



NEW CREATION NEWS

Jan. ~ Feb. 2026

St. Peter's United Church of Christ

1475 Orchard Park Rd., West Seneca, NY 14224

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PASTORAL PONDERINGS

We begin the season of Epiphany on January 6. It is always on January 6 and is celebrated as the time when the kings finally arrive to meet Jesus, twelve days after Christmas. That's why it may not always be on a specific day of the week. I remember having a membership class with a woman who wanted to join the church but she never learned that sometimes traditions are far from what really happened. I explained that most of the time when we see nativity scenes and from day one, the angels, the shepherds, Mary, Joseph and the baby and the kings are all there together. Some churches wait to add the baby Jesus but few wait until Epiphany to add the three Magi. Many people take down the Christmas tree and other decorations that are up for the holidays on the 12th day after Christmas. Epiphany is used with a small "e" and it is used to talk about a new awareness, an awakening and a thought that changes how we think about something. Enjoy this Epiphany, remember the Kings coming to worship the Christ child and take a minute to praise him, too.

The next church season begins in February on Ash Wednesday, February 18. This begins the Lenten season.

Pastor Paula



CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: *Please call ahead.

The church office hours are Monday - Thursday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. The office is closed on Fridays.

PASTOR OFFICE HOURS: *Please call ahead.

Rev. Paula will be in the office on Tuesdays from 10:00 am - 12:30 pm and Thursdays from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

PASTORAL CARE

Rev. Paula Gustafson is available to provide pastoral care for members of St. Peter's congregation. Rev. Paula can be reached by phone at 716-476-9261 or by email at pastorpaula2021@gmail.com.



Sunday, February 8, 2026

The St. Peter's Annual Meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday, February 8, immediately following worship. The Church Council members will provide a light lunch for attendees of the meeting.

Please plan to attend this important meeting.



St. Peter's Council 2025

DEACONS:	Linda Richards, President Kathy Reandeau, Treasurer Christel Kasprzak, Secretary Marina Stohr
ELDERS:	Paul Gannon, Vice President Sue Beier, Financial Secretary Karen Buranich Sandy Fiegl
TRUSTEE:	Brian Welsh

There will be 2 open seats on Council for 2026. The commitment is one meeting a month, for a two-year term. Each Council member becomes either an Elder focusing on the Spiritual needs of the church or a Deacon, focusing on Operations and Finances. If anyone is interested, they should reach out to one of the current Council members. The term will begin in February 2026.



Annual Congregational Meeting – February 8

Game Night – February 20

Palm Sunday – March 29 at 10 am

Easter Sunday – April 5 at 10 am

ENCIRCLING IN OUR PRAYERS...**FOR GOD'S HEALING**

Esther Woltz; John Sworen; Chuck and Irene Brooks; Tim and Sue Schrader; Milton and Elenore Keim; Janet Hunt; Audrey Seaman; Dorothy Probst; Esther Heppner; Rod Tolley; Mike Rogers; Marvin Glinski; Karen Homonai. Prayers for those lost, injured and traumatized by the mass shootings across the U.S.; Continued prayers for the people of Ukraine, Sudan, and the Middle East.

FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

For those in the hospital and with medical problems known only to God and their loved ones.

For all victims of violence.

For all **Gold Star parents** – those who have lost sons or daughters in the military—may God be with them and comfort them in their time of loss.

FOR THOSE IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY:

Earle C. Heusinger III  Army

Justin Hurlburt  Army National Guard

Jacob Kruwel  Army

Caleb Tolley  Air Force

Holly Tolley  Air Force

Jack Welsh  Marine Corps

And for all firefighters, EMTs, law enforcement & border officers.



Stay up to date with all of the St. Peter's UCC events by visiting our Website or Facebook page.

Check back often so that you don't miss anything!

Website: www.st-petersucc.org

Facebook: [St. Peter's United Church of Christ—West Seneca](https://www.facebook.com/St.PetersUnitedChurchOfChristWestSeneca)

**IN MEMORIUM**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our dear friend Brian Wettlaufer on January 7, 2026, in Fort Pierce, FL where he resided since 2018.

