



Tidings of Peace

January 2026

Volume XXX11 Number 1

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church ♦ 1747 W. Milham Avenue, Portage, MI 49024 ♦ 269-343-3453 ♦ popportage.org

*"Touched by
the Gospel,
we seek to be
instruments of
God's Peace,
for the sake
of the world."*

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Pastor's Page

Hope Blessing by Meta Herrick Carlson

I was too young to remember

When they splashed

My forehead with tap water

And spoke promises over my life,

Big mysteries pulled down for me.

Hope is like a glassy thread tied

One end to that day and the other

To my body, hidden in plain sight

So I cannot snip it with shears

And run off into the shadows alone.

Hope is like the reach of the thread,

Its full length tangled but never taught,

Infinite perhaps, a slack reminder that

There is much more to come and

I am worth finding every time.

On the fourth Sunday of Advent (12/21/25), I preached about the Christmas story from Matthew's gospel (Matthew 1:18-25) saying, "God enters the great scope of human history somewhere in the messy middle, at a time and place when and where people are suffering, scandalized, and scared. It was a time not so unlike our own: when Palestinians and Ukrainians are trying to survive in war zones; when American school children and Australian Jews live in fear of gun violence; when government programs that provide resources for health care, food, and education are being taken away, when political rhetoric is heated and divisive; when human turmoil and natural disasters force millions to flee their homes and find refuge elsewhere.

Into this mess, a glimmer of grace shines. Into this chaos, Love arrives.
Into this world, Christ is born; Emmanuel, God with us. Therein lies our hope."

The new year is a time for hope. Many people make resolutions about things they hope to change in the coming months. I'm sure we all have our own lists of things we hope will be better in 2026. All the advertisers are already trying to sell us on the new diet plan, exercise routine, or slick new gadget that will improve our lives. Their job is to make us feel like we're lacking something they can sell us.

As people of faith, our hope is not in anything we can purchase. Our hope is in God alone. This hope entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ who lived, died, and rose again to give us the gift of eternal life and unyielding hope. We have already received this gift so there is no need for us to live in fear that we might miss out on it. God, Emmanuel, is with us and will always find us. Nothing can take this gift away.

Shalom, Pastor Rachel

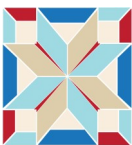


What's Happening at POP!

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Meets **Friday, January 2 at 10 AM** in the Social Hall.

If you or someone you know would like a shawl, or for more information about becoming a prayer shawl creator, please contact Dianne Hellman, 323-9392.



Quilters

Tuesdays, January 6 & 20 at 9:30 AM

Where: POP Social Hall

Not sure you can sew well enough to participate? Don't worry! They're happy to teach you, too. Contact Sheryl for more information: 267-6274.

Ladies Lunch Bunch

Meet at 11:45am on **January 20** at the Hunan Gardens
7024 W. Q. Ave., Portage

Questions? Car pool? Need a ride?

Contact Dianne Hellman, 323-9392.

Budget Hearing and Annual Meeting

Join us to learn the proposed budget for 2026.

January 11 at 9:15 a.m. in the Flex Room

January 18 at 11:45 a.m. in the Sanctuary.

On **January 25** we will have the annual meeting at noon in the Sanctuary. There will be an enhanced fellowship hour.



WOMEN'S SMALL GROUP

Monday, **January 5 and 19**, 7:00pm in the Flex Room

Continuing our discussion on

Bishop Michael Curry's Book, **LOVE IS THE WAY**

We'd love to have **YOU** join us too!!

Contact Diane Snyder, dmsnyder1149@gmail.com for more information!!

Bunko

Join us **Tuesday, January 13 at 1 PM**

Where: POP Gathering Space

Just a few rolls of the dice and you'll have this fun game mastered!



Men's Breakfast!

8:00 AM, Wednesday, January 14

Mark's Diner on Romance Rd. in Portage.

Join Pastor Rachel for breakfast, prayer, and conversation.



Prince of Peace Book Club

The POP Book Club will start the New Year meeting on January 21, 2026 at 10 am in the Peace Lounge with the funny and moving book "My Friends" by Fredrik Backman.

