

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

February 1, 2026

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

142 Market Street, Williamsport, PA 17701

stmarks@stmarkswilliamsport.org

Office (570-323-4619) Fax (570-323-2452)

Rev. Brian D. Vasey, Pastor

bvasey@stmarkswilliamsport.org

Welcome to Saint Mark's!

This is Christ's church. There is a place for you here. Join us as we do God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world.

Our Mission: “To know Christ and to make Christ known.”



Please note:

Hand sanitizer is available for your use.

Offerings may be received by way of offering plates as you enter or leave.

An Order for Holy Communion; Setting Two, Lutheran Book of Worship

A guide to hymnal use: All hymns are printed in the bulletin and when reference is available the LBW, Green Book; WOV, Blue Book

Light print = Pastor/Leader. Bold print = Congregation.

**Please stand as you are able.*

INTRODUCTION TO TODAY'S WORSHIP

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

WELCOME/ANNOUNCING THE DAY/ANNOUNCEMENTS

***A BRIEF ORDER FOR CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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

Silence is kept for reflection/kneel or stand

Mighty God, lover of justice,

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.

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.
 Amen.

***HYMN Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart No Reference Available**

Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!

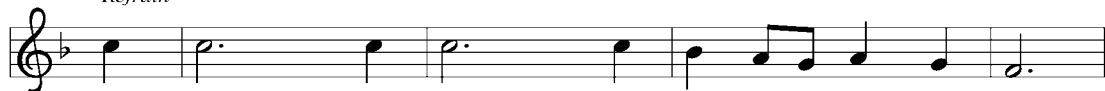


1 Re - joice, ye pure in heart! Re - joice, give thanks, and sing;
 2 With voice as full and strong as o - cean's surg - ing praise,
 3 With all the an - gel choirs, with all the saints on earth
 4 Still lift your stan - dard high, still march in firm ar - ray,



your fes - tal ban - ner wave on high, the cross of Christ your king.
 send forth the stur - dy hymns of old, the psalms of an - cient days.
 pour out the strains of joy and bliss, true rap - ture, no - blest mirth.
 as pil - grims through the dark - ness wend till dawns the gol - den day.

Refrain



Re - joice! Re - joice! Re - joice, give thanks, and sing!

5 At last the march shall end;
 the wearied ones shall rest;
 the pilgrims find their home at last,
 Jerusalem the blest. *Refrain*

6 Praise God who reigns on high,
 the Lord whom we adore:
 the Father, Son, and Spirit blest,
 one God forevermore. *Refrain*

*THE GREETING

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

And also with you.

*HYMN OF PRAISE



A Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and peace to his peo-ple on earth.



B 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

***THE PRAYER OF THE DAY**

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. 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.

THE FIRST READING: Micah 6:1-8

¹ Hear what the LORD says:

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

² 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.

³ “O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.”

⁶ “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?

⁷ 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?”

⁸ 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.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 15

¹ LORD, who may dwell in your | tabernacle?

Who may abide upon your | holy hill?

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

³ they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil | to their friends;
they do not cast discredit up- | on a neighbor.

⁴ **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.

⁵ They do not give their money in hope of gain, nor do they take bribes a- | gainst
the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be | overthrown.

THE SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ 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? ²¹ 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. ²² For Jews
ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a
stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the
called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of
God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is
stronger than human strength.

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to abolish things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

The word of the Lord.

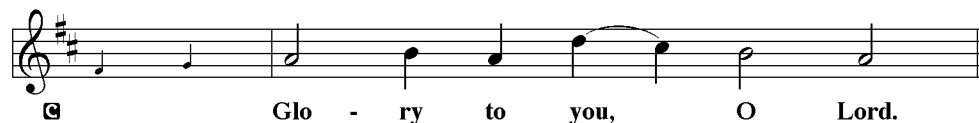
Thanks be to God.

***GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**



***THE GOSPEL: Matthew 5:1-12**

The holy gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew, the fifth chapter.



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

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

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

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

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

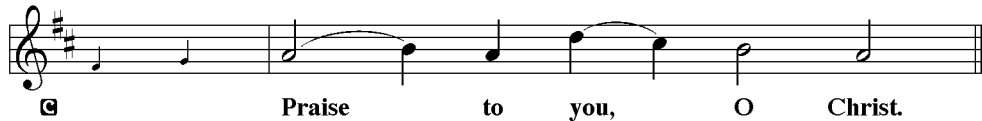
⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs

is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice 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.