Services will be private.

Please keep the Wettlaufer family in your prayers.

FELLOWSHIP HOUR

We will continue to have Fellowship Hour once a month after worship service; on the third Sunday of each month. Coffee and tea will be served.

ALL are WELCOME and we hope you will join us!



If you would like to help with a future Fellowship Hour, please check the sign-up sheet for open dates.

St. Peter's UCC....

Faith, Fellowship and Service

Faith in Christ,

Welcoming **Fellowship**

and Loving **Service**

**PRAYER REQUESTS**

You may have noticed a new feature on our website (or on Facebook posts) – we now have a Prayer Requests form on our 'Contact Us' page at <https://www.st-petersucc.org/contact>. Prayer is a vital part of our Christian and church life, and we would like to pray for your needs - physical, emotional, or spiritual. You do not need to be a member of St. Peter's to ask us to pray for you. Please fill out the form to have your request added to our prayer time. All forms submitted go directly to Pastor Paula, and will remain completely confidential if requested. If you would like to have your request included in the Sunday morning "Prayers of the People" during our 10:00 am worship service, please submit the form **no later than Saturday morning by 10:00 am**.

**SUNDAY MORNING GREETERS**

We are looking for people to be Sunday morning greeters. It is an easy way to help and a great way to meet fellow members of the congregation. If you are interested, please see the sign-up sheet on the table in the sanctuary entrance. Questions can be directed to any one of the more experienced greeters.



MISSION MUSINGS

Submitted by
Kathy Reandeau

Sharing Christ's love and peace with all!

Once again, St. Peter's provided a happy start to the new year for many families in our community! From Thanksgiving through Christmas your support and generosity continue to overwhelm and astonish me, and fill my heart with joy. Your Thanksgiving donations helped feed 35 people in families that face the unrelenting assault of food insecurity. We also provided yummy appetizers, drinks, and desserts to Plymouth Crossroads to round out the dinners they received.

I added 26 names to our Christmas Giving Tree, with several gifts requested for each person. I felt some trepidation as Page 1 had always pitched in, and this year depended solely on the giving hearts of St. Peter's. I should have known better than to be concerned, as the gifts and donations quickly began piling up. Thank you to Karen Homonai and Pastor Paula for completing the tags, to those who helped decorate the tree, everyone who helped me carry gifts to my car, and especially to those who shopped until they found just the right items to help make someone's holiday a little brighter. There were a large number of children who now have clothes, toys, books, and basic baby supplies; families affected by the cut-backs in federal programs; and residents or alumni at Plymouth Crossroads who benefitted from our support. I also took a Christmas dinner to another family, and have food and household items to take to Family Promise of Western New York after the holidays. By the end of December, I will be making our benevolence distributions from amounts you have contributed throughout the year.

My sincerest thanks to everyone who makes all of this possible. Together we can truly make a difference! We have an idea in the works for another Lenten giving journey and will be releasing details on that soon!

SIERRA LEONE/JERICHO ROAD GLOBAL OUTREACH:

Jericho Road continues its global medical outreach missions. Staff members recently traveled to Goma where Chantal and her team deliver hundreds of babies, perform lifesaving surgeries, nourish children who need it most, and was recently designated a "hospital lookalike."



In a full-circle moment, they met UB alum Dr. Nico Fesser, who spent the 2019 summer at the Wellness Clinic and now runs the "Fedder and Friends Center for Hope," a Child Soldier Rehabilitation Center.



Phebian Abdulai continues leading the medical mission at the Adama Martha Memorial Community Health Center in Sierra Leone to avoid preventable medical tragedies, despite uncertainties in funding and medical supplies. We can support Phebian's work by donating money through the bi-monthly envelopes and gently-used clothing to the clothing shed. Learn more at <https://www.jrchc.org> under the global work tab.

PLYMOUTH CROSSROADS: Plymouth's mission is to provide a safe, supportive, home-like environment for



at-risk youth. They recently received \$25,000 from M&T Bank to further their goals. We supported Plymouth by attending the Buffalo Bills Viewing Party Fundraiser, which turned out to be their most successful fundraising event ever, and with our donations at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Visit www.plymouthcrossroads.org for more info.