For one summer, four friends who come from abusive homes meet on a pier to escape, share secrets, and have fun. Twenty-five years later another person's life will be changed by her meeting these friends through a painting of them on that pier which was painted that special summer.



Social Concerns

December at Prince of Peace has truly been a month of giving, caring and supporting.

Additional Food Boxes – After continually running out of filled food boxes we purchase from the Southwest Michigan Food Bank at our bi-monthly distribution, we decided to prepare our own filled food boxes (each containing 10 shelf ready staples), and have them ready for immediate distribution when we run out of the SMFB boxes. Thus far we have made 50 boxes and have distributed 25 of these. Through your generous gifts we will also be able to distribute cheese, butter and eggs in the future.

Thank you everyone for a most generous and loving season of giving as we serve our neighbors as Jesus has asked us.

Christmas Families Support Project -

Once again this year we have supported 6 families with wants and needs.

This includes 2 Portage Community Center families of 5 persons each, including children.

Our Youth totally took care of one of these families.

2 single parent families of 4 persons each from the YWCA Women's Shelter were helped. These families requested and received 4 dressers for their bedrooms as well as many other gifts.

PoP's 2 refugee families were gifted as well, and included items for a disabled family member.

In total we supported 23 people with 115 gifts

Chairperson, Lynne Waltham said, "the PoP community, once again, came out strong, despite a wicked economy."

Children and Youth News

Youth kicked off December with Shop and Wrap!

We had record attendance this year with 12 middle and high school students. We started with a pasta lunch, got into teams, and headed to Target. Items on our list ranged from clothes and shoes to kitchen and household items to, of course, toys! We brought the gifts back to the church and wrapped them up. We finished our afternoon with cookies, cocoa, and games. Another awesome Shop and Wrap in the books!



The Christmas Program, *Bethlehem PI*, debuted on

December 14th during morning worship. Our cast of kids, youth, and adults did a wonderful job bringing the story to life. Special thanks go to Mike W for leading the tech team and Janet H for providing the music! If you missed it, be sure to find the recording on our Youtube channel. This year also marked the first year that the chili cook-off was not on the same day as the



program. Youth Committee hosted fellowship time in the gym, providing cookies to decorate and a delicious hot chocolate bar. Thank you to everyone who assisted in making this day happen, and thank you to all who attended, clapped, laughed, and ate cookies!

So Much Wrapping!



This time of the year can be busy for many of our kids and youth. School concerts, dance recitals, important games, family gatherings, not to mention final exams! Please take a moment to pray for our youth in this busy season. We are so glad that so many of our youth are able to participate in worship in all kinds of wonderful ways through this joyous season! Be sure to keep an eye out for them as they light candles, assist with communion, greet visitors, sing or play their instrument, control slides or microphones at the tech booth, or play with other kids in the nursery and at the playground. Our faith community is alive and vibrant in this season of snow and cold!



Best Ways to Contact Pastor Rachel

Calling

During regular church office hours, the best way to reach Pastor Rachel is to call the church: 269-343-3453. If she's not in or not available, Tamara will usually know the best way or time to reach her that day. Before or after regular hours, the best way is to call her mobile number, which is listed in the church directory. She encourages you to save her number in your phone and give it to any family members, close friends, or neighbors who might need to contact her in an emergency. Please keep in mind that she assumes any calls received before 9 AM or after 9 PM are emergencies, so if you call at those times, she may sound worried when she answers.

Texting

This is a great way to contact Pastor Rachel with information you don't want to forget in the moment but that isn't an emergency. You are welcome to text her mobile number (again, listed in the directory) at any time and she will respond as she is able, usually 9 AM – 9 PM. This is also an excellent way to give her information like phone numbers, addresses, meeting locations, and times because she can easily refer back to the information when she needs it.

E-mailing

Pastor Rachel regularly checks her pastor-rachel@popportage.org account Sunday – Thursday each week. She generally takes Fridays and Saturdays as Sabbath from work related e-mails. If you need her to see something you sent on one of those days, please call or text her to let her know it is there.

