



First Bethel Church  
King's Light Newsletter

JANUARY 2026

2026



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
THOUGHTS FROM  
PASTOR DAVID

I have used the theme “From the Heart” since I became pastor of First Bethel. This year I am switching to something close. The theme I will use for 2026 is called “Healthy Church.” First Bethel is a healthy church and for that I am thankful! It is good to review the areas of church life that determine the church’s health. So here we go!

### **THE CARE OF OUR MEMBERS**

As we continue to expand our ministry to the Bethel Park community in 2026, I am wanting to make sure our care of our First Bethel community expands as well. It is important that we understand how the member care has evolved over time, universally and locally.

Those that have attended church(s) over the last several decades can attest to how different things are in today’s local church compared to that of 1950’s and beyond. After World War II, most churches filled to overflow. Membership rolls swelled so much that care of church members consumed the life of the church. This became the centerpiece and defined the culture of church. The influx of money that came with growing membership facilitated staff that would assist the pastor in the care of members. All in all, the predominant life of churches focused on the inside of the church. Programming, worship, building, and pastor/staff expectations focused on who was already there, not the ones not there yet (the community).

Churches in the US are in a different place now. Church attendance and membership remained stable until the late 1980’s and early 90’s. After that, a significant decline began. By the early 2000’s, attendance and membership were in free fall. By the year 2020 less than fifty percent of Americans were active

members in US church congregations and most mainline denominational churches experienced dramatic membership drops, some fifty percent and more. Though this can be attributed to several causes, the predominant one is churches becoming irrelevant to the world around them – the by-product of inward focus. There was no effort to build relations with non-churched individuals, community groups, businesses, and local government. Churches did not have their thumbs on the pulse of community needs as they devoted most of their time and resources inside the walls of the church. The balance of care for those outside the church walls with those inside grew imbalanced. This was done partly out of necessity, and partly because it was more comfortable and “safe”.

How does this impact member care in today’s churches? It requires churches to correct the imbalance without neglecting the care of its members, utilizing a whole-church effort instead of relying on the pastor or church staff. Churches that will find relevance in today’s culture and society are those that free the pastor to devote time to foster community connections, the identification of community need, and ministry leadership. First Bethel does this well. I have felt the freedom to do this, and it is making a difference in others’ lives as well as the ministry life of First Bethel. That being said, I would like for us to do our best, always making sure there are no holes associated with our care of members. Next, I would like to share the practical approach First Bethel engages and the addition of another element to our model of care.

First Bethel uses a “Shepherds” model of member care, outlined below.

- The shepherds minister to those who are homebound members that are not able to take part in church life physically, but desire to stay as connected as possible.
- Each homebound member is assigned a shepherd who stays in touch via telephone, personal visits, letters, emails, etc.

- The Shepherds meet quarterly with the pastor. At this meeting, each Shepherd shares about the member they are paired with, including any special needs and/or need for a pastor call.
- Each shepherd is encouraged to arrange a time for the pastor to visit for communion – to be shared when the shepherd can be present too. The goal is for this to happen two to four times annually.
- Periodically, seasonal gifts are coordinated, and each shepherd receives a gift to take to their member

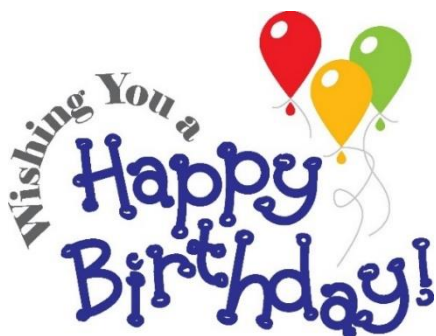
## **ROOM FOR GROWTH**

- While we have a structure to attend to our homebound members with the Shepherds, we do not have a structure to care for those who are able to participate actively but are experiencing a difficult season and not able to be active for a time. For assorted reasons, a member may not notify the church of their difficulty. It is critical that no one walks through challenging times alone. I would like to implement a structure to make sure none “fall through the cracks”.
- Some may feel this is the pastor’s responsibility...and that is correct...to an extent. It is the pastor’s responsibility to make sure systems and structures are in place for the congregation to extend this care, but it cannot be the pastor’s job exclusively for the reasons shared earlier. I think most at First Bethel “get this” and are healthy in this area. Additionally, I am in a mode on Sunday mornings that doesn’t lend itself to me being observant of who is or is not present.
- Our Shepherds ministry will be working on a system/structure in January to achieve this objective.
- Again, the objective of this ministry is not to “bust” those absent from the active life but to extend care in order that no one is doing life alone. Living in true Christian community is a core element in being the church together.