CLOTHING SHED: The clothing shed collects and redistributes gently-used clothing to organizations and people all over the world, and it continues to receive a great deal of donations every week. We use funds raised to support Phebian Abdulai's work in Sierra Leone. **DO NOT** put any household items, pillows, electronics, toys or books in the shed!

FOOD PANTRY: The food pantry helps address emergency food insecurity issues in our church or community. It is a little low after the holiday giving, and we need canned vegetables, pasta sauce, cereal, and other non-perishable items. Please put any donations in the barrel in the glass vestibule during church office hours, or contact Kathy Reandeau for a pick-up. Please contact me if you know of anyone in need of food.



COUNCIL CORNER

Your Church Council hopes everyone had a peaceful holiday season full of love and joy. As we look back on 2025, we recognize that it was a bittersweet time with the sale of our property, but it also frees us to concentrate on the larger vision of being a growing, caring church moving forward into 2026. Thank you to everyone who supported our work, joined our efforts, and continued to contribute to meeting the financial needs of our church family.

There was so much that happened in the past two months that brought us together as a church family: we attended the Plymouth Crossroads Buffalo Bills Viewing party fundraiser, helped feed deserving families for Thanksgiving, heard from Pastor and members about what they like at St. Peter's as part of our Stewardship awareness month, approved our 2026 budget, dove into the holiday spirit by decorating the church and sharing a warm lunch, shared Advent inspiration each Sunday, listened to a guest speaker, learned about the UCC's Christmas Fund offering, enjoyed the music of Strike The Rock at the Donovan Post and in our own sanctuary, provided an overwhelming response to Giving Tree needs, engaged in a moving Christmas Eve candlelight service, and ended the month on a bright note by observing the 90th birthday celebration of Mary Jane Krantz! And we still hope to have a children's play, if they can all get healthy at the same time. Phew – what a ride it's been.

We hope for so much more next year. So, what can you do to get involved? There are so many ways, really:

- **Financial support:** As you heard at our budget meeting, we are projecting a substantial deficit for next year. Please prayerfully consider your weekly giving to help meet the financial needs of St. Peter's. If you can't increase your donation amount, please suggest or help at our fundraising events.
- **Join Council:** We will have two openings next year and are looking for volunteers to fill these spots. Members participate in monthly Council meetings to consider the overall business of the church, and are also designated as either an Elder or Deacon. These groups meet separately to discuss the financial and spiritual matters of the church.
- **Sign Up:** 2026 sign-up sheets are available for scripture readers, greeters/ushers, altar flower providers, and fellowship hour hosts. The Elders are working on descriptions for each of these activities, so you will know what is involved, or you can ask one of us for assistance. We also need two Sunday School leaders on the second and fourth Sunday of each month – see Sandy Fieg!.

- There are two committees that work behind the scenes to support the work of the church:
 - **Pastoral Relations:** This committee serves as a liaison between Pastor Paula, Council, and the congregation. Here we listen to concerns from each side in confidence, and try to come up with a workable solution for all involved.
 - **Visioning:** Got a suggestion for worship service, an idea for a fundraiser or a fun get-together, or thoughts about ways we can reach out into our community to invite others into our congregation? Then the visioning committee is for you! This is a loose and fun brainstorming session where we just gather to discuss ideas, opportunities, and hopes for our future. The next meeting is Monday, April 27 at 6:00 p.m., and we would love to see you there! Be prepared to share ideas about ways to focus on our strengths of worship, music, faith, community, wellness, mission, and fun.

We appreciate that Pastor Paula is trying different ways of increasing participation during our worship services, including a new way of sharing the light of Christmas, coming out from behind the pulpit more often and seeking to engage the congregation in more ways. On January 18, we will hold a quick informational meeting after church to review some of our procedures. The annual meeting is February 8, and we hope you will set aside time to attend and participate in conducting our yearly review.

