



St. Stephens Bethlehem United Church of Christ

January & February Newsletter

Hello Church Family & Friends,

Our Advent & Christmas season was a very busy time of the year. We had breakfast with Santa (Dec 7) and our second ever Christmas Community dinner and caroling event (Dec 17) with many guests from our neighborhood. We held our first joint fundraiser, the cookie walk and pork chop dinner raising \$1,390 at this event. Shared our famous Christmas cookies during coffee hour. Spent many hours decorating our sanctuary and social hall for the Christmas season together. You have been so generous this time of year by supporting our Memorial Angels sale to decorate our sanctuary tree with, donating Poinsettias for our altar, and donating items for our warming and giving tree for members of our community. We are truly blessed. As we move through this season of giving, let's ensure that the spirit of the season extends long after the decorations have come down; Advent & Christmas at church in July? Now, there's a thought!!!

As we have been thinking about LOVE, how we love our church, and all that's going on around us this past year, we are reminded of what Jesus said when asked what the greatest commandment is: "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29–31) Love. That's what it all boils down to for us. Many of us have grown up singing the hymn, They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be what Christians are known for these days.

So, February is the month of LOVE. Did you ever think about it truly? Why do we need a month to celebrate LOVE? We can and should do it year round. In December we lit the 4th candle of our Advent wreath that celebrated God's love for us. How do you show your LOVE for your loved ones? How do you show your LOVE for our church? How can we expand that LOVE to others? Is LOVE the answer in bringing PEACE ON EARTH? The way to truly experience and share the love of God in our homes, neighborhoods and world is through love. Loving God (Mark 12:30), loving one another (John 15:12), loving our neighbors (Mark 12:31; "Who is my neighbor?": Luke 10:25-37), even loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Pretty sure that covers most everyone in our lives. Loving others day in and day out is hard. . Simply ask yourself, in each conversation and action, "Is this word or deed a way to show the love of Christ to this person?" Again, it's an easy thing to think and ask ourselves — it's in doing it that becomes more difficult. But wouldn't it be nice if we were known for our love.

So, please join us at church in all the events listed in this newsletter, and help us spread the LOVE for our church out into the community showing them what an amazing church we have.

*Bill Chapman, John Frenning, Joy Tedeschi, Rob Seth, Phil Starr, Joe Tricoli, Mary Martino, Elisa Faling,
Teddy Haase & Robert Christmann*

Your SSBUCC & KUCC Leadership Team Members:



And now we welcome the new year.

Full of things that have never been.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

I lean toward optimism. I see the glass half full more often than half empty. I lean that way, not so much because I am confident that everything always turns out for the best, I know better than that. Nor because I prefer to ignore the bad in favor of the good, I'm too much of a realist for that. Rather, I lean toward optimism because of God.

Christmas reminds us that God in Christ lives in our world, everywhere, all the time. Therefore, the deck is stacked in our favor, so to speak. That isn't to say we're never dealt a bad hand or that sometimes we choose. But whatever the circumstance, in some way or another, and often in ways we never fully see, if we see at all, God is at work lovingly and gently guiding me, you, all people, and all creation toward a world filled with what our Jewish friends call Shalom.* This coming year of our Lord, 2026, we the people of Kenilworth and St. Stephens Bethlehem United Churches of Christ will continue the journey of discernment regarding full merger. During the coming months, I will design some get-to-know each other activities, lead two graced history events (during which we'll learn about each congregation's history), and create workshops to help us answer the question, "Who and what is God calling us to be and do moving forward?" Please plan to participate. I promise it will be meaningful and even fun!

So, we embark on another year, 2026, which, for each of us, individually, and as a church community, will be "full of things that have never been." Whatever comes, though, God is in all things, and that makes all the difference.

May God's presence live in and through you and bring peace in all of your moments!

Pastor Ruth Snyder

Interim Pastor

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RuthESnyder01@gmail.com

* Shalom (שלום) is a rich Hebrew word meaning peace, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, and well-being, used universally as both "hello" and "goodbye" in Israel, conveying a blessing for a complete and harmonious state of being, extending beyond just the absence of conflict. It signifies a deep, foundational completeness that includes personal, interpersonal, and societal flourishing, originating from the root idea of being whole or complete (shalem).



January & February Worship & Events Schedule



Sunday, January 4, 2026: Epiphany/ Communion at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Dr Ruth Snyder. Celebrate January Birthdays during coffee hour.

