



FaithWestwood UMC

New Year Study Guide 2026

In the New Year, it is **Time to Begin** afresh and renew our commitment to discipleship in the name of God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer!

This guide may be utilized by FaithGroups and/or Individuals.

If you would like to connect with a FaithGroup on-site and/or online, please check out the latest **GROW Catalog** on our website faithwestwood.com

Be Transformational New Year Challenge / look at the **end** of each lesson
Family Activities / see **INSERT**
Mission Offerings & Activities / look for the **"GOLDEN"** banner on **back page**



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United Methodist Church, January 2026
Mission Offerings & Activities by Director of Caring Ministries Vikki O'Hara
Family Activities (insert) by Director of Family Ministry Leah Dinoso

Week of January 4 / Covenant Renewal & Holy Communion

Time to Shine – The prophet Isaiah celebrates the light of the world, bringing nations and kings, camels, and gifts to his light. In addition to claiming these images, we will reflect on the magi's story! In this new year, how might you & I celebrate **Epiphany** and how Jesus is calling us to **shine our light**?

Isaiah 60:1-6 (NIV) /

60 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.

⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord."

Opening

- Intro: What are you most **excited** about in the year of our Lord **2026**?
- Pray: **Holy God, I commit this year to Your purpose and plan. Inspire my discipleship and inspire my Church! May everything I do in the name of Jesus Christ, be done to Your glory. In the name of the Light of the World I pray, AMEN.**

Observing

- Read **Isaiah 60:1-3**. In addition to the following, name the representations of the **darkness** covering the earth and over God's people (exile / persecution / return to unfamiliar / slow restoration) as they needed the **light** to shine on them?
- The prophet Isaiah speaks about the **"glory of the Lord."** Look up this phrase in additional Bible dictionaries and/or online sources. How would **this phrase** bring **hope** to God's people?
- Verse 3 reveals how the **light** draws nations & kings to it – how is this **spiritual light** a gift to the whole world and a reflection of the creation of light in Genesis 1?
- Read **Isaiah 60:4-6**. These verses represent those returning to Jerusalem from exile. Much later in history, these verses have also represented a foreshadowing of the magi traveling to the Christ-child and bearing gifts. How do these verses speak to the **praise** of both the **return of God's people** and the **journey & gifts to the Christ-child**?
- Recalling **Matthew 2:1-12** and the story of the Magi and their gifts to the Christ-child, remember how the light of the star – that astrological phenomenon – led them to Bethlehem.

(Week of January 4)

Reflecting

- Imagine hearing these words today, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come.”** How would **these words** speak into your mind, heart, and spirit today?
- The **“glory of the Lord”** is reflected most fully in Jesus Christ. As God’s people, you are created to reflect Christ’s glory and to point others to him – how is this best done **by individuals**? How is this best done **by the Church**?
- How do the passages from **Isaiah** and **Matthew** inspire your **worship** today and provide a goal for the whole year?
- Think about a **dramatic return** you have experienced in your lifetime (i.e.: after deployment and/or war / return to a community after tragedy or natural disaster / other....). How did you and/or others **celebrate** this return?

Sending Forth

- After sharing your **prayer requests**, read or sing from UMH #254: ♪ **O-oh, star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright. Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light. AMEN.**
- **Be Invitational New Year Challenge**: Thinking of your discipleship, consider the ways that Jesus is calling you to **shine your light** this year. Write them down and share them with a friend.

Week of January 11 / Reaffirmation of Baptismal Covenant

Time for Grace – John the Baptist prepared the way with a baptism of water, yet the One to baptize with the Holy Spirit was about to be baptized by John! In this New Year, how do you and I embrace the sacrament of **baptism** as ***an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace***?

Mark 1:4-11 (NIV) / ⁴And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Opening

- Intro: Share about a memorable **baptism** in your journey: your own, a child, grandchild, or friend. What made it so **memorable**?

(Week of January 11)

- Pray: **Holy God, I commit this year to Your purpose and plan. Inspire my discipleship and inspire my Church! As I remember my baptism and am thankful today, allow Your Spirit to wash over me. In the name of the Living Water I pray, AMEN.**

Observing

- Read **Mark 1:4-8**. What did John the Baptist's **appearance** in the wilderness represent for those who were looking for **spiritual renewal**? Did he **look** like a prophet?
- What did John the Baptist's **baptism and message** represent for those who were looking for **spiritual renewal**? Did he **sound** like a prophet?
- Verse 8 emphasizes how John will baptize with water, but he (Jesus) will baptize with the Holy Spirit – how does this distinction bring hope for what is to come?
- Read **Mark 1:9-11**. Verse 9 says, “**At that time**” indicating the precise moment for Jesus’ ministry and beginning of public ministry – with what preceded and followed, how are these indications of this right moment?
- While Mark’s version is brief and to the point, the powerful elements of the baptism of Jesus are present – **water, Spirit as dove, voice from heaven**. How do these elements reflect the creation story?
- The voice of God affirming Jesus as God’s Son: who was this for: **Jesus, John the Baptist, the others present, or the later readers** of Mark’s Gospel?

