



# First Pres News monthly

Volume I | January 2026

## *A note from the pastor...*



A new year is here, and they always come so quickly. Many of us pause to try and consider what we might do differently in the coming year or how we might focus our attention on something important to us. In the church, this is a Lectionary Year A. In worship most of the Gospel readings will be from the Gospel of Matthew. Considering the impulse to try something different and find something worthy of our focus in this new year, we will spend the year focused on the Gospel of Matthew. We probably won't go verse for verse like some traditions but will stick with the lectionary. I think this extended focus will allow us time to dig deeply into what Matthew is saying about Jesus and to us.

One commentary that has been helpful to me in thinking about the message of Matthew is *Matthew and the Margins* by Warren Carter. Carter shows how the Gospel of Matthew focuses on the people and places at the margins of society. Carter is a scholar who takes the historical context of the gospel seriously and draws important lessons for today from the message of the text.



In January, we will focus on the first four chapters of the text looking at the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I hope to offer some Talk-It-Over times after service where we can dive deeper into the text. Author, Alexander Shaia shows how Matthew is a book about facing times of change. This is always an important theme but seems even more pressing today. I pray that this time of meditation on Matthew will be a blessing for all of us.



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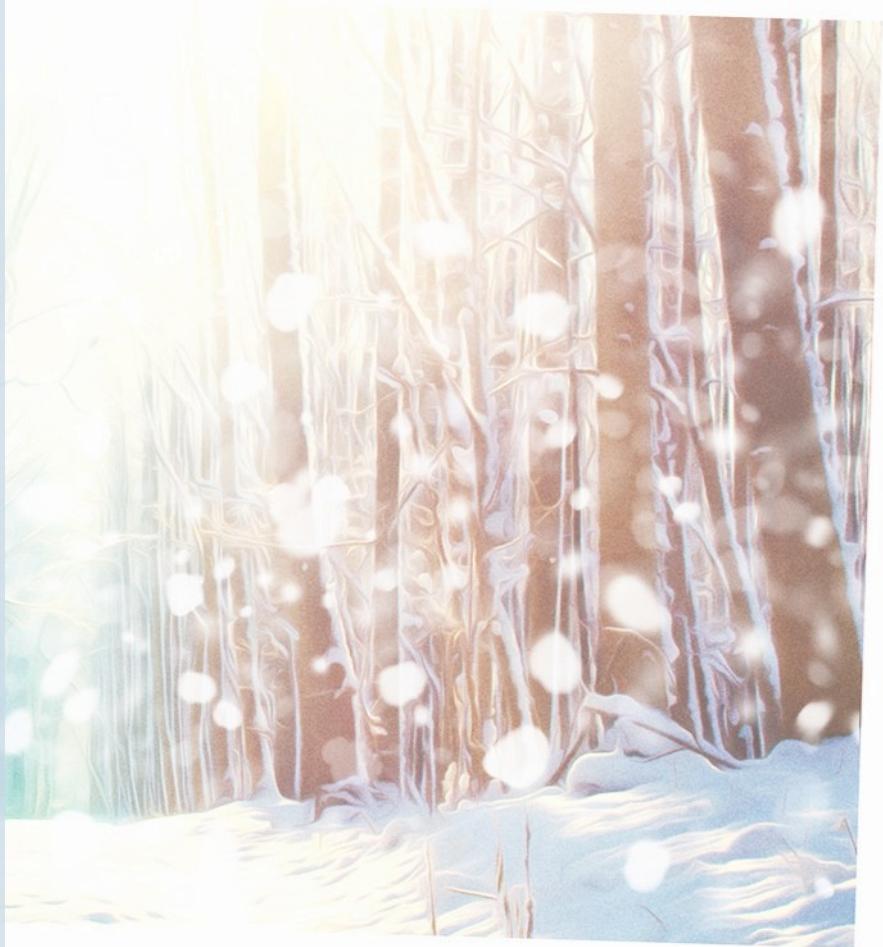
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# Happy Birthday