Monday, January 5, 2026: Joint LT meeting at 6:30pm

Sunday, January 11, 2026: Baptism of the Lord Sunday at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Krista Ulrich

Sunday, January 18, 2026: Worship at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Dr. Ruth

Sunday, January 25, 2026: Worship at 10:30am, Congregational meeting & budget vote at 11:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Robert Fleming

Sunday, February 1, 2026: Communion & worship service at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Ryan Henderson (Associate UCC Conference Minister for Communication and Online Community) Souper Bowl Fundraiser 11:30am - 2pm.

Monday, February 2, 2026: Joint LT meeting at 6:30pm

Tuesday, February 3, 2026: Craft, Soup, Sandwich & Get TOGETHER at 12pm. (We will be making a Valentine craft for our shut-ins and home)

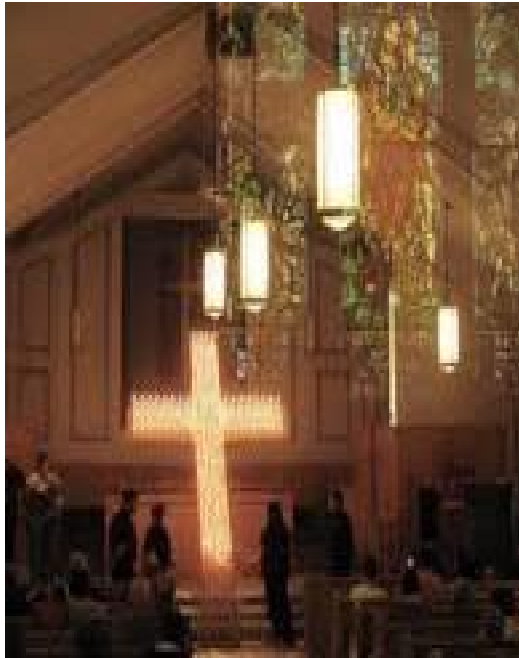
Sunday, February 8, 2026: "Love Theme" worship service at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Dr. Ruth Snyder. Visiting & delivery of "LOVE" packages to our church's shut-ins after worship. (Super Bowl Sunday)

Sunday, February 15, 2026: Worship at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Ebony Singletary.

Tuesday, February 17, 2026: Shrove Tuesday Potato Pancake Dinner Fundraiser. 3 - 7pm.

Wednesday, February 18, 2026: Ash Wednesday Lighted Cross worship service at 6:30pm. Beginning of LENT. Guest Pastor, Rev. Bob Fleming. Candles can be purchased in memory of, in honor of, or in thankfulness. Please see the attached blue envelopes and attached order form for it. The cost will be \$3 per candle.

Sunday, February 22, 2026: Worship at 10:30am. Guest Pastor, Rev. Dr. Ruth Snyder



Ash Wednesday
Wednesday, February 18, 2026
6:30pm
Service of the Lighted Cross

It is our GREAT pleasure to bring back our tradition of the lighted cross worship service to start the period of Lent. Some of you might not know, this cross was made by members of our congregation to raise money to help to pay off the mortgage of our present church building at 750 Wehrle Drive, when it was built in 1956.

Candles can be purchased for \$3.00 each in Memory Of, In Honor Of, and In Thankfulness. You can mail in your order forms, or drop them off in the offering plate by Sunday, February 15th. Names will be printed in the Ash Wednesday bulletin and read off during this worship service. **Extra order forms are located in the narthex, or write additional names on the back of this sheet.**

In Memory Of: _____

In Memory Of: _____

In Memory Of: _____

In Honor Of: _____

In Honor Of: _____

In Thankfulness: _____

Given By: _____



Planning Ahead: Please mark your calendar for our Annual Congregational Meeting & Budget Vote on Sunday, January 25, 2026 at 11:30am. We have 2 open seats on the Leadership team of SSBUCC. If you are interested in serving on the Leadership Team, please let Gineen Frenning or Etta Czaja know. The Leadership Teams of both churches created a 2026 Operation Budget of \$138,625 that needs your support on. Please note the huge increase was due to our insurances of \$17,000. We are working on the Annual Report. If anyone would like to submit a report on their group or events that happened, please submit it to ststephensbethlehemucc@gmail.com by January 4, 2026. **The Annual Report will be available to pick up in church on Sunday, January 11th.**



Souper Bowl Luncheon/ Fundraiser **Sunday February 1** **11:30am - 2pm**

If you can donate a crockpot of soup, please sign up across from the church office. Tickets are \$7 for an unlimited amount of soup. Additional containers can be purchased for \$2 to take soup home in. We also need items for our regifting auction. You can bring in these items and give them to Cindy, Gineen, Nancy or Bill) . Thanks so much.



Sunday, February 8th 2026

After coffee hour we need volunteers to delivery "LOVE Packages" to our church's shut-ins. See Bill Chapman if you can help out. These will include; soup, apple pie, roll, heart cookie & drink box.