Reflecting

- Reflect on a season of **spiritual renewal** in your journey – which of the following elements were present: **repentance / forgiveness of sins / confession / other**?
- Today, you and I may understand “**baptism with water**” more readily than “**baptism with Holy Spirit**” – how have you experienced baptism with **both** water & Spirit?
- After baptism with water, the pastor says, “**May the Holy Spirit work within you that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.**” How do **both** water & Spirit help you to live as a faithful disciple?
- What is **one take-away** from this lesson to help you to claim a **Time for Grace** in your **discipleship** in 2026?

Sending Forth

- After sharing your **prayer requests**, read or sing UMH #393, ♪ **Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. AMEN.**
- **Be Invitational New Year Challenge:** Reflect on what your **baptism** means to you and how you have experienced God’s amazing **grace** in your spiritual journey.

Week of January 18 /

Time for Good News – Later, John the Baptist’s disciples were sent to the Lord asking, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus reveals the **good news** brought to the world through him. In this new year, how do you and I claim what we believe and claim about Jesus?

Luke 7:18-22 (NIV) / ¹⁸ John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, ¹⁹ he sent them to the Lord to ask, “**Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?**”

²⁰ When the men came to Jesus, they said, “**John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’**”

²¹ At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²² So he replied to the messengers, “**Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.**”

Opening

- Intro: What is the **BEST news** you have heard thus far in 2026?
- Pray: **Holy God, I commit this year to Your purpose and plan. Inspire my discipleship and inspire my Church! Help me to claim the good news Jesus brings through healing and proclaiming. In the name of the One who was, who is, and who will be I pray, AMEN.**

Observing

- Read **Luke 7:18-20**. Verse 18 indicates “**all these things**” of what John’s disciples and others had already experienced in Jesus Christ. Then John’s disciples go to Jesus asking if he is the One to come. What is the **significance** of this as John the Baptist KNEW the answer? Do you perceive this as a **strategy** to help John’s disciples and others to believe?
- Think about **John the Baptist’s disciples** – the ones who sought spiritual renewal and were baptized in the wilderness – what would make it easier and/or harder for them to believe in Jesus Christ?
- Read **Luke 7:21-22**. Jesus was already **performing miracles and healing** so many afflictions – which ones are specifically mentioned in verse 21?
- How does the list in **Jesus’ response** in verse 22 differ from verse 21, and why?
- The public ministry of Jesus emphasizes **healing** and **focusing on the marginalized** of the world. How did Jesus bring **good news** to those who needed him the most?

Reflecting

- Put yourself in the “**sandals**” of a first century observer who is **religious and spiritually motivated** for the coming of the Messiah: what question would you ask of Jesus?

(Week of January 18)

- What did Jesus **do** that would inspire your **belief** – his preaching, teaching, healing, performing miracles?
- Thinking of those lists in verses 21 & 22, how have you and/or any loved ones experienced **healing** in the name of Jesus?
- Knowing how Jesus brings **his good news** in many ways (others, songs, scripture), when did Jesus bring **good news** to you when you needed it most?

Sending Forth

- After sharing your **prayer requests**, read and/or sing from UMH #171, ♪ **Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! There's just something about that name! Master, Savior, Jesus! Like the fragrance after the rain. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! Let all heaven and earth proclaim: Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that name! AMEN.**
- **Be Invitational New Year Challenge**: Reflect on the **good news** of Jesus Christ in your life. Who in your life needs some **good news** right now? How might you **share your experiences** to bring hope, peace, joy, love, grace, and/or mercy to someone?

Week of January 25 / Vision Luncheon Day

Time for Everything – The wise words of Ecclesiastes reveal how there is a time and season for everything under the heavens. In the new year, how do you and I embrace **God's vision** for our lives?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 (NIV) /

3 There is a time for **everything**, and a **season** for **every activity** under the **heavens**:

² a time to be **born** and a time to **die**, a time to **plant** and a time to **uproot**,

³ a time to **kill** and a time to **heal**, a time to **tear down** and a time to **build**,

⁴ a time to **weep** and a time to **laugh**, a time to **mourn** and a time to **dance**,

⁵ a time to **scatter stones** and a time to **gather them**,

a time to **embrace** and a time to **refrain from embracing**,

⁶ a time to **search** and a time to **give up**, a time to **keep** and a time to **throw away**,

⁷ a time to **tear** and a time to **mend**, a time to be **silent** and a time to **speak**,

⁸ a time to **love** and a time to **hate**, a time for **war** and a time for **peace**.