Fellowship Hosting for Jan. and Feb. 2026:

Jan. 4 - Dave & Ginny Holle  
Jan. 11 - Jen Seversen and Ken Schacht  
Jan. 18 - Sharon Campbell and 1 other TBD  
Jan. 25 - Deb Yale and Bev. Eifert  
Feb. 1 - John & Linnea Brooke  
Feb. 8 - Jerry & Nancy Ritter  
Feb. 15 - Dave & Ginny Holle  
Feb. 22 - Jen Seversen and Ken Schacht

3 Evelyn Alumbreros  
5 Roberta Moulds  
9 Tammy LaMarr  
Josh Nitz  
10 Kay Mahl  
Sarah Seversen  
12 Logan Lehmann  
13 Katie Humphrey  
John Daniels  
14 Pam Wortley  
Amanda Grunewald  
17 Ross LaMarr  
20 Lissy Blandford  
22 Cheryl Nitz  
23 John Brooke  
24 Shawna Lehmann  
26 Dennis Reeser  
28 Julia Reeser  
31 Ben Wahlen

# Happy Anniversary

Dave & Ellen Easley  
*January 29, 1966*  
Michael & Amanda Grunewald  
*January 6, 2018*



Lunch & Learn December 9, 2026 "Why Venezuela" Photo by: Kathi Wilson

## Mission Initiative - January 2026 Update

Mark your calendars for the first annual Dennis Reeser Memorial Chili Tasting Event: Sunday, February 1<sup>st</sup> in the lower level dining room following worship.

As with so many Church fellowship gatherings, the man behind the scenes getting everything set up and working correctly was Dennis Reeser. His amazing generosity of time coupled with a fantastic skill set and wonderful sense of humor added so much joy to our Church Family. There is not a First Pres event where he does not come to mind, and he is deeply missed. So, plan to come and eat some Chili, spread some joy, help feed some hungry people with your free-will offering and raise a spoon to the memory of our friend who showed us daily what love in action looks like.

**First Pres Food Pantry**—The food pantry continues to provide much needed emergency food for individuals and families in need. Many of the folks who utilize the food pantry at our Church come on foot. We truly are serving the needs of our downtown neighbors with this vital mission.

### Always in demand:

Hearty Soups

Tinned/pouched or canned meat (chili, stew, tuna, chicken, hash, Spam)

Baby Wipes/Diapers

Dish soap

**Toy Collection for Julian Thomas School Children**—A heartfelt thank you to all of you who donated to the Toy drive for Julian Thomas School families. Recipient families were identified by the school's social work team and teachers so that each child in the selected family could receive Christmas presents.

Thanks to Kathi Wilson and Pat Badger, our wonderful collection of donated toys was delivered to the school as Kathi recounts below:

*Santa came early to Julian Thomas Elementary School on Thursday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, a bitter cold but blue-sky day in Racine! Santa's sleigh brought helpers Kathi & Pat as they were driven by reindeers Volvo and Taos delivering bags and bags of beautiful toys donated by First Presbyterian Elves! Emma Baertlein, Julian Thomas social worker, came with her cart to receive gifts for the students which would be wrapped the next day. She was thrilled and grateful to receive Barbie dolls in all skin tones, Hot Wheels and trucks, Transformers, game boards, dinosaurs, stuffed animals, a bouncing ball, a slinky and the ever-fun mini grocery cart!*

"We are grateful for everything First Presbyterian Church does for our students, and we wish you all a very Merry Christmas"! Emma



**The Deacons | Food Cards for Julian Thomas School Families**—Thanks to your generous donations, we were able to provide 39 Julian Thomas School families (selected by the school social work team) each with a \$100 grocery food card. This is almost double the amount we were able to provide last year. Julian Thomas School was very grateful to have so many food cards to give to their families who are in distress this year.

**THANK YOU!!    THANK YOU!!    THANK YOU!!**

Without you none of this would have been possible, and we are so grateful for the support you gave these two important mission initiatives.