Tuesday, February 17: Shrove Tuesday Potato Pancake Dinner Fundraiser. 3 - 7pm.

Cost \$12 (Potato Pancakes, Apple Sauce, Rye Bread, Fasnacht or Paczki and Beverage) Call or text 716-632-4226 for reservations. Or purchase your tickets on Sundays.



If the weather is too bad to attend church, you can always watch us on our Youtube channel live (<https://www.youtube.com/@st.stephensbethlehemucc586>) , or a taped version on Facebook or our website(www.ssbucc.com).

Thank you to Cody, Joe, Jason Teddy & Phil for stepping up and volunteering to Live Stream our worship services.

THANK YOU

The WINGS (Women In God's Service) Group would like to thank everyone who donated items to their Christmas mission project of collecting items to benefit our Hope & Joy Food Pantry. These are items that Feed More and Food Stamps don't provide. Thanks so much, you are a true blessing to these recipients.



Thank you for supporting our Memorial Angel Christmas Tree Tradition. We sold 81 angels. Thanks to Donna Sauer for making the angels and organizing it for us. It made our sanctuary so festive and homie for the Christmas Season. Thanks for your support.



Coffee hours are a great time for the congregation to bond and to grow together. If you can help us out by volunteering to host a coffee hour, please let Bill know. The church provides the coffee, juice and paper

products, we just need you to provide the goodies.

Open slots are:

Sunday, January 11: _____ Sunday February 8: _____

Sunday, February 15: _____ Sunday, February 23: _____

Please Keep the Following People In Your Prayers:



Fleming Family on the death of Sue's mom

Carolyn Bernhart

Pastor Arthur Davis

Sue Wade

Nancy Smith

Izzy, Joe Tricoli's adopted daughter

Marion Andrus

January Birthdays:

Nancy Smith (Jan. 3)

Amy Strusienski (Jan. 6)

Bill Cookfair (Jan 8)

Ava Hartmann (Jan 10)

Lois Vidaver (12)

Nancy Zajdel (13)

Katie Mazurek (17)

Kathryn Christmann (18)

Rev. Arthur Davis (Jan. 22)

Doug Faling (23)

Elly Keim (24)

Denise Graser (Jan. 25)

Nick Seth (Jan. 31)

Joe Tricoli (Jan. 31)

February Birthdays:

Shaun Leidolph (Feb. 5)

Nancy Kelly (Feb. 7)

Gary Reese (Feb. 10)

Harold Peters (Feb. 14)

Karen Jasinski Hennessy (Feb. 17)

Jack Fogelsonger (Feb. 18)

Cheryl Caine (Feb. 20)

Sorry if your name is missing above. We don't have it in our church records, Please contact Bill Chapman so he can include you. Thanks



Flea Market

Saturday, April 25, 2026

9am - 2pm

Table Rental is \$20 for an 8 foot table.

See Bill Chapman for an application.

When you are doing your spring cleaning and find items you know longer want, please donate them to the church's flea market table.

Baked Good Sale will also take place this day.

2026 Fundraisers & Major Events:

Please mark your calendars, we need your help!!! We have budgeted making over \$12,000 in fundraisers in our 2026 budget.

Sunday, March 29, 2026 (Palm Sunday), Free Breakfast with the Easter Bunny, 11:30am - 1:30pm. Craft making and game playing.

Friday, April 3rd, Good Friday Fish Fry: 3 - 7pm. Cost is \$16.

Haddock fish, potato salad, macaroni salad, cole slaw, bread, apple pie, and beverage. Call 716- 632-4226 to reserve your tickets. Eat in or take out. Worship service at 7pm.

Sunday, June 7, Theme Basket & Gift Card Raffle. 11am - 3pm.

Saturday, July 18: Craft & Vendor Show: 9 - 3pm

Thursday & Friday August 27 & 28th Church Yard Sale. 9am - 5pm.

Sunday, October 18, Theme Basket/ Gift Card Raffle & Trunk or Treat Event. 11am - 3pm.

Friday, October 23, Family Halloween Event. 6 - 8:30pm. Movie, game play & craft making event.

Tuesday, November 3, Election Day Bake Sale. 6am - 6pm

Sunday, November 22, Community Thanksgiving Luncheon, 11:30am - 1:30pm.

Sunday, December 6, Breakfast with Santa. 11:30 - 1:30pm.

