



THE ARK

January 2026

NEWSLETTER

COVENANT United Methodist Church

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From Pastor's Desk:

Count Your Blessings

**"Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God has done."**



These words come from the well-known hymn Count Your Blessings. At its heart, this hymn teaches us a crucial piece of Christian wisdom: from time to time, we need to pause and intentionally count God's blessings in our lives. This simple practice helps us recognize how faithfully God has listened to our prayers and how generously God has blessed us. Such recognition leads us to genuine gratitude and deepens our trust in God's providence. Without this practice, we can easily forget God's quiet guidance and ongoing blessings—and instead focus on what we think we lack.

As we stand at the dawn of 2026, this feels like the perfect time to embrace this wisdom. Looking back on 2025, how did God answer your prayers? How did God guide and bless you over the past year? What blessings do you recognize in your life today?

With this same spirit, I have taken time to look back and count God's blessings in the life of our church. Doing so has taught me, as an ambitious pastor, an important lesson: God has already poured out abundant blessings upon Covenant UMC. **In 2025, our church grew stronger—both in numbers and in spirit.** We welcomed around **15 new members** this year, just as we did the year before, and several others are already planning to join in 2026. Many of you may have noticed the growing number of new faces in worship.

Our **Sunday School** and **Youth Group** have also grown, leading to the creation and expansion of meaningful programs such as Fun Sundays, the Youth Mission Trip, Rally Sunday, Lock-Ins, and the Christmas Program. Alongside our long-standing small groups like **UMM** and **UWF**, new groups have formed—**Trillium, Food and Fellowship, and Young Couples' gatherings**—each fostering deep and active connections.



When it comes to mission, the list has become too long to name in full. What can be said simply is this: our existing missions have expanded and flourished, and new mission opportunities continue to emerge. One common comment from new members is how challenging it can be to keep up with all the ministries and missions happening in the church—a good and joyful challenge to have.

In addition, over the past three years, all major **building projects** have been completed. These include repaving the parking lot, replacing the sanctuary lighting, and installing a new accessibility ramp this year. This work was made possible through the faithful commitment of the Trustees and the generous support of the congregation.

This growth has been a steady trend over the past three years, but it has been especially noticeable in 2025. Why has this happened? Ultimately, it is God who has made it possible. At the same time, this growth reflects the faithful and tireless commitment of our church leaders and members in response to God's blessings. Many people may not realize how often and how many hours our leaders give each week, carrying out countless ministries behind the scenes. Many have served faithfully in leadership roles for over three years, often without recognition.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to our dedicated church leaders. I also want to thank the many faithful members who serve quietly and humbly in ministries and missions without acknowledgment. Without all of you, this growth would not have been possible. Thank you for your faithful and generous engagement.

Yet church growth is not only a **blessing** to celebrate—it is also a responsibility God entrusts to us. God's blessings are God's call for us to become a blessing to others. They are an **invitation** to make mature disciples and to expand God's Kingdom in our community.

So we must ask ourselves: what is God calling us to do next? On a personal level, I invite each of us to reflect on how we can grow as more mature disciples of Jesus Christ and how we can help transform the Fond du Lac community into a clearer expression of God's Kingdom. Rather than staying with abstract ideas, I encourage all of us to identify tangible and practical ways to live out this calling in 2026.

To discern God's guidance together and to explore these practical steps as a community, the church leaders and I are planning a **five-hour visioning meeting** on **January 17**. This time will include prayer, discernment, discussion, and planning. Please keep this meeting—and our leaders—in your prayers as we seek God's direction.

I pray that 2026 will be a year in which all of us grow into greater maturity, both personally and as a church community, as we continue to count our blessings and respond faithfully to God's call.



January Worship and Sermon

As an immigrant pastor who has served in Wisconsin for over ten years, one thing I have learned is that there is a shared rhythm of life among Wisconsinites. Because of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's celebrations, November and December are often very busy months. However, after the New Year, that busyness begins to settle. Life grows quieter, and we are given more space to be alone and to slow down. Our cold winter weather often deepens this calm and reflective rhythm. Some people may experience this season as depressing or lonely. Yet from a spiritual perspective, it can be an ideal time to deepen our relationship with God. Solitude and silence are often necessary for us to journey inward and listen more carefully to God's presence in our lives.