Thanks for reading this first installment of “Healthy Church!” As always, please contact me if you have any questions, thoughts, or feedback.

Journeying together,

***Pastor David***



Jan 1 Alex Zahniser

Jan 9 Taryn Powell

Jan 10 Mindy Jack

Jan 10 Ian McDonald

Jan 11 Teagan Long

Jan 14 Kristy Fink

Jan 14 Russ Schlutz

Jan 14 Melissa Smith

Jan 15 Anabell Rinehart

Jan 15 Carolyn Taylor

Jan 17 Zofia Smith

Jan 19 Andy Jack

Jan 22 Samantha Kite

Jan 22 Erin Martin

Jan 22 Don Ruffing

Jan 25 Barb Dillon

Jan 25 Keith Dutcher

Jan 25 Kitty Orr

Jan 28 Andrea Swift

Jan 30 Patty Laing

## G. LAVERNE MCCONNELL

**June 27, 1928 – December 11, 2025 (age 97)**



Age 97, of Bethel Park, passed away peacefully on December 11, 2025, surrounded by her loving family. Laverne was born June 27, 1928, in McKeesport, PA, to the late Leslie S. Myers and M. Bertha Behunek Myers. She met her future husband, James "Jimmy" McConnell Jr., in the first grade, and they were married on September 26, 1952. Together they were fiercely loyal,

adventurous, and full of laughter. They made their home in McKeesport, where they raised their family and became an integral part of the community they cherished. Later in life, Laverne moved to Bethel Park, PA, continuing to nurture the same warmth and closeness with neighbors and friends that had always defined their lives. Laverne worked as a secretary at Westinghouse. She loved baking, gardening, sewing, knitting, and playing bridge. She was a proud Daughter of the American Revolution, as well as a member of the Salvation Army, the Ruthfred Acres Woman's Club, and many other organizations throughout her lifetime. She will be remembered for her strength, faith, friendliness, charismatic personality, and humor. Laverne will be deeply missed by her son, James McConnell III, and his wife, Mari Marutani; her daughter, Kim Long, and her husband, David S. Long; and her sister, Janice McEwan. She loved her grandchildren: Jesse and Cody Long, Jenna Yoshikawa, and David Marutani. She also loved her great-grandchildren: Ryan, Kyle, Zoey, Teagan, Isa, Lando, Kieran, and Georgie, as well as several nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her husband, Jimmy; her siblings, Eleanor Bartels, and Leonard Myers. A woman of deep faith, boundless kindness, quiet strength and gentle spirit, Laverne was an inspiration to everyone she met. Her legacy of love will live in the hearts of all who knew her.

<https://www.beinhauer.com/obituaries/G-Laverne-Mcconnell?obId=46679315>

# OUTREACH

By Sally Irick

The Outreach Committee would like to thank the congregation for making Christmas special for 25 children and families from FamilyLinks. There were also several Angel Tree requests for Kings School Kids that were fulfilled. First Bethel UM Church is always so kind and generous all year round which makes our ministries so successful.



The recipients of Daily Bread and the NOW (Nurture, Outreach and Witness) committee are very grateful for the donation to Daily Bread. With this donation FBUMC will be able to continue providing a hot and nutritious meal six times a year to individuals in need. A heartfelt thank you for supporting this mission. May God Bless You. Merry Christmas!

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## **FISH is Fun In the South Hills at Parkford Community on Wednesdays 3:30 PM – 5:30 PM**



*Snacks, Games, Crafts & Homework Help  
Come Join Us!!!*

*Contact Mary Courtney or Lisa Rulong for more  
information.*

*FISH volunteer opportunities are now in Ministry Scheduler Pro,  
so signing up is even easier!*

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## **ASP TRIVIA NIGHT IS BACK!**



The ASP Trivia Night fundraiser will be **Saturday, February 21st at 5PM**. Stay tuned for more information on how to join a team and help us raise funds for our next Appalachia Service Project trip!

# THE NYADIRE CONNECTION

Dear First Bethel, my family,

We have bounced from the Christmas Season to a new year.

A long time ago, I wrote a song called **Let's Not Wait 'til Christmas to Have Christmas Day**.

One line of the lyrics is: "The moment we share God's love, that's when Christmas starts." And so, I am hoping that First Bethel will adopt Kundai, so that his Christmas begins because of our open, generous hearts. He needs three more sponsors. More on a First Bethel plan for Kundai will come.