With gratitude and best wishes for the New Year!

Meg Daniels and Georgia Herrera, on behalf of the Mission Initiatives Committee  
Mary Bernstein and Ken Nakayama, on behalf of the Deacons Committee

## Choral ARTS Society

### Choral Arts Society Announces Auditions for Spring 2026

The Choral Arts Society of Southeastern Wisconsin (CAS) invites adult singers to audition for Spring 2026 by appointment on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, from 6:30<sup>PM</sup> to 9:30<sup>PM</sup> at First Presbyterian Church, 716 College Avenue, Racine. If you would like to sing great music with friendly people, please contact David Eaton, CAS Audition Coordinator Team, at (262) 939-6930 to schedule an appointment.

Rehearsals are held at First Presbyterian Church on Tuesday evenings from 7:00<sup>PM</sup> to 9:30<sup>PM</sup> from late August until May.



This sketch was drawn by Jill Castillo during the *A Concert of Hope and Peace—Spirit of Racine Music Makers*.



“A Candlelight Concert” Music & More’s first concert collaboration with the Choral Arts Society of South-eastern WI was a spectacular sold-out success! The pews were full and more chairs were set up in the rear of the sanctuary to accommodate the large crowd. There were a number of new attendees. The darkened sanctuary was filled with beautiful candlelight, red poinsettias, soul-stirring music, and graceful dancers. We received positive feedback afterwards that this type of peaceful, reflective, and hope-filled concert is needed during the busy holiday season.

A soprano soloist, positioned in the balcony, opened the concert with a traditional Mennonite song. The first set featured four selections from guitarist Mark Paffrath, soprano Liz Steffensen, violinist Darlene Rivest, and cellist Michelle Venturella. CAS pianist Randy Fischer played a lovely version of “Away in the Manger,” with cello and violin accompaniment.

Fifty-four members of the Choral Arts Society participated, conducted by Jim Schatzman. Pat Badger conducted the Women’s Choir. Beloved Christmas repertoire included “Ave Maria,” “Wexford Carol,” “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” “A Thousand Candles,” “O Magnum Mysterium,” and a memorable version of “Silent Night” originally made popular by the group Mannheim Steamroller. Several poetry readings were interspersed throughout the program. A dozen dancers from The Studio of Classical Dance Arts performed two pieces: A traditional Israeli candle dance and “Waltz of the Snowflakes” from The Nutcracker. An audience candle-lighting, alongside a Yo-Yo Ma arrangement of “Dona Nobis Pacem/Auld Lang Syne,” added to the beauty of the evening. Donations received in the offering baskets were earmarked for the Women’s Resource Center.

A festive post-concert reception was held in Ihrman Hall where attendees were entertained by the spirited Prairie School Jazz Combo. An assortment of delicious treats was provided by O&H Danish Bakery and some CAS members.

Pat Badger organized the annual cookie box sale and more than \$1,400 was raised for M&M’s three youth music scholarship funds! Bakers from OBUUC joined once again with First Pres bakers to turn out hundreds of beautiful Christmas cookies which sold out at \$10 a box.

Many people contributed to the success of this concert! Thanks to:

- ◆ Pat Badger
- ◆ Dr. Elizabeth Steffensen and Maestro Jim Schatzman from CAS
- ◆ Marc Darling and Linda Bennett from The Studio of Classical Dance Arts
- ◆ The singers, musicians, poetry readers, and dancers
- ◆ Blythe Haney, for creative social media marketing
- ◆ M&M & CAS donors
- ◆ O&H Danish Bakery for their very generous cookie donation for the after-concert reception
- ◆ The Prairie School Jazz Combo
- ◆ Dave & Ginny Holle
- ◆ Cookie Bakers: Mary Bernstein, Ruth Bradford-Johnson, Linnea Brooke, Louisa Daniels, Meg Daniels, Nancy DeKraay, Bonnie Eastman, Jennifer Eastman, Susan Galle, Bill & Blanche Gunderson, Katie Humphrey, Elie Hunt, Camille Jensen-Guion, Diane Kuntzelman, Anita Kottke-Miller, Suzanne Landis, Diane Lehmann, Dena Lieberman, Carrie Massey, Amanda & Norah Paffrath, Joe Pourroy, Kiera Roome, Maria Scott, Ruby Seeton, Pam Simpson, Rachel Trobaugh, Deb Utley, Betsy Walton, and Kathi Wilson
- ◆ Cookie Boxers: Mary Bernstein, Ruth Bradford-Johnson, Linnea Brooke, Bill & Blanche Gunderson, Georgia Hall, Elie Hunt, Camille Jensen-Guion, Pam Simpson, and Kathi Wilson