Social Media

In order to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, Pastor Rachel will not request a connection or “friendship” with you on social media. She is, however, more than happy to accept the connection when you offer it. If you do connect with Pastor Rachel on Facebook or Instagram, you are welcome to message her through those platforms, but keep in mind that she does not always keep as close an eye on those as she does on her texts and e-mails so you may not reach her as quickly or reliably there.

Other

Pastor Rachel is a very visual learner so it is very helpful to her to have important information written down. This is especially true for scheduling meetings – if it isn't written on her calendar, it is likely she will forget. E-mailing, texting, or watching her write the date and time in her calendar are the most reliable ways to ensure she has the information in the right place. Similarly, if you tell Pastor Rachel something important on a Sunday morning, she may ask you to leave her a note (there's a dry erase board on her office door you can write on or you can put a note in her box in the work room in the office hallway) or to text or e-mail her the information as a reminder so she can follow up with you later.

Learning Opportunity



Here are two opportunities to learn more about earth care issues in the new year sponsored by Hope for Creation.

First, you are invited to a showing of the documentary "Bad River". This film chronicles the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa's fight for environmental justice and sovereignty against the Enbridge oil pipeline that runs through their land. The showing will be held on **Sunday, January 18 from 5 - 7 PM at Milwood United Methodist Church**, 3919 Portage Street in Kalamazoo. Snacks and drinks will be provided.

Second, if you are looking for a good book to begin 2026, try *Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature and Spirit*. In this book, eco-philosopher, naturalist & award-winning author Lyanda Lynn Haupt offers an invitation to ecological consciousness and action. Then consider joining us right here at **Prince of Peace Lutheran Church on Sunday, February 22 from 5 - 7** for a thoughtful discussion around the intersection of science and spirituality presented in the book. If you prefer spoiler alerts, and want to hear about the book prior to reading it, that would be fine. All are welcome! Snacks and drinks will be provided.

Please RSVP for both events by going to the Hope for Creation website at www.hopeforcreation.net, and clicking on Events at the top of the page.

Daily Prayer Calendar

Prayer on behalf of others is an essential spiritual discipline, but so is prayer for the self. Below is a list of prompts intended to focus the pray-er on seeking God's help with becoming more fully the person God created her/him/them to be. One use for this calendar would be to incorporate a new prompt into prayer each day of the month, but feel free to be creative. "Holy One, help me to..."

Ask more often than I tell
Discern the way forward in matters big and small
Broaden my thinking about options and partners in ministry
Utilize my God-given talents and the perks of my personality type
Say what needs to be said and resist the temptation to speak what should remain unspoken
Take time to play
Use my resources in ways that are welcome and helpful on behalf of the less resourced
Believe that I am loved and called by God
Recognize and process anxiety without visiting it on others
Tend to the needs of my body and mind
Participate positively in my community
Hope with abandon
Prioritize relationships over to dos
Dance in each moment
Look for the opportunity in change
Embody more fully the humility and the strength of Christ
Dig deep to find untapped courage
Understand my privilege and the ways it affects others
Grow in wisdom about the important things
See the image of God in all people
Know when to say no in order to say yes
Love in a way that stretches me
Acknowledge what I don't know



Listen with an open and attentive heart
Open myself to be surprised by joy
Be an agent of reconciliation without being sucked into triangulation
Care well for my corner of God's creation
Increase my patience with myself and others
Forgive old hurts, thus freeing myself from their power over me
Help others discover their strengths
Live with integrity

*Created in 2014 by Laura Stephens-Reed,
Clergy Coach & Congregational Consultant
reverendlaura@gmail.com*



Council and Committees



During December's council meeting we heard a budget presentation for the upcoming 2026 year from the Finance team and reviewed fall campaign data from the stewardship committee. We thank both teams for their impressive work to plan ahead and compile all the data we need to have another successful year at PoP!

We have also been impressed with the amazing services and events like Christ the King Sunday, Advent services, the Youth Shop and Wrap event, and the Youth Christmas program. Fellowship outings like our annual hors d'oeuvres party, cookies and cocoa, and caroling outreach went off without a hitch and joy and merriment were had by all.

We give special appreciation and thanks to our hard-working and dedicated staff who are facing challenges like fires, floods, and food shortages with patience, love, and endurance.