With this season in mind, I have prepared a sermon series for January and February titled “**The Lord’s Prayer.**” Prayer is one of the most essential ways we stay connected to God, and among all prayers, the Lord’s Prayer holds a special place because Jesus himself taught it to us. Many Christians—myself included at times—recite this prayer by memory without fully reflecting on the depth and meaning of its words. Yet every line and every phrase carries rich meaning. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us who God is, what to pray for, how to pray, and how to live according to God’s will. Over six Sundays, we will explore each part of this prayer together, trusting that this journey will invite us into a deeper relationship with God. With holy expectation, I invite all church members to join us for this new sermon series.

There are also a few important notes regarding our January worship services. **On January 11**, we will participate in the traditional **Wesley’s Covenant Prayer** during worship. This prayer, written by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, has long been used at the beginning of the year as a way for Methodists to renew their commitment to God. By praying this prayer together, we will have an opportunity to re-surrender ourselves to God’s will and to offer our lives anew in this coming year.

On the third Sunday of the month, **January 18**, we will **install our church leaders** who have committed themselves to serve in ministry for 2026. Finally, on **the last Sunday of January**, I will be away attending **the Youth Winter Retreat**. During that time, **Rev. Michael Morning** will join us and bring God’s Word to our congregation.

January Worship and Sermon

DATE	CALENDAR	SERMON	WORSHIP
1/04	New Year Epiphany	Sermon: Lord's Prayer 1	- Communion - Offering: Pacto de Gracia
1/11	The Baptism of Our Lord	Sermon: Lord's Prayer 2	- Wesley's Covenant Service - Offering: Pacto de Gracia - Choir
1/18	2 nd Sunday after the Epiphany	Sermon: Lord's Prayer 3	- The Installation of Church Leaders - Offering: Banana Project - Bell Choir
1/25	3 rd Sunday after the Epiphany	Guest Preacher: Rev. Michael Morning.	- Offering: Banana Project - Choir

Pastor's Schedule

Due to various church events, the pastor's retreat, and vacation, the pastor's schedule this month will be somewhat different from a typical month. If you would like to meet with the pastor, please review the dates below.

- ◆ **UMC Korean Pastors' Winter Retreat:** December 29th – 31st
- ◆ **Pastor's Retreat:** January 5th – 7th
- ◆ **Youth Winter Retreat:** January 23rd – 25th
- ◆ **Pastor's Day Off:** January 27th – 28th
- ◆ **Pastor's Vacation:** February 2nd – 7th

The church office will be open as usual, except on January 1st.

Small Group Ministry Update: **Trillium Looks Ahead to New Year**

The new year is a perfect time to try something new. Why not join a small group? Trillium is a small group with a theme of God and nature. The idea is that by connecting with nature we connect with God and each other. The group meets twice a month, once indoors and once at an outside location connected to nature. Outside activities are weather dependent but designed to accommodate those with physical limitations. Its **next meeting is Wednesday, January 14 at 1 p.m.** at the **Fellowship Hall**.

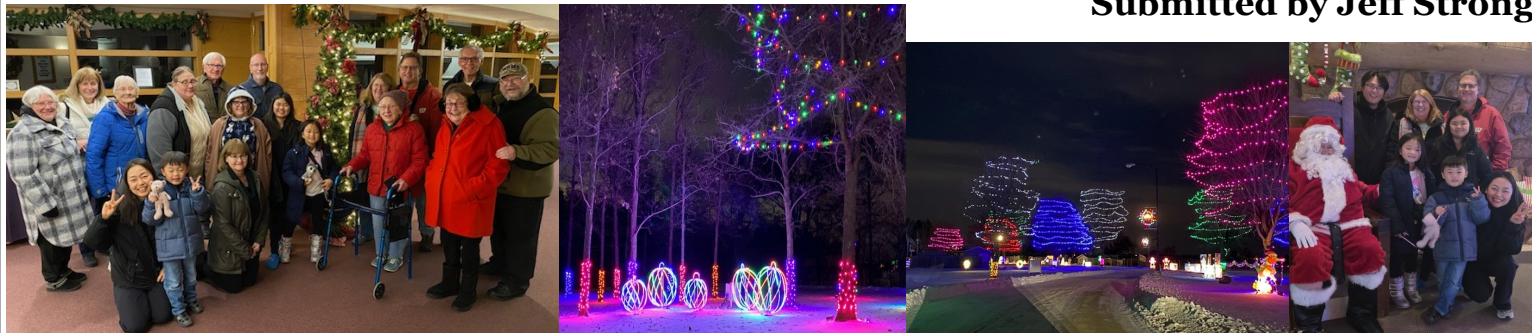
We'll celebrate the first anniversary of the group with a cake, review favorite images from the 2025 outings, plan ahead for 2026, and view videos of ice caves along the shore of Lake Superior.