Please remind your family and friends about our prayer request page on the website, and let us know if there is someone you think we should send a greeting card to. This might be someone we haven't seen in church recently, someone who is ill, or someone going through a rough period. We will announce the intention in church and ask everyone to take a minute to sign the card to let the recipient know they are being thought of in prayer. The next Council meetings are scheduled for January 19 and February 16, beginning at 6:30 p.m. May God's peace and blessings be with you throughout the coming year!



STRIKE THE ROCK'S HOLIDAY CONCERTS

We hit the road this year by traveling all the way to Cheektowaga where we sang to a full house at the Francis J. Donovan Post. The concert included our traditional and more contemporary numbers with the musicians rocking the house with songs of their own.

Two nights later we sang to a very appreciative audience at our annual St. Peter's concert. There were many familiar faces as well as some that we've never seen before.

We always enjoy performing our Christmas music and want to thank everyone who supported us at either or both concerts.



BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

To Pastor Paula, Strike the Rock, my St. Peter's family. Celebrating my special birthday with all of you was truly special. The music and sermon just made my day more memorable than I thought possible.

Thanks for all the love.

Sincerely,
Mary Jane Krantz



Dear members of St. Peter's UCC,

Thank you so much for your donation of Christmas gifts for our boys at Plymouth Crossroads. Your caring support of our mission makes this Christmas season special.

Thanks,
Friends of
Plymouth



CHRISTMAS PLAY

It was later than expected but our cast of little angels was finally all healthy enough to put on their Christmas play presentation of "The Angel and Mary" just in time for Epiphany, and it was well worth the wait. Despite falling halos and a few nervous jitters, they did a great job of presenting the story of Christ's birth - truly a story we should remember all year. Thank you to the supportive parents, patient adults, and outstanding cast for making this such a special occasion for our church family!

**TO THOSE WHO BRING SMALL CHILDREN TO CHURCH:**

Author unknown, submitted by Linda Richards

There you are at church. Your baby or toddler is restless. Perhaps even a little boisterous. You try to silence them, and nothing. You try to pacify them with food or toys, and nothing. Eventually, you resort to the last thing you wanted to do - you pick them up, and before a watching audience, you make the march out of the church. All the while you're a little embarrassed, maybe a little frustrated too. You might even think to yourself, "There's no point in coming to church. I get nothing out of it because I have to constantly care for my kid."

I want you - mothers and/or fathers - to know just how encouraging you are to so many. The elderly woman who often feels alone beams with a smile at the sight of you wrestling with your little one. She's been there before. She knows how hard it can be, but she smiles because to hear that brings back precious memories. Seeing young parents and their small children brighten her day; she may have just received bad news about her health but seeing the vitality of young ones removes - if but for a moment - her fears. The older man who always seems to be grouchy notices you too. He's always talking about how children in this day have no respect or sense of goodness. But he sees you - a young family - in church every week. Like clockwork, he can depend on the sight of you and your young family. You give him hope that maybe the Church isn't doomed after all, because there are still young parents who love God enough to bring their restless children to church.

Bring your children to church! If we don't hear crying, the church is dying. As hard as it might be for you as a parent who's half-asleep, keep on doing what you're doing. You are an encouragement, and you're starting off your children's lives as you should.

**SONG NOTES:**

 Strike The Rock likes to end its Christmas Concert with a driving version of the song, "Light Of The Stable," but did you know that there is also a quieter, more contemplative version? It was written by Elizabeth Rhymer and Steve Rhymer, and first released by Emmylou Harris with Dolly Parton, Neil Young and Linda Ronstadt in November 1975.

Modern arrangements convey themes of hope, divine guidance, the nativity story, and Christ as the central light, invite listeners to find salvation and joy in the

newborn King, and echo biblical passages about Jesus being the light of the world.

The song celebrates Jesus as the "guiding light" that illuminates the darkness, referencing the star of Bethlehem and the spiritual light of Christ. It's a direct celebration of Christ's birth, calling people to worship the "newborn King" and find peace and thankfulness in the stable where He was born. It brings a message of spiritual hope, urging listeners to cast aside fear and embrace the joy of the Christmas story. The lyrics are a call to worship, with refrains like "Hail! Hail! To the newborn King; Let our voices sing Him our praises". "Light of the Stable" uses the imagery of the nativity to present Jesus as the ultimate source of spiritual light, hope, and guidance for all people.