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

Opening

- Intro: Set a timer and name as many clichés and quotes about **time** as you are able.

(Week of January 18)

- Pray: **Holy God, I commit this year to Your purpose and plan. Inspire my discipleship and inspire my Church! Guide this season in my journey, and may I fully use my time to glorify God. In the name of the One who was, who is, and who will be I pray, AMEN.**

Observing

- **Note:** Who is the author of **Ecclesiastes**? Jewish and Christian tradition attributes the book to King Solomon. Other modern scholars consider how the author may have used King Solomon's persona with the wise voice being known as "Qoheleth" (Teacher/Preacher). Regardless of author, the message remains wise & important!
- Read **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**. Which "**time to**" statements speak to you the most? Why?
- How do these statements represent the natural **rhythm** in life, experiencing highs & lows – and which represent the highs and which represent the lows?
- Read **Ecclesiastes 3:9-13**. There are many interpretations of this wisdom literature. What do you glean from **these verses** about **God / humanity / value of work / value of time / eternity / happiness / doing good / eating & drinking** ?
- What is the result of human **toil** meaning **working extremely hard, incessantly** (see question in verse 9 and response in verse 13)?

Reflecting

- What **memories** come to your mind with particular verses? (i.e., times with someone mending tears; times of searching, keeping, throwing away or letting go)
- Read again **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8** on page 6 yet only with the words in **BOLD**. What did you hear from **this perspective**?
- Thinking of the two extremes – **living frugally and living excessively** – which of these, do you believe, represents the wisdom author's intentions?
- How might these words inspire your **discipleship** in the new year?

Sending Forth

- After sharing your **prayer requests**, read or sing UMH #383 (v. 1, 4), **♫ This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on, time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that's gone. Christ is alive and goes before us to show and share what love can do. This is a day of new beginnings; our God is making all things new. AMEN.**
- **Be Invitational New Year Challenge:** Reflect on **God's vision** for your life – how is God calling you to grow in your **discipleship** this year? Write down some personal goals in the space below:

Mission Offerings & Activities

01/04 – Helping Hands. Today's mission offering supports our Helping Hands Fund which offers short-term financial assistance to people in our own church family facing an unexpected financial need.

Mission Activity: The **Great Plains Conference Justice and Mercy team** is inviting all members of congregations in the Great Plains Conference to begin 2026 with a **week of faithful witness**. Inspired by the Wesleyan call to social holiness, we are encouraged to stand together in faithful witness through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness against systems that harm God's creation and God's people. To check out resources for participating in this week --including daily devotionals, a congregational prayer guide, etc., follow this link: <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/faithful-witness>

01/11 – FaithWorks Pantry. Today's mission offering will help us purchase items in bulk to keep our pantry shelves stocked during this time of increased food insecurity.

Mission Activity: Keep the fingers of our dedicated **Blanketed with Prayer** ministry team members busy crocheting hats, scarves, prayer shawls, and baby blankets. Donations of scrap and new yarn may be added to the tubs in the west vestibule any time.

01/18 – Human Relations Sunday. Human Relations Sunday is a denomination-wide special Sunday, observed on the Sunday before Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 18, 2026) to recognize and promote Dr. King's vision of building a "beloved community" where everyone flourishes rooted in love, dignity and justice. Today's offering supports programs such as: Community Developers Program (helps churches serve neighborhoods by addressing local needs such as education, housing and small business); United Methodist Voluntary Services (supports advocacy for issues including poverty, human trafficking and environmental justice); and Youth Offender Program (helps incarcerated youth and young adults succeed after release.)

Mission Activity: Continue adding new and gently used household items for **The Furniture Project** to the collection tubs in the foyer and inside the west entrance, under the coat rack. The Furniture Project redistributes household items and furniture to help set up homes for people in need. Current needs include kitchen utensils, potholders, towels, washcloths, silverware, coffee mugs, drinking glasses and bakeware, which are all low in stock at the warehouse.

01/25 – CMS Partnership. Today's mission offering will provide an evening meal for 90 Central Middle School teachers during parent-teacher conferences. Funds will also supplement our in-kind donations to stock "The Zone" – a no-cost CMS resource providing students with basic needs like clothing and personal care items.

Mission Activity: Beginning today and continuing throughout February, we are collecting new items to stock the **CMS Zone**. Lists of needed items are available on the CMS table in the foyer, and donations may be placed in the marked tubs outside the church office and on the CMS foyer table.