Sunday, December 13: Cookie Walk, Christmas Concert & Pork Chops 12 - 6

Hooks'n Needles News:

Happy New Year! Hooks'N Needles have been busy this autumn. Linda made 81 chapstick holders while Donna made 81 soap sacks. We filled with chap sticks and bars of soap before donating to 3 different Lady Vet Groups in the name of Hooks'n Needles. As a total group(plus friends), we have donated 26 hats to Batavia Bounce House. Joan has delivered 14 hats to the Kenilworth Library and 20 hats with 6 scarves to Kenmore Mercy Emergency Room. Town of Tonawanda Senior Center received 20 hats & 18 scarves for their warming tree. 20 hats and 4 scarves on SSBUCC & KUCC warming tree. If anyone knows of a family or a group that could use hats, we still have some hats ready to go!!!

We have plenty of room at our table, please consider joining us. We will meet at 2:30pm on Thursday January 8, January 22, February 5 and February 19th.

Submitted by Donna Miller

Church School News:

Our Sunday School had a very busy and fun Advent season. Thanks to Joy for organizing the very creative and interactive lessons each Sunday. The children had a great time playing the Christmas games. The Church school averages between 4-5 children each week. Thanks to all the volunteers who make this programming possible for our children. Below are the volunteers for January & February.

Jan	4	Christina	Denise	Ann
Jan	11	Joy	Ava	Jason
Jan	18	Christina	Denise	Betty
Jan	25	Joy	Ava	Jason
Feb	1	Christina	Denise	Joe
Feb	8	Joy	Ava	Jason
Feb	15	Christina	Ann	Betty
Feb	22	Joy	Ava	Jason

Hope & Joy Food Pantry News:

OUR GOALS

The Hope & Joy Food Pantry's goal is, and always will be, to ensure the community that surrounds us always has access to nutritious food options. However, we are always looking for new and better ways to achieve this goal and serve our neighbors! To that end, the Hope & Joy food pantry has several projects and initiatives in our pipeline which we hope to implement over the next 1-3 years.

1. Our garden has provided fresh produce to the clients we serve during good harvest months. Over the coming years, we hope to expand into a true Community Garden that can provide ample produce to our clients and be sold to the community at large through local farmer's markets.
2. We hope to become a source not just for supplemental food for those in need, but also for education on food security, growing your own food at home, and enrichment resources in community, so that our clients may find avenues with which to better their lives.
3. We are looking to provide expanded availability for our clients in the coming years! We hope to utilize donations from our generous donors and fundraisers to allow us to serve over 100 families each week, and perhaps expand our hours of operations to allow additional flexibility.

Food Pantry Hours of Food distribution: Sundays 1-3pm, Mondays 5-7pm & Wednesdays 1-5pm. If you can help out please contact Kim at

Phone: 716-609-8819 Email: HopeAndJoyFoodPantry@gmail.com

Grief Share Program:

What is GriefShare? At GriefShare you'll receive valuable guidance and tips, leading you to relief, comfort, and peace of mind. A support group to help you move through the grief process. If you are interested in a group like this please contact Rev. Bob Fleming at pastorbob80@gmail.com or (585) 599-4803

SSBUCC Treasurer Report:

Income for the month of December \$5,098 (This includes weekly tithes, fundraisers and building usage income)

\$405 raised from our Memorial Angel Sale

Major expenses for November & December: \$6,899.47 for furnace repairs.

\$1200 per Month for November & December (\$600 paid by SSBUCC and \$600 paid by KUCC) for our interim pastor. Total \$2,400.

KUCC Sound System and Live Streaming System has been installed at SSBUCC. Costing approximately \$600. Sue Wade has offered to cover this cost. Thanks Sue.

Please note our average electric bill is \$250 each month for September - December. This is approximately \$150 lower each month since Heritage Christian Day Hab left.

A glimpse of the 2026 Budget: (More details in the Annual Report available for pick up in Church on Sunday January 11).

Total Income/ Revenue for 2026:

Pledges:\$56,000, Loose Plate: \$1,200, Building Usage: \$20,370, Unpledge Support: \$4000, Special Collections \$500, Fundraisers: \$12,000, Kenilworth Support: \$20,000

Total \$114,070.

Total Projected Expenses for 2026:

Facilities: \$43,700, Maintenance Contracts: \$12,600, Payroll: \$37,775, Outreach \$41,000.

Misc. Expenses: \$3,550

Total Expenses for 2026: \$138, 625

\$138,625 - \$114,070 = \$24,555 (2026 Operating Deficit)

Please note to save money in the 2026 budget, Kim Wilson is working with Mindy Rankin & Phil Starr in transitioning the treasurer to a volunteer position. Saving approximately \$13,000 a year.

Volunteers are always needed around the church to do cleaning and maintenance projects. Please see Joy or Bill to help out with that. Church volunteers doing the daily cleaning and maintenance saves the church approximately \$20,000 in our 2026 budget.