*"Hail! Hail! To the newborn King;
Let our voices sing Him our praises.
Hail! Hail! To the guiding light
That brought us tonight to our Savior.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"*

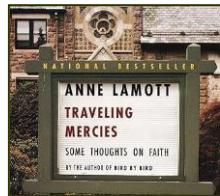
Let us remember the hope we celebrated in His birth throughout the coming year! Tell us what a song means to you, or you might even go online to learn about its history or find the exact words that touch you the most. Let's sing out our praises of St. Peter's music!



BOOK BITS

Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith

by Anne Lamott



In her last meditation of 2025, Pastor Paula quoted from the book, *Traveling Mercies*, a reflective memoir that chronicles the author's spiritual journey, characterized by her struggles with addiction, loss, familial relationships, and her gradual embrace of Christianity. It is described as a personal, wise, very funny, and "life-affirming" book (*People*) that shows us how to find meaning and hope through shining the light of faith on the darkest part of ordinary life.

Lamott claims the two best prayers she knows are: "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." She has a friend whose morning prayer each day is "Whatever," and whose evening prayer is "Oh, well." Anne thinks of Jesus as "Casper the friendly savior" and describes God as "one crafty mother." In essence, *Traveling Mercies* is an "owner's manual" for cooperating with grace, celebrating the messy, beautiful process of living a faithful life. Against all odds, she came

to believe in God and then, even more miraculously, in herself.

Key Themes & Content:

- **Faith Journey:** Lamott details her unexpected conversion, moving from cynicism to belief, describing it as "a series of staggers" rather than a leap, finding God in unlikely places.
- **Humor & Honesty:** She tackles serious topics (death, addiction, divorce) with wit, irreverence, and deep compassion, making faith accessible and real.
- **Community & Relationships:** The book features beloved real-life figures like her son Sam, her friend Pammy, and church members, highlighting the power of human connection and support.
- **Finding Grace in the Ordinary:** Lamott learns to see miracles and meaning in everyday struggles, finding solace in simple prayers.

Why People Love It:

- **Relatability:** It's a guide for imperfect people seeking grace, showing that faith isn't about having all the answers but about showing up and trying.
- **Spiritual but Not Preachy:** Even non-believers connect with its candid look at finding meaning and surviving life's difficulties.

Share with us about the books you enjoy, and tell us how they lift up your spiritual life.



SERMON THOUGHTS FOR WINTER DAYS

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet!" Celebrate the good news that God walks with us, no matter where we are going. We are asked to go and preach His word to all we meet.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Compassion will change our lives and our world!

Come down Zacchaeus! The tax collector didn't know who he was in his heart, until Jesus gave him the gift of relationship, even though it was unexpected and may even have been undeserved. Don't let sin dwell in you - if Jesus is coming to visit, you need to have your house in order!

Take courage! The prophet Haggai encouraged the people to be bold and to not be discouraged by the task ahead of them, providing assurance that God was with

them and would provide the strength to complete the work. "My spirit abides among you - do not fear.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."

To be a true receiver of God's blessings, we need to realize that life is indeed a blessing. "Hope lights up our darkness" because it acts as a source of light and guidance during difficult and dark times. Just as light brightens a dark room and helps us find our way, hope provides the strength and optimism we need to overcome challenges and uncertainties.

Be on guard that your hearts are not weighted down with the worries of this life. You will find God today, and will continue to move forward!

Remember the strength of peace, and keep it in your heart. In silence may we feel your peace, your place, your heaven, here and now.

Joy to the world; the Lord is come; Let Earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare him room, And heaven and nature sing!

We must believe that what happens in our lives will not destroy us as God is with us through it all. We can be the people of faith in a challenging world.

My soul magnifies the Lord! The light of Christmas is our reminder that a newborn child can change our lives forever. In a world filled with pain and anger, God has given us what we need to be strong.

Psalm 148 lists the many ways to praise the Lord. We are reminded to celebrate the gifts of God and keep the love of Jesus in our hearts all year. God is always with us!

May the peace, hope, joy, and love of His birth remain in your heart throughout the year!



