



December 2025

XXX1 Number 12

Tidings of Peace

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church • 1747 W. Milham Avenue, Portage, MI 49024 • 269-343-3453 • popportage.org

Pastor's Page

Repeat the Sounding Joy

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,*

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Luke 2:13-14

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Some of my favorite memories of Advent and Christmas involve making music. My alma mater, Wittenberg University, did an annual Advent Lessons and Carols service. In our senior year, my roommate, Erika, got the coveted solo of the first verse of *Once in Royal David's City* that the Wittenberg Choir sang as they entered the sanctuary in candlelight and darkness. My senior year of high school, I played the violin at four different Christmas Eve services, three for my parents' congregations and the last one for the Catholic church in town where they turned the lights out on me and I had to play *Silent Night* in the dark at 1 AM, so I was grateful for the three previous services' worth of practice! To this day, I smile to myself when we get to that part of the Christmas Eve services as I join my voice or my violin with yours on that beautiful hymn.

Whether you consider yourself a musician or not, no matter if you're a regular choir member or play an instrument or are someone who prefers to "play the radio" (as my grandpa says), I hope you spend some time singing this season. Not only is music a wonderful form of worship and praise to God, it's also good for our health! Music is known to reduce stress by slowing the breath, steadying the nervous system, and strengthening the body and brain.

In an article titled "Are You Singing Enough" for *Nice News*, Rebekah Brandes writes, "For millennia, humans have used song to soothe, grieve, celebrate, and connect. It's one of our oldest forms of communication," Elisha Ellis Madsen, board-certified music therapist and master of social work candidate, told *Nice News*. "Now, science is catching up. Physiologically, singing regulates the nervous system through rhythmic breathing and vibration, which calm the body whether or not it 'sounds good.' Emotionally, it reawakens our capacity for play and self-expression — things many adults have lost touch with."

Singing with others adds the benefits of community by helping us feel more connected to one another. When we share joy and empathy through music, our relationships with one another grow stronger.

Continued on page 4



What's Happening at POP!

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Next meeting **Friday, December 5 at 10 AM**
in the Peace Lounge.

If you or someone you know would like a shawl, or for more information about becoming a prayer shawl creator, please contact Dianne Hellman, 323-9392.

Quilters

Tuesdays, December 2 & 16 at 9:30 AM

Where: POP Social Hall



Not sure you can sew well enough to participate? Don't worry! They're happy to teach you! Contact Sheryl for more information: 267-6274.

When: Tuesday, December 9 at 1 PM

Where: POP Gathering Space

Just a few rolls of the dice and you'll have this fun game mastered!

Bunko is easy to learn and offers wonderful opportunities for conversation and connection with others. Call Carla Hannemann at

269/216-3498 for more information.



WOMEN'S STUDY GROUP

All women are invited to join us

Dec 1 & Dec 15

7 pm POP Flex Room or Zoom

Continuing our discussion on

Bishop Michael Curry's Book,

LOVE IS THE WAY

Men's Breakfast

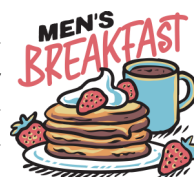
8:00 AM, Wednesday, December 10

Mark's Diner on Romence Rd in Portage.

Come for fellowship, prayer, and conversation.

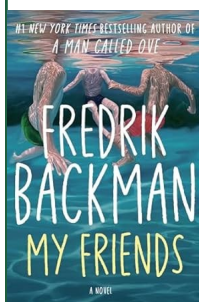
Tell them you're with Prince of Peace.

We've got the back room reserved.



There will be no Book Club meeting in December.

If someone asks you what you want for Christmas, you might choose one of the books on the POP book club list for 2026.



On Jan 21 we will discuss "My Friends" by Fredrik Backman. A group of teenagers find refuge from their bruising home lives by spending the summer on an abandoned pier telling silly jokes and sharing secrets. Twenty-five years later their bond will change a complete stranger's life. It is a funny and deeply moving story.

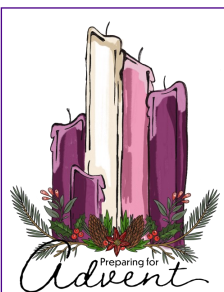
The book for Feb 18th, "The Kitchen House" by Kathleen Grissom is about slaves on a Virginia plantation. It explores the themes of race, identity, and family.

On March 18th we will discuss "Home Front" by Kristin Hannah. A wife and mom goes to war in Iraq after 9/11 and comes home suffering from PTSD. Life has radically changed for her and her family. Will they be able to save their marriage and become a happy family again?