Submitted by Jeff Strong

Holiday Lights Dazzle

Twenty attendees kicked off the holiday season with a visit to **the Oshkosh Celebration of Lights December 4** in an event hosted by the small group **Trillium**. After enjoying some sweets and a hot beverage at church, the group viewed almost a million lights in displays on the 2.4-mile drive through the EAA grounds. Admission fees and food donations supported local area charities. Some even had personal time with Santa.

Submitted by **Jeff Strong**



Sunday School News

Sunday **January 4**, our Sunday school teachers will meet following the worship service to discuss our curriculum plans for January and February.

Sunday, **January 11**, our Sunday school teachers will go to lunch in Fond du Lac (place to be determined) **at 11:00**. This outing will give us an opportunity to socialize and get to know one another better. Please sign up in the Narthex so we have an accurate count for the restaurant! We appreciate you!



December was a busy month for Sunday school children and the Youth group as they practiced for the Christmas program presented on December 14 during worship. All of the comments following the performance were very positive. The Sunday school children not only sang and danced, some learned how to play **Joy to the World** using small hand bells under the direction of **Nancy Johnston**. The Christmas story was retold by all of the children with the aid of puppets which were performed by the youth group. What a wonderful way to celebrate Jesus's birth! Thank you to all who made this such a success!

Tentative date of **Family Fun Sunday** with **tubing** at Sunburst is **February 1**, following the church service. Look for a **sign-up sheet** on the Narthex table. Families are welcome to invite others who are not members of the church. More information will be announced in January!

Submitted by **Julie Tennie**





January Sunday School Schedule

DATE	CALENDAR	SUNDAY SCHOOL	TEACHERS
1/04	New Year Epiphany	- No Sunday School - Nursery - Sunday School Teachers' Meeting	AnnaRose A.
1/11	The Baptism of Our Lord	- Theme: "Jesus Brings Lazarus Back to Life" - Bible: John 11:1-44 - Sunday School Teachers' Lunch	TBD
1/18	2 nd Sunday after the Epiphany	-Theme: "Israel Needs a Leader" - Bible: Judges 2:6-23	TBD
1/25	3 rd Sunday after the Epiphany	-Theme: "Deborah Becomes Israel's Judge" - Bible: Judges 4:1-16	TBD

Youth Group News

The youth group brought back the puppets during the Children's Christmas Program and did a really nice job. **Henry** voiced Faithful Fred while **Brayden** operated the puppet. **Lily** voiced Picky Patty while **AJ** operated the puppet. Finally, **Charli** voiced Sage Sarah while **Ava** operated the puppet. **Kyle** acted as the emperor. It was a wonderful production.

The youth, along with their leaders **Jeff** and **Diane**, had a lock-in on December 20-21. We ate a lot of food, watched the Packer game and movies, played some games, and got "some" sleep. A few even went caroling the next day.

The youth will be attending the annual **winter retreat** at **Camp Lucerne January 23-25**. Winter Youth Retreat is a chance for youth to connect in community at camp while enjoying all of the winter activities (both indoor and outdoor) that camp can offer: sledding, broomball, indoor large group games, camp-style worship and faith exploration and so much more. The camp has a chef that offers wonderful meals.

Submitted by Diane Weider



Confirmation News

The confirmation program has entered its final quarter. Despite the demanding homework and in-depth discussions, the confirmands have participated sincerely and faithfully. Please continue to keep our confirmands—**Brayden, Kyle, and Lily**—in your prayers as they complete this journey, growing in their knowledge of God and in their spiritual experiences with Him.

I would also like to invite mentors and parents to join the class, experience the program firsthand, and engage in further conversation with the confirmands. Please feel free to come and be part of this meaningful time.

Submitted by Pastor Ho Lee

January Youth Group & Confirmation Schedule

DATE	CALENDAR	YOUTH GROUP	CONFIRMATION
1/04	New Year Epiphany	- No Class	- No Class
1/11	The Baptism of Our Lord	- Youth Group Meeting: YM 360	- Confirmation Class 1: Alpha: New Life
1/18	2 nd Sunday after the Epiphany	- No Class	- Confirmation Class 2: Alpha: Evil
1/25	3 rd Sunday after the Epiphany	- Youth Winter Retreat: 1/23 – 25	

Church Council

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we rejoice in the birth of our Savior, we extend our deepest gratitude to each of you for your faithful support of our church and its missions.