WELLNESS AWARENESS

During the winter season we can see an increase in many types of respiratory illnesses including cold, flu, COVID, and RSV. These can be difficult to recover from, so here are some tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses. These steps can help to reduce germ spread and protect your lungs from viruses and irritants.

Hygiene & Behavior

- Wash Hands: Frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer.
- Cover Coughs & Sneezes: Use your elbow or a tissue, not your hands, to prevent droplet spread.

- Stay Home When Sick: Isolate yourself to avoid infecting others.
- Wear Masks: If you are concerned about your exposure to potentially-sickening germs, consider wearing a well-fitted mask in crowded indoor spaces.

Environmental & Air Quality

- Ventilate: Improve airflow in homes and workplaces.
- Clean Surfaces: Regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces like doorknobs, phones, and counters.
- Avoid Irritants: Steer clear of smoke, strong chemicals, and allergens.

Medical & Lifestyle

- Vaccinations: Talk to your medical professional about which vaccinations are appropriate for your age and health concerns.
- Boost Immunity: Eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep to strengthen your body's defenses.
- Stay Informed: about the latest tips for preventing respiratory illness.

Please share any tips or insights you have to help all of us increase our focus on physical and spiritual wellness.



**You will not
impact the world
by faithfully going
to church.**

**You will impact
the world by being
the church when
you go out into the
world.**

@saltandlight.words

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

JANUARY

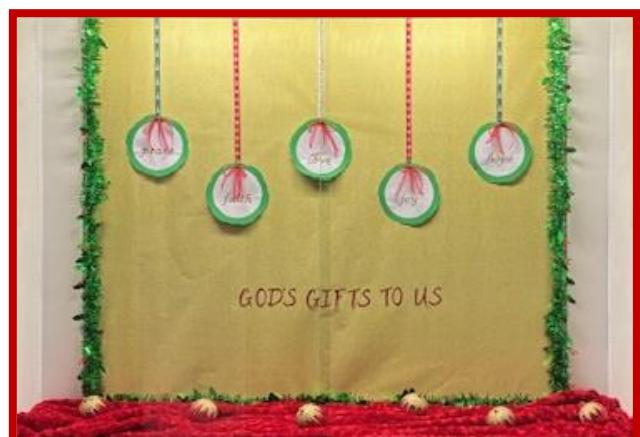
- 12 Pam Hurlburt
- 14 Mark Kasprzak
- 16 Grayson Vail
- 20 Renae Johnson
- 24 Elenore Keim
- 26 Susan Beier

FEBRUARY

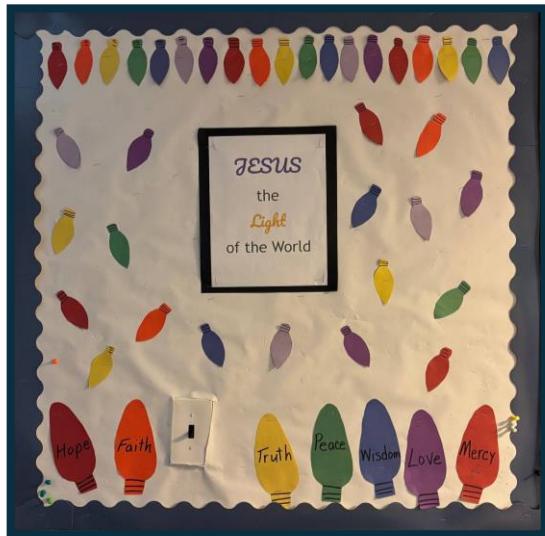
- 2 Chuck Brooks
- 7 Charlie Bushen
- 8 Daniel Richards
- 9 Phebian Abdulai
- 12 Jamie Burdzy
- 20 Eric Knerr
- 23 Marina Stohr
- 28 Christine O'Melia
- 29 Sandy Fiegl



Display by Linda Richards



Display by Christel Kasprzak



Billboard by Karen Buranich

For the health and safety of all our beloved members of the congregation, please remember that if you are feeling ill you should stay home, rest, and join us for worship through our Facebook Live feed.