THE SERMON

***HYMN**

Build a Longer Table

No Reference Available

Build a Longer Table



1 Build a long - er ta - ble, not a high - er wall,
2 Build a saf - er ref - uge, not a larg - er jail;
3 Build a broad - er door - way, not a long - er fence.
4 When we lived as ex - iles, ref - u - gees a - broad,



feed - ing those who hun - ger, mak - ing room for all.
where the weak find shel - ter, mer - cy will not fail.
Love pro - tects all peo - ple, spar - ing no ex - pense.
Christ be - came our door - way to the reign of God.



Feast - ing to - geth - er, strang - er turns to friend,
For an - y place where jus - tice is de - nied,
When we em - brace com - pas - sion more than fear,
So must our ta - bles wel - come those who roam.



Christ breaks walls to piec - es; false di - vi - sions end.
Christ will breach the jail wall, free - ing all in - side.
Christ tears down our fenc - es; all are wel - come here.
None can be ex - clud - ed; all must find a home.

Text: David Bjorlin, b. 1984

Music: NOËL NOUVELET, French carol

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***THE APOSTLES' CREED**

Let us confess the faith in which we were baptized.

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

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

**He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again 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**

After each petition: Merciful God/Hear Our Prayer

***THE PEACE**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

People may greet one another with these or similar words.

ANTHEM (10:30am)

The Beatitudes

George Whitefield Chadwick

OFFERTORY



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be
fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -
nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

*OFFERING PRAYER

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.
Amen.

*THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

♩ The Lord be with you. ♪ And al - so with you.

♩ Lift up your hearts. ♪ We lift them to the Lord.

♩ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

♪ It is right to give him thanks and praise.

The musical notation is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written on a single line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody and lyrics. The third staff continues the melody and lyrics. The fourth staff continues the melody and lyrics. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and half notes) and rests. The lyrics are: "The Lord be with you. And al - so with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give him thanks and praise."

It is indeed right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise to you, O Lord, holy Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Sharing our life he lived among us to reveal your glory and love, that our darkness should give way to his own brilliant light. And so, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

♪ Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:

Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.

Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

The musical notation is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written on a single line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody and lyrics. The third staff continues the melody and lyrics. The fourth staff continues the melody and lyrics. The notation includes various note values (quarter, eighth, and half notes) and rests. The lyrics are: "Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might: Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est."

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father:
Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign.
You have filled all creation with light and life;
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
We praise you for the grace shown to your people in every age:
The promise to Israel, the rescue from Egypt, the gift of the promised land,
the words of the prophets; and the gift of your Son,
who proclaimed the good news in word and deed and was obedient to your will,
even to the giving of his life.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, 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."

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

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 rejoice in the hope of his coming.
Come, Lord Jesus.

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit,
that we who share in Christ's body and blood
may live to the praise of your glory
and receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.
Come, Holy Spirit.

All praise and glory are yours,
Holy One of Israel,
Word of God incarnate,
Power of the Most High,
One God.
Now and forever.
Amen.

***OUR LORD'S PRAYER**

Lord as you have taught us, so now we pray:
**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.**

*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, grant us peace.

*INVITATION TO COMMUNE

Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Come to the table; taste and see.

Thanks be to God!

All are welcome at the Lord's Table. Use the center aisle, pick up a small glass on the way. Receive the bread and then proceed to receive the wine by way of a pouring chalice. After communing return to your pew using a side aisle. Those not communing may come forward for a blessing.

Know that the crucified and risen Christ gives himself to you in his supper. If you cannot eat bread, drink only the wine. If you cannot drink wine, eat only the bread.

THE COMMUNION

*AFTER COMMUNION

The body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

Amen.

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

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.

Amen.

***BLESSING**

May Almighty God,
Father, Son ☩ and Holy Spirit,
bless you with endless grace, peace, and joy.

Amen.

***HYMN**

The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve

WOV, "Blue," 723

The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve

The musical score is written for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. It consists of three systems of music. The first system has four vocal parts with lyrics: 1 The Spir - it sends us forth to serve; we go in; 2 We go to com - fort those who mourn and set the; 3 We go to be the hands of Christ, to scat - ter; 4 Then let us go to serve in peace, the gos - pel. The second system has four vocal parts with lyrics: Je - sus' name to bring glad tid - ings; bur - dened free; where hope is dim, to; joy like seed and, all our days, to; to pro - claim. God's Spir - it has em -. The third system has four vocal parts with lyrics: to share the poor, God's fa - vor to blind pro - claim. cher - ish a dream and to help the the lov - ing see. pow - ered us; to we do go in Je - sus' name.

***DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Do justice. Love mercy.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Music Notes: Chadwick (1854–1931), one of America's foremost late-Romantic composers and a leading figure in the Boston Six, sets the text of the Beatitudes with expressive lyricism and sophisticated harmonic textures. Each blessing is highlighted with subtle dynamic shifts and flowing vocal lines, drawing the listener into the spiritual depth of Christ's teaching. The anthem's reflective yet uplifting character encourages meditation on the values of compassion, humility, and mercy.

OUR PRAYER LIST

Grace Arner, Vanessa Morgan, Charles Miller, Jerry Miller, Richard Ritter, Ashton Ott, Lucille Sider, Gary Cable, Virginia Pulaskie, Bunny Ditchfield, Ezra Buckman, Sheila Brassard, Kevin Rosini, Kathy Eshelman, Micah, Deb Buckman, Linda Rosini, Walt Haussmann, Kristin Rehm, Ariel, John Tartline, George Poliska, Connie Shaible, John and Terry Holohan, Loretta Hawe, Donna Baker, Ann Kuntz, and Ann & Charles Kuntz.

COMMEMORATIONS

Presentation of our Lord

Monday, February 2, 2026

Forty days after the birth of Jesus we mark the day Mary and Joseph presented him in the temple in accordance with Jewish law. There they were greeted by Simeon, an aged priest who offered the song "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace," as well as by the prophet Anna, who spoke of the redemption of Israel.



Ansgar, Bishop of Hamburg, missionary to Denmark and Sweden, died 865

Tuesday, February 3, 2026

A monk who helped bring Christianity to Scandinavia, Ansgar returned to Germany where he was named bishop of Hamburg. He is remembered for his love for poor people.



The Martyrs of Japan, died 1597

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Christianity was brought to Japan in the sixteenth century by Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries. The religion was suppressed, however, and in 1597 twenty-six missionaries and converts were crucified. Nevertheless, Christianity survived and prospered.



THIS WEEK AT ST. MARK'S

Today, February 1

Holy Communion, 8 and 10:30 am
Sunday School, 9:15 am
Worship & Music after 10:30 service

Monday, February 2

Office Hours, 9 am- 1 pm

Tuesday, February 3

Office Hours, 9 am- 1 pm
Evangelism and Fellowship, 5:30 pm

Wednesday, February 4

Office Hours, 9 am- 1 pm
Men's Fellowship, 6 pm

Thursday, February 5

Office Hours, 9 am- 1 pm

Friday, February 6

Office Hours, 9 am- 1 pm

Saturday, February 7

Church Office Closed

Sunday, February 8

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Holy Communion, 8 and 10:30 am
Sunday School, 9:15 am

OUR STEWARDSHIP for January 25, 2026

No report due to weather

ALTAR FLOWERS are given to the Glory of God by Memorial Fund.

WORSHIP LEADERS for February 1, 2026

Lector	8:00 am	Brian Jackson
	10:30 am	Phil Thomas
Communion Assistants	8:00 am	Brian Jackson
	10:30 am	Matt & Wanda Fortin
Ushers	8:00 am	Miller/Poff
	10:30 am	The Magg's/Dick Reitz
Hospitality	8:00 am	Herb Poff
	10:30 am	Shelby & Gary Weber
Organist		Sam Robinson
Altar Guild (JANUARY)		Sally Bjornstad & Vicki Haussmann

ANNIVERSARIES

Cindy Hartzel	2/4
Vince & Diane Bardsley	2/28

BIRTHDAYS

Michael Reitz	2/6
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KEEP IN MIND:

~When you or a family member are ill, have a crisis of faith, or have a personal concern of which you wish to make the pastor aware, please contact him directly by church office telephone (570-323-4619) email (bvasey@stmarkswilliamsport.org) or his cell phone (272-788-0161). Do not assume the pastor will know of your need any other way.

~ When you or a loved one has a change of address, email, or telephone number, please contact the church office at stmarks@stmarkswilliamsport.org or 570-323-4619. Please direct your intentions whether or not to share this information with our church family, so that in may be included in the weekly bulletin and/or the "Lion."



So we are done for this year however, please do not stop thinking about the kits and the items for them! Watch the clearance racks and shelves for items and snap them up. If you do not want to store them at home, you can bring them to the church and put them in the office opposite the middle lounge - you will know which one it is - the messy one with boxes, etc. Baby clothes, towels, etc. can be found on clearance. Deb Buckman



WANT TO EXPLORE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LUTHERAN CHRISTIAN? Adults wishing to unite with St. Mark's in church membership are invited to contact PASTOR VASEY at 570-323-4619 or email: stmarks@stmarkswilliamsport.org.