Your generosity and prayers have been a true blessing, enabling us to share God's love both within our community and beyond.

May the peace of Christ dwell richly in your hearts this Christmas, and may the coming New Year be filled with His abundant grace and blessings.

With heartfelt thanks and joy.

Thomas Retzleff, Church Council Chair



Missions

On **January 4th** and **11th** our loose offering will go to **Pacto de Gracia**. Pacto is the Hispanic Ministry that uses our church on Sunday afternoons, led by Rev. Janet Martinez. Pacto's parishioners give what they can but more is needed to run their ministry. Therefore, a few weeks a year, we do what we can to help them with their finances.



On **January 18th** and **25th** we will give to the **UMM's Banana Project**. The Banana Project supplies bananas to four elementary schools every Monday. This is a big expense and can use as much of our support as we can give.

Submitted by Diane Weider

Angel Tree Wrap Up

A **huge thank you** to everyone who contributed by pulling ornaments or donating money through the loose offering. We adopted six families, purchased **67 gifts**, filled six laundry baskets with cleaning supplies, and gave **\$625** in grocery gift cards.



“When we put away the Christmas things, we shouldn't put the Christmas Spirit away with them.” Bill Keane

Submitted by Diane Weider

Loaves and Fishes

On **Wednesday, January 14th**, Covenant will be serving a carry-out meal **from 4-6 pm** for those in need at **Church of Peace** on Military Rd. across from the YMCA.

At the present time, we are planning for 150 meals to be served. As always, the meal consists of chicken, vegetables, scalloped potatoes, bread, banana, cookies and milk. Anyone who wishes to help serve, provide cooked potatoes (1 box dry feeds 4), or donate boxes of scalloped potatoes, or large service cans of green beans/corn are greatly appreciated. This time we are fortunate to have leftover cookies, so we won't have to bake them YAAHH! The **sign-up sheet** will be in the Narthex. Please indicate if you are cooking or providing boxes of potatoes. For 150 meals we will need a total of 38 boxes. We are blessed to have 2 Church members who faithfully provide the bread and bananas. Say a prayer for them! Thanks to all who give so generously of their time and donations!



Submitted by Mona Averbeck & Nancy Johnston

United Methodist Men (UMM)



The Men's group 2026 plans include a **spaghetti dinner** on **Thursday, January 22nd, 4:30-6:30 pm**. We are also looking forward to full participation in a Men's Sunday service and special men's recognition. We will continue to look for opportunities to serve our Covenant family along with outreach to our community with the Banana Project for 4 local schools and assistance with serving at Loaves N Fishes.

In God's Love, Bill Averbeck, President

Trustees

Your Trustees are preparing for maintaining, along with **FUTURE roof replacement** of our Sanctuary portion and also the **FUTURE replacement of our boiler heating system**. The expectation we have is around 5-7 years to prepare for both these replacements. Our roof gets inspected 2x a year, spring and fall by Lopez Roofing, to address any immediate necessary repairs which in turn will ensure a longer roof life.

The boiler/heating system is also being maintained in similar fashion with an agreement with J&H Controls. The Trustees hope that by being proactive, this will help Covenant and our congregation with future planning and financial issues.

As always, we are appreciative of your consideration, support and financial support moving forward.

Happy New Year! God's Blessings!



Submitted by Bill Averbeck, Trustee Chair

UWF: United Women in Faith:

SUGARPLUM COOKIE WALK THANK YOU!!

It was again successful thanks to everyone who contributed in so many ways. Bakers, set up helpers or workers on the days of sale, all who purchased cookies and candy were all instrumental in this huge effort. I'd like to share with you some comments from our guests.

Thanks for doing this as I don't have time to bake! I just can't do this anymore, so I truly appreciate this option. You have such a wonderful variety and set it up so easily for us to come and shop. The last comment was Will you do it next year?

We earned \$2,940.20 (\$8 less than last year). This is divided between Missions committee and Sara Circle for mission projects you hear about throughout the year. The planning committee worked hard to organize this, and their work is greatly appreciated. Again, thanks to all who donated...you made it possible!!

Submitted by Dea Hebel



Christmas Caroling

Our amazing church members came together for a heartwarming caroling event! From 11 am to nearly 2 pm on Sunday Dec. 21, we visited **six different locations**, spreading joy and festive cheer to our homebound members and assisted living facilities. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who participated and made this day so special!