We have done this before with two boys whose large photos have been shown in the Narthex many times. First was Charles. The youth group and one adult were two sponsors for Charles. First Bethel then took care of Nyasha. Nyasha had four sponsors - **all from First Bethel**.

I am thrilled to announce that the work of Christmas for Kundai has already begun with one sponsor already stepping up. Kundai needs four sponsors in order for our wonderful First Bethel Church to be able to say: **"Kundai is our child!"**.

More about this sweet 9 year old boy will be coming. For now, this is a picture of him taken this past summer.



Good New Year to you.

Love and Shalom,

Phil (aka The Chicken)





**Appalachia**  
SERVICE PROJECT®

## **WARM. SAFE. DRY. LOVED. BECAUSE OF YOU.**

by Gloria Stephan

First Bethel received a Christmas Card from Appalachia Service Project with these words:

*"This Christmas, homes like Arthur and Vickie's are filled with laughter and light. When Arthur and Vickie opened their hearts to raise eight grandchildren, their small home was stretched to its limits, but their love wasn't. With the kindness of friends like you and the help of ASP volunteers, this family now has more bedrooms, a sturdy roof, and space for every child to dream. During this season of giving, may your heart be filled with the same warmth you have given to families in need through your generosity and compassion. Merry Christmas from all of us at Appalachia Service Project"*

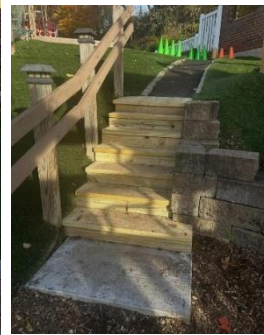
**As I spent time with friends and family in my comfortable and secure home this season, I found myself thinking about those whom my church helped to enjoy that same comfort this year. Volunteering in summer and fall, it's sometimes hard to see the lasting effect of helping others feel safe and loved.**

Our week of service will be **Sunday, June 14 – Saturday, June 20<sup>th</sup> 2026**. Support this ministry by joining us for a week or donating funds. To register, submit a \$50/youth or \$100/adult deposit to hold your spot. The trip is open to High School students and Adults with current clearances. Scholarships and fundraising opportunities will be available soon, and our church always supports this ministry with their gifts of time, talent and resources. See ASP's website. <https://asphome.org/summer/#learn-more> or contact Gloria Stephan for more information. Happy 2026! .

## A NOTE FROM KINGS SCHOOL KIDS!

**THANK YOU** for the variety of ways you have expressed your support of KSK! We especially wanted to thank the Men's Group for the holiday gift cards for the staff, to everyone who donated cookies to our extravaganza's bake sale, to the hard work from the volunteers in the Men's Group who built our new steps outside and who report for duty any and every time we need some assistance, and lastly for the many classroom gifts from the Angel Tree. It takes a village and we are so blessed to have each of you in ours

**Wishing you all a Happy and Healthy New Year!**



# YOUTH MINISTRY

The Youth Group enjoyed their traditional Progressive Christmas Dinner where they visited three different homes to enjoy appetizers, dinner, and dessert on December 20<sup>th</sup>.




In addition to enjoying great food and lively company, everyone also had fun with games and a gift exchange, which were highlights of the evening. A special shout out to Meredith Steinhagen for organizing, and our hosts, Jaime & Robin Gray, Mike & Gloria Stephan and Mark & Lisa McDermot.


What a great way to kick off the Christmas season!



First Bethel Congregation,

Thank you so much for my goodies box 

I loved everything sooo much 

That was so very thoughtful! I ate everything in it while I was studying for my finals! 

Thank you all again!

Love,

*Ella Harman*

# CHURCH LIBRARY NEWS



## A NEW YEAR & OLD FAVORITES

Of more than 1,800 books on our Library's shelves, here are some past favorites of First Bethel readers:

**UNBROKEN** – An ex-Olympic athlete survives a U.S. bomber crash, weeks in a raft at sea and torture in prison camps in World War II.

**LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY** -- A smart young chemist is not accepted by colleagues because she's a woman. So she uses her chemistry skills to host a unique cooking show and becomes rich and famous.

**HEAVEN IS FOR REAL** -- A little boy's astounding story of his trip to Heaven and back.

**NICKEL AND DIMED** – Trapped in a cycle of poverty.

**A MAN CALLED OVE** – In Sweden, a grumpy but lovable man's quiet life is gone after a boisterous young family moves in next door.

**ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE** – A blind French girl is in this Pulitzer-Prize winner set in World War II.

**BEFORE WE WERE YOURS** – Historical fiction based on the scandal in which children were kidnapped and sold for adoption.

**WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING** –An abandoned young girl living alone in a North Carolina marsh is called an outcast and bullied. Eventually, says Publishers Weekly, she becomes an "unforgettable heroine."

**THE GREAT ALONE** -- A Vietnam War veteran seeks a fresh start in the Alaska wilderness with his young family.

**EDUCATED** – Tara Westover was kept out of school and worked in the junkyard of her father, but she educated herself and went on to earn a Ph.D.

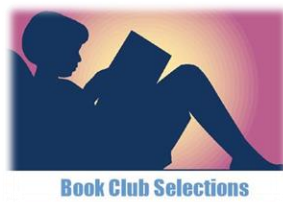
**SOLD ON A MONDAY** -- During the Depression a sign on a farmhouse porch said, "2 CHILDREN FOR SALE.". A review calls this "a masterpiece that poignantly echoes universal themes of loss and redemption...both heartfelt and heartbreaking."

**Your Library Staff**

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## BOOK CLUB

Our Book Club delves into a wide range of books to broaden our insights and viewpoints. Plus, we choose some titles simply for the pleasure of reading!



We welcome your recommendations and participation. Meetings are held once a month at 7PM (usually the third Friday of the month) at Panera Bread in South Park Shops. Join us sometime!



### **Friday, January 16<sup>th</sup> – Winesburg Ohio by Sherwood Anderson**

A collection of twenty-two interconnected stories following George Willard's life in fictional "Winesburg, Ohio," exploring themes of loneliness and isolation in small-town America.



The Youth Retreat to Jumonville will be **February 13-15, 2026**. Contact Meredith Steinhagen, Youth Coordinator, for more details. All junior and senior high school aged students are welcome to join us for this fun weekend event. We're hoping for snow!

# FIRST BETHEL MEN'S GROUP



The next Men's Group meeting is Saturday, January 3<sup>rd</sup> at 8:30AM. The men also gather informally for breakfast on Wednesdays around 9AM at the Eat 'N Park in South Park Shops.

The men coordinate local service projects and assist with various Nurture, Outreach and Witness ministries within and beyond our walls.

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## MARTHA CIRCLE



Martha Circle is a time for the ladies to be together for fellowship, service and connecting with other women of our faith community. There is no Martha Circle meeting scheduled for January, but they usually meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 1PM. Watch your bulletin or check the King's Light for details. Contact Donna Hennen for more information.

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## First Bethel's Mission Statement

***“Nourish Every Body,  
Stimulate Every Spirit,  
Satisfy Every Soul,  
for the Glory of God”***



# **First Bethel United Methodist Church**

Bethel Park, Pennsylvania

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

**5901 Library Road**

**Bethel Park, PA 15102**

<http://www.firstbethelumc.org>

**Church Office**

**412-835-0700**

[FBUMC@Verizon.net](mailto:FBUMC@Verizon.net)



**Kings School Kids**

**412-835-6141**

[KSK10@Verizon.net](mailto:KSK10@Verizon.net)

**Pastor:** Rev. David Ewing

Mobile: 412-818-0889

[PastorDavid@FirstBethelumc.org](mailto:PastorDavid@FirstBethelumc.org)

**Office Manager:** Lisa Stefanowicz

[OfficeManager@FirstBethelumc.org](mailto:OfficeManager@FirstBethelumc.org)

**Choir Director and Organist:** Phil Himmler

**Director of Maintenance:** Jim Howells

## **KINGS SCHOOL KIDS**

**Director of KSK:** Mary Beth Deckard

**Assistant Director of KSK:** Nicole Crisson

**KSK Office Administrator:** Charlene Phillips



<https://www.facebook.com/FirstBethelUMC/>

**KINGS LIGHT DEADLINE:** The **20<sup>th</sup>** of each month is the deadline for submissions for the next issue of the King's Light. Please have your information submitted on time to avoid the disappointment of not having it appear in the next edition. Send via email to Gloria Stephan, editor or send to [FBUMC@Verizon.net](mailto:FBUMC@Verizon.net)

**FIRST BETHEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**5901 LIBRARY ROAD**

**BETHEL PARK, PA 15102-3398**

**[www.firstbethelumc.org](http://www.firstbethelumc.org)**

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