We truly have the most amazing people working and serving at PoP! On behalf of all council members, we pray you all are having an advent season full of peace and love.

Great opportunity!

Prince of Peace has the privilege of hosting the annual assembly for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod (i.e. Mitten Synod) on **May 15 and 16, 2026**.



ELCA Synod Assemblies are annual gatherings where congregations within a region (synod) meet for worship, learning, and governance. Discussions and voting are held on church business like budgets, social statements, constitutional changes, and electing leaders, all while focusing on the ELCA's mission of "God's work. Our hands." through fellowship, Bible study, and action on justice issues.

Based on our baptized membership, POP can elect 2 members at large and 1 confirmed youth to be voting representatives at the meeting. We elect these representatives at our annual meeting which will be Sunday, January 25, 2026.

This is a fantastic opportunity to get a glimpse into the work of the church at the synod level and to meet others from congregations across the state. AND, since it's here at POP, there is no overnight travel involved.

Are you interested in attending as a voting member?
Please let the church office know.

If you have any questions, please talk to Lisa Creed or Beth Whately who attended last year.

Library News

POP Library Updates:

First, our library committee is planning to have another library display of books (fiction and non-fiction) in The Gathering Space. The topic will be Forgiveness". It will start on **February 2 and end February 9**.

This is a difficult topic for everyone, but it is a personal choice. We all must make the choice to forgive many times in our life. How we choose to forgive or not to forgive can affect our lives profoundly. Some of these hurts are irritations that can happen just because we are living with human beings, but some of these hurts are of such a magnitude that they seem impossible to forgive.

Also, but no less important, is the need to forgive ourselves for some deed or action we have done. Hopefully through Christ's example and God's grace these books may serve as a pathway to healing, peace and love.

Please leave all books on the table until February 9 at which time they will be returned to the library, and you will be free to take them out and read.

Second, we are planning a "free giveaway" of non-fiction books. We have been doing some housekeeping in the library so we can make room for new books. The date of the giveaway will start on February 16. It will be open to the congregation for 2 weeks.

Fellowship News

"There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship." - Thomas Aquinas

As we begin a new year at POP, consider making a New Year's resolution to share the gift of friendship with one new person. The time we spend developing relationships with one another is always time well spent and a way to share God's love. Winter can be a time where we just want to huddle inside alone, but making a new friend is a great way to warm your heart!

Beat the winter blues with another **Trivia Night** with Wade Lawrence coming up in January. This one will be **Friday, January 23**. Get your team together for another night of competition, fun and fellowship!



As always the proceeds will benefit the Good Samaritan fund. Cost is \$10 a person, and registration begins at 6:30PM. We will have coffee, tea and water available. If you would like something else to drink, please feel to BYOB (bring your own beverage). We request that the beverages be non-alcoholic. We will have food for purchase. (Be on the lookout for details.) Because of the fundraising nature of this event, please avoid bringing outside food. This will be a wintertime only event going forward, so this is your one chance to show off your trivia skills in 2026. **Don't miss out!**

Our annual outing to catch the **KWings in action** will be **Friday, February 6th**. The game will start at 7PM, and Pastor Rachel will be singing the National Anthem at 6:50. Sign ups will be coming soon in the Gathering Space.



Pack up those crafts – it is time for another POP craft day, **Saturday, 2/21 from 10AM-2PM.!** Bring whatever craft you enjoy and relax while you spend time in fellowship with other crafters. We always have a great time enjoying each other's company and seeing others' talents. There will be a potluck lunch to keep you fueled up for all those projects! Keep an eye out for sign-ups!



Save the date notice! The Fellowship Committee is pleased to announce that we are planning a Women's Retreat this spring. Details are still being worked on, but the tentative dates are May 22-23 and will happen at Das Essenhaus in Middlebury, IN. There will be double occupancy rooms reserved to share. More details to come in the future!

Just a reminder about ways that you can help with Fellowship after service on Sundays.

First, consider signing up to bring a treat. You are not limited to cookies! Quick breads, muffins and other treats are all acceptable. As far as fruit, fresh, canned or frozen is fine. Nothing need be homemade – purchased treats are still treats! If the quantity of treats is preventing you from donating, sign up with a friend to split the cost/work. (Our rule of thumb is 6 dozen cookies for a typical Sunday – so that can be easily shared.)

