2026**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**

### **Something Bigger Than Us**

The beatitudes could easily be read as a list of rewards and consequences, and the kind of behaviors that will merit one or the other. We are well accustomed to understanding the world in such terms. Children receive rewards for good behavior. Students earn awards or scholarships. Athletes win medals or trophies. Success is a ladder we climb and, if we've done our part, our job is rewarded in the end.

Jesus talks about a great reward, but it's not one we can earn. On a closer look, the nature of many of the so-called "blessings" in the beatitudes is as much about what is done to us as about anything we do for ourselves. Jesus begins his sermon by going up the mountain, but his words push us not to new heights but to greater depths. Poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger, thirst, and persecution—these are not behaviors to strive toward for a reward. Instead, they are circumstances in which we can find ourselves when the ladder we've been climbing falls to the ground. Alternatively, to be merciful or pure in heart or a peacemaker is to choose to get off the ladder altogether for the sake of something bigger than our small selves.

The beatitudes as a whole suggest that Jesus wants more for us than simply collecting a heavenly prize in the end. His blessings assure us that all along the way, no matter our circumstances, we have an inherent, God-given dignity that no one and nothing can strip from us. At the table of Christ, all who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled. This meal isn't awarded to us for a job well done. Rather, it feeds us for the work still to be done, that of sharing God's mercy and peace with others.