- ◆ Thanks to M&M volunteers: Mary & Steve Bernstein, John & Linnea Brooke, Sharon Campbell, Dave & Ginny Holle, Elie Hunt, Carrie Massey, Beth Shelton, Kathi Wilson, Debbie Yale
- ◆ Special thanks to Greg Berg and Curt Vollman for pre-concert publicity, Steve Comeau, Shelley Maurer, Theresa Revis, Gloria Zember, Royce Earnest & the Buildings & Grounds crew.

Plans are already in the works for a second collaboration with the Choral Arts Society for Sat. Dec. 5, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. Mark your calendars for this special event!

With gratitude and New Year's Blessings!

Georgia Hall  
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*This concert was funded, in part, by an ArtSeed grant from the Racine Arts Council and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts. We are grateful for their support!*





## Your Voice Matters!

Have you ever felt the pull to sing, especially as a way to worship, connect, and serve? The Chancel Choir invites you to step in, lift your voice, and become part of something meaningful. Whether you've sung your whole life or are simply curious, there is a place for you.

Our choir is a warm, encouraging community of singers who come together to enhance worship, grow musically, and build lasting relationships. No prior choir experience or music-reading skills are required. All we ask is an open heart, a love for music, and a willingness to grow together.

### Why Sing with the Chancel Choir?

- ◆ Share your gifts through inspiring musical worship
- ◆ Connect with a caring community and form new friendships
- ◆ Strengthen your voice and musical confidence
- ◆ Experience the joy and purpose of singing together

### Rehearsals

All January and February rehearsals take place on these Wednesdays at 7:00<sup>PM</sup>:

1/7/26      1/14/26      1/28/26      2/1/26      2/25/26

Rehearsals are thoughtfully planned, uplifting, and fun, designed to help singers learn music comfortably while enjoying time together. Our repertoire includes a variety of styles, from traditional works to more modern songs that enrich the worship experience.

If you've been searching for a place to belong, a way to serve, or a reason to sing with purpose, this is your invitation. Come try a rehearsal. No pressure, just joy.

Your voice truly matters, and we would be honored to sing alongside you.

For more information, please contact Alejandro Alumbreros ([piano3842@yahoo.com](mailto:piano3842@yahoo.com)) or stop by after service. Any Chancel Choir member will be happy to welcome you and answer your questions.



## BLESSING THE THRESHOLD

— A poem for the New Year

This blessing  
has been waiting for you  
for a long time.

While you have been  
making your way here,  
this blessing has been  
gathering itself,  
making ready,  
biding its time,  
praying.

This blessing has been  
polishing the door,  
oiling the hinges,  
sweeping the steps,  
lighting candles  
in the windows.

This blessing has been  
setting the table  
as it hums a tune  
from an old song  
it knows,  
something about  
a spiraling road  
and bread  
and grace.

All this time  
it has kept an eye  
on the horizon,  
watching,  
keeping vigil,  
hardly aware of how  
it was leaning itself  
in your direction.

And now that  
you are here,  
this blessing  
can hardly believe  
its good fortune  
that you have finally arrived,  
that it can drop everything  
at last  
to fling its arms wide  
to you, crying  
welcome,  
welcome,  
welcome.

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