Women of the **ELCA** 

Ruth Circle will not meet in December.

Join us in January. Want more information?
Call Dianne Hellman (269-323-9392)



Advent Dinner and Service

Wednesdays, December 3, 10, 17

Dinner at 6:00 p.m.

Service at 7:00 p.m.



**BREAD AND BREAKFAST
IS ON HIATUS UNTIL 2026**



Social Concerns Update -



"Every heart deserves a home" - is the mission statement of Housing Resources, Inc. Kalamazoo. HRI was the site of this weeks Project Connect 2025, where Prince of Peace had an impact, serving several hundred of folks. We have

participated in Kalamazoo's Project Connect for 10 years when it was organized by Angela Anderson, and was held at the Expo Center.

With a change of leadership and financial support, HRI has taken over this very worthwhile event. As a transitional year, leadership at HRI has determined that Project Connect will resume many of the services of the past next year, such as immunizations, medical check-ups, haircuts, family photos, etc.

In the past, PoP has provided and served lunch for 600 guests. For the last few years and for this year, we have provided an extensive Free Store. Items provided have been; laundry detergent, dish detergent, toilet cleaner, household spray cleaner, window cleaner, diapers, baby wipes, shampoo, body wash, toothpaste/brushes, deodorant, feminine products, toilet paper, paper towels, Kleenex and antibacterial wipes. Also this year, we sponsored a clothing giveaway along with the employees of HRI. Many donated winter wear, boots, shoes, children's clothing and hundreds of other items.

Chairperson Sandy Mertz along with Kristi Zimmerman collected, organized, sorted all donations and were ready to bring them to HRI when the fire occurred. Now everything had to be washed and re-bagged. With your help, over 50 bags of clothing were washed dried and returned within 30 hours! *It truly was a miracle.*

God's blessings to you all and also to Sandy, Kristi, Martha Irons, Randi Martin, Diane Hellman, Micki Holder, Claudia Blahnik, Intern Kathleen, Mark and Mary Clyne, Don Mertz, Dennis Stalker and Paul MacNellis for your help the days of the event.

We're looking forward to helping our brothers and sisters at Project Connect 2026.

Blessed to be a Blessing -



BLESSING BOX

Please consider donating non-perishable food items for the blessing box.

Some suggested items are peanut butter, jelly, soup with pop-top lids, fruit cups, crackers, cookies, and toiletries. You can put your items in the Blessing Box bin in the Gathering Space by Social Concern basket.

Take a turn filling the Blessing Box. It needs to be filled *daily*. Items will be

sorted into bags so it is as simple as taking a bag from the storage area and placing the items in the box out front by the sign. If you don't have building access, it is easiest to come during regular office hours 9 AM - 4 PM. Staff can also buzz people in from off-site if you need to arrive outside of office hours. Sign up at : <https://tinyurl.com/ybfd3sx8>

Food Scarcity is in Our Community! Will you help our neighbors?

It takes 4-5 people to help this ministry.

Please sign-up and **arrive by 12:30 to help set up. Sign up is on the website.**
<https://popportage.org/pages/food-distribution-signup>



POP Christmas Card



**Take a stroll in
Celery Flats
this December
and see our holiday card.**

Prince of Peace has a card
in the city's
Christmas card lane.

We went with the
theme of Peace in many
languages, artfully
executed by Em.

Pastor's Page Continued

December is a wonderful month to join us for worship and sing with a whole congregation! In addition to Sunday morning services, we have Wednesday evening services featuring the beautiful sung setting, Holden Evening Prayer. We will also join our voices in song as we go caroling at local care centers on Dec. 14, after worship. And this month or any month, you can talk with Director of Music, Janet Hill, about joining the Sanctuary or Handbell choirs as a way to have making music with others part of your life on a regular basis. However you choose to participate, you'll be part of the great heavenly and Earthly chorus repeating the sounding joy that always announces Jesus' arrival in our world and in our lives!

Shalom,
Pastor Rachel

https://nicenews.com/health-and-wellness/mental-physical-health-benefits-singing/?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Are+you+singing+enough%3F+-+19632391

Fellowship News

"My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple, loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait until Christmas to do that?" - Bob Hope

Christmas can be a very lonely and difficult for many; think about reaching out to someone new this season. Seek someone new to chat with during fellowship time after service. Greet and welcome visitors. Reach out to a friend you haven't spoken to for a while. Honor the upcoming holy season by spreading Christ's love.