Still Needed At.....

Our congregation generously donated food, snacks and hygiene items to various nonprofits in our community during our Reverse Advent project. But the need for these items continues. As you are able, please consider donating to these nonprofits.

Shepherd of the Streets: Currently there is an urgent need for paper towels and toilet paper. Gently worn coats, hats and gloves are also being collected during these winter months.

Sojourner Truth Ministries (STM): Needed are brown, large-size lunch bags, ketchup, mustard, salad dressings and plastic knives.

United Churches Food Pantry: Please consider continuing to offer non-perishable food items to be used by the Pantry. Participating in Souper Bowl Sunday is a fun way to participate.

Sandwich Crews at St. Mark's: We provide sandwiches weekly to New

Covenant's Blessing Boxes. Monetary donations to offset the cost of rolls, meat and cheese are always appreciated. Checks may be made payable to St. Mark's with the memo line indicating Parish Life. Thank you, Devin Owen, for joining the Wednesday Sandwich Crew.

Update on Code Blue

Church crafters, Theresa Furman, Cindy Todd and Lou Ann Zeigler graciously made and donated wire stars for use by the Evangelism and Fellowship Committee during Advent. The ornaments were free for the taking, but a modest donation was requested to purchase grocery gift cards for Code Blue. Many stars were taken and the monetary donations were generous. But something magical occurred. In addition to more than \$200.00 in cash, gift cards starting showing up anonymously in the Evangelism and Fellowship mailbox. Last week St. Mark's was able to give Code Blue several grocery gift cards totaling \$370.00 in addition to hundreds of individual snacks! But the gifts have continued, as an additional \$50.00 in grocery gift cards were placed in our mailbox raising our total to \$420.00! We are blessed by your generosity, but more importantly Code Blue is able to serve the homeless in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

A Look Ahead----Valentine's Day Greetings

The Evangelism and Fellowship Committee needs the congregation's help in sending Valentine's Day greetings to our Special Concern Folks and others we do not see as often as we would like.

Cards are available in the Narthex today, **Sunday, February 1, 2026** after each service. Please add a cheery message, affix a stamp and mail in time for Valentine's Day. Thank you for any assistance you can provide.

Card Ministry

A new year for sending cheery messages to our Special Concern folks is underway. The Evangelism and Fellowship Committee need volunteers to take a month of card sending for 2026. Everything is provided but you. The sign-up sheet is in the Narthex.

Go Tell It IN The Mountains Initiative Sunday February 1, 2026

The **Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative** is a grant fund work of the Allegheny, Upper Susquehanna, and Northwest PA Synods of the ELCA. This Initiative has the three main goals of

- 1) Equipping preachers with techniques and developing skill to communicate the gospel in more compelling ways.
- 2) Recruiting and equipping aspiring preachers, and
- 3) Encouraging existing members of our congregations to respond to compelling preaching through integrating the gospel into their daily lives.

In support of increasing compelling preaching in our region the following resources have been developed. A Preaching with Power Cohort along with 7 small group preaching cohorts are active. Weekly Pericope Studies have been promoted through zoom and each quarter a professionally led pericope study is conducted. Three times each year there are trainings on preaching in coordination with United Lutheran Seminary. Special videos on inclusionary language, understanding our Pennsylvanian Appalachian context, and understanding the basics of AI usage in congregations have been created.

In support of increasing the availability of preachers, free training for those interested in being Authorized Lay Worship Leaders have been created in partnership with Luther Seminary. A connection tool for congregations and preachers is also in the design phase of development.

In support of us as listeners, two resources have been affirmed for congregational study. First is "Listeners Dare" by Will Willimon and the second is "I Will" by Thom Rainer. Any congregation who wishes to study the "I Will" book may have this book purchased for them by the Initiative! Finally, EVERY congregation had a 5-mile radius demographic analysis completed by Initiative staff and mailed to each congregation in our three synods.

Today, we desire your help to understand where we should focus our efforts in preaching and listening development. Please take a moment to answer this question and turn it in TODAY. "What are your hopes for the sermon each Sunday?" Your responses will be gathered to seek common needs and desires related to preaching in our region. Your support is genuinely appreciated!

That question again is: "What are your hopes for the sermon each Sunday?"

At the January meeting of **St. Mark's Congregational Council**, the following officers were elected for calendar year 2026:

President	Ray Huff
Vice-President	Richard Reitz
Secretary	Cindy Todd
Treasurer	Deb Buckman

Thank you to all who have agreed to serve St. Mark's for 2026 and all who have previously served our congregation.

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