January Birthday

Jan. 3 Casey Averbeck
 Jan. 13 Nicklas Verbeck
 Jan. 13 Joyce Kurtz
 Jan. 16 Kathy Kimpel

Jan. 18 Kevin Sherman
 Jan. 21 Jan Andrews
 Jan. 22 Jackson Goldapske
 Jan. 23 Blake Taillefer

MISSION moments

1/4	Pacto de Gracia
1/11	Pacto de Gracia
1/18	UMM's Banana Project
1/25	UMM's Banana Project




January Anniversary

Jan. 12 Bill & Shelli Dekker
 Jan. 16 Benjamin & Lauren Miller
 Jan. 23 Doug & Judie Duitman

2026 January Worship Volunteers

2026	Liturgist	Children's Time	Acolyte	Live-Streaming	PPT/Sound	Ushers
1/4	Shelli D.	Pastor Ho L.	Memphis A.	Mona A.	Tom R.	Bill A. (Head) Jan A. / Sandy T.
1/11	Julie T.	Shelli D.	Ivy T.	Ava A.	Miyeon K.	Bill A. (Head) Art A. / Sandy T.
1/18	Diane W.	Diane W.	Abigail G.	Lily or Mona	Tom R.	Bill A. (Head) Dorene G. / Sandy T.
1/25	Bill D.	Denise T.	Jin L.	AJ A.	Diane W.	Bill A. (Head) / Sandy T.

JANUARY 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
 <p>4 9am Worship Service - Communion Sunday 10:15 am Choir Practice 10:30-11:30am Sunday School Teachers' mtg.</p>	<p>Pastor's Retreat (1/3)</p> <p>5</p>	<p>6 10am Trustee Mtg. 1 pm—3 pm Loom & Weaving</p> <p>Pastor's Retreat (2/3)</p>	<p>7 10am Sara Circle 4:45 - 5:45 pm Finance Meeting</p> <p>Pastor's Retreat (3/3)</p>	<p>1 New Year's Day Office will be closed</p> <p>8 9:30am Youth G. Teachers' Meeting 12:30pm Statistics Report Training</p>	<p>2 Pastor Sabbath</p> <p>9 Pastor Sabbath</p>	<p>3 Pastor Day Off</p> <p>10 Pastor Day Off 8am Men's Breakfast 9:00 am - 3:00 pm Rummage Sale Pacto de Gracia</p>
<p>11 9am Worship Service 10:15am Choir Practice 10:30am Youth G. mtg. 11:30 am Sunday School Teachers Lunch 6pm Confirmation class</p>	<p>12 10am Community Worship Service at Lake House 11:45am Staff mtg.</p>	<p>13 10am Care Cmte. mtg 1 pm—2 pm Visitation 6 pm—8 pm Loom & Weaving</p>	<p>14 9:30am Bible Study 10:30am Mission Cmte. Mtg. 1pm Trillium Meeting 4pm Loaves & Fishes</p>	<p>15 Pastoral Visitations</p>	<p>16 Pastor Sabbath</p>	<p>17 Pastor Day Off 9am-2pm Planning Meeting for 2026</p>
<p>18 9am Worship Service 10:15am Choir Practice 6pm Confirmation class</p>	<p>19 11:45am Staff mtg.</p>	<p>20 1 pm—3 pm Loom & Weaving</p>	<p>21 9:30am Bible Study 10:30am Worship Cmte. Mtg. 5:30-8pm Champions Bingo</p>	<p>22 Pastoral Visitations 5pm Men's Group Spaghetti Dinner</p>	<p>23 Pastor Sabbath</p>	<p>24 Pastor Day Off</p>
<p>25 9am Worship Service 10:15am Choir Practice 6pm Confirmation class</p>	<p>26 11:45am Staff mtg. 6:30-7:30 pm Church Council Mtg.</p>	<p>27 6 pm—8 pm Loom & Weaving</p>	<p>28 8am Women's Breakfast 9:30 am Bible Study</p>	<p>29 Pastoral Visitations</p>	<p>30 Pastor Sabbath</p>	<p>31 Pastor Day Off</p>



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Covenant United Methodist Church

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Main Office Hours
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Pastor Office Hours:
 Mon– Thurs
 9:00am-3:00pm

The Submissions deadline is no later than the 15th of each month at noon.
 Please get your content to the office by this date for the next month’s issue.