Second, please consider signing up to do set up/clean up treats on Sunday. This isn't difficult at all, and two people can do this easily. If you need help learning how to use the coffeemaker – just let anyone on the fellowship committee know, and we will get you trained. Please consider volunteering as this is a time for us to join together to celebrate each other and our faith in Jesus.

Happy New Year to one and all from the Fellowship Committee!

Birthdays and Anniversaries



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Anniversaries

Randy & Marilyn Lund 1/22

1/1 Thomas Noall
Mary Holtapp
Renee Lassila
1/2 Eli Thomssen
1/5 Jennifer Jawahir
Marilyn Storch
1/6 Kyan French
1/7 Calleigh Bolde
1/10 Marilyn Lund
Karen Helmeke
1/11 Jordan Kana'an
Ann Lindahl
1/13 Joan Ford
1/14 Christine Thommen

1/15 Melissa Ottesen
1/16 Charles Ford
Claudia Blahnik
1/17 Gabriel Maurer
Robert Wagley
Tammy Olsen
1/18 Sandy Foster
1/20 Ava Erdmann
Stephanie Somers
Avery Vanden
Bussche
1/21 Dylan Sweeney
1/22 Karsten Cooper
Lynda Bauckham

1/24 Linda Isakson
Caelyn French
1/25 Holly Lago
Stella Lindmark-Stepanski
1/26 Linda Timm
1/27 Donna Pennington
Diana Reames
1/29 Dennis Stalker
Fran Bushfield
1/30 Sara Krebill
Dale Clem
1/31 Sara Lassila

Prince of Peace Calendar — January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	29 Office Closed in observance of Christmas 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group	30 Office Closed in observance of Christmas	31 New Year's Eve Office Closed in observance of Christmas	1 New Year's Day Office Closed in observance of Christmas	2 Office Closed in observance of Christmas 10:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry - Peace Lounge	3
4 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	5 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 7:00pm Women's Study Group - Flex Room	6 Epiphany 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 6:00pm Great Lakes Adventure Club - Social Hall/Flex 7:00pm Bells 7:00pm Youth Committee - Zoom	7 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing 7:00pm Church Council meeting - Zoom	8 1:00pm Food Distribution 6:00pm Partners in Profit 6:30pm South County Fiber Arts 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal 7:00pm Co-op Core Team Meeting - Zoom	9 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring	10
11 9:15am Budget Meeting 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm MS/HS Youth Group	12 3:00pm Social Concerns Meeting 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 5:30pm Finance Committee mtg. - Zoom 7:00pm Personnel/Executive Committee - Zoom	13 9:15am Staff Meeting 1:00pm Bunko - Gathering Space 7:00pm Bells	14 8:00am Men's Breakfast @ Mark's Diner 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing	15 Newsletter Deadline 1:00pm Free Store 6:00pm Nurse Honor Guard of Kalamazoo 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	16 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring	17 
18 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Budget Meeting 12:00pm Fellowship Committee Meeting	19 Martin L. King, Jr. Day 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 6:00pm Master Gardeners - Sanctuary 7:00pm Women's Study Group - Flex Room 7:00pm Worship Committee Meeting - Zoom	20 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 11:45am Ladies Lunch Bunch @ 5:30pm Property Committee - Zoom 7:00pm Bells	21 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Library Committee - Library 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing	22 1:00pm Food Distribution 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal 7:00pm Youth Committee - Zoom	23 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring 6:30pm Trivia Night - Registration 7:00pm Trivia Night	24
25 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Annual Meeting	26 9:30am Ruth Circle 1:30pm Care Team Meeting 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 6:00pm Justice and Diversity Meeting - Zoom 6:30pm Nami Support Group	27 Open Doors Men's Shelter Meal 9:15am Staff Meeting 7:00pm Bells	28 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing	29 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	30 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring	31

Legend:

AA—Alcoholics Anonymous ESL—English as a Second Language

NAMI —National Alliance on Mental Illness

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269/343-3453

www.poppottage.org

Facebook: *Prince of Peace, Portage, MI-ELCA*