Get out those calendars as Fellowship has a lot of dates coming up!



Sunday, November 30 is the last day to sign up for the annual POP Holiday Hor'd Oeuvres Party. The party starts at 7:00PM on Friday, December 5 at the lovely Eldridge home. Please sign up in the Gathering Space to bring an appetizer or beer to share. We hope to see you there!

Celebrate the season by sharing the gift of music.

We will be going Christmas caroling on **Sunday, December 14**. We will be meeting at 1PM. Fellowship will be providing a light lunch before we head out. This year, there will be two groups. Group 1 will be visiting Storypoint North and the Sisters of St. Joseph. Group 2 will be visiting Storypoint South and the Artisan at Heritage Community. Last year's attendees reported that this was a lovely event. Sign up in the Gathering Space.



We are hoping to have a Winter Trivia night in January. Watch out for details.



Pastor Rachel will be singing the national anthem at the K-Wings game on February 6. Join us to support her and enjoy a fun night of local hockey. Watch for sign ups coming soon.

Craft day is back! Grab your projects and bring a dish to pass on **Saturday, February 21**. This is always an enjoyable event to visit and fellowship with your POP friends! Sign-up coming in 2026.



Save the date notice! The Fellowship Committee is pleased to announce that we are planning a Women's Retreat this spring. Details are still being worked on, but the tentative dates are May 22-23 and will happen at Das Essenhaus in Middlebury, IN.

Lastly, a very Merry Christmas and Happy New year to you and yours from the Fellowship Committee!



During Council's November meeting we were amazed to hear about PoP helping out in many ways in our community through food distributions, health services, and clothing distribution. We are so amazed to see how our staff and groups are continually the hands and feet of Jesus in so many ways. We are also excited to hear about how the CHARGE youth retreat was a big success and very impactful for our youth. As Advent season is upon us we anticipate touching services and events connecting our PoP family. We also continue to have an eye on 2026 as the stewardship campaign continues and finance begins the budgeting process. We are always honored to steward PoP's vision and efforts and as always, please seek out those of us in yellow lanyards if you desire learning more.



**Pastor Rachel
is on call
for emergencies.**

The Jubilee Garden completed another successful year in 2025.

Our small group of volunteers planted, grew and harvested over 1100 pounds of produce. Compared to the last 12 years when harvest data by crop were kept we set records for most amounts harvested for a year in cucumbers, greens, potatoes and tomatoes. Just under 1000 pounds were distributed to local families in need at the Mothers of Hope Free Market. Over 180 pounds of produce were also donated to Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes. For more info on this ministry or to find out how you can volunteer next year, contact Mark Clyne (email: markclyne@sbcglobal.net).



Pray Without Ceasing

Pray Without Ceasing is a nationwide prayer movement started in the ELCA to uplift and unite communities in prayer during a time of significant change.

Join us every Wednesday at 10 am
here at church to pray together.

For more information, contact
Laurie Brown or Em Witteveen.

For more information on the
Pray Without Ceasing movement,
visit pray-without-ceasing.org.

The Zoom link is: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84102538282?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84102538282?pwd=L4MlxRUcrPcMjoQ7sI7J4FoJiLzutc.1)
[j/84102538282?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84102538282?pwd=L4MlxRUcrPcMjoQ7sI7J4FoJiLzutc.1)
[pwd=L4MlxRUcrPcMjoQ7sI7J4FoJiLzutc.1](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84102538282?pwd=L4MlxRUcrPcMjoQ7sI7J4FoJiLzutc.1)

Christmas Eve Worship



**Worship Schedule
FOR CHRISTMAS**

Join us Christmas Eve for Worship Services.

At 4:30pm is a candlelight family Christmas service.

8:30pm is candlelight and communion with special music by our choir and a string quartet.

Advent

The sacred call "Prepare!"
Does not ask for lists or logistics.
We do not "Keep awake!" only to ensure
We are not forgotten at the rapture.
Nor is the stillness sedentary.

So do not simply go looking
For a candle scent to capture
What it means to Ponder,
Or a gift to prove your Love,
Or a tall tree to announce,
"Joy to the World!"

Advent lays bare visions of time bending
Into already and not yet,
By the God who tears apart
The hustle, the heavens, the temple curtain!
with no intention of mending
Back together our favored boundaries.

This is the thin space where
Stillness is powerful and
God is changing our hearts,
So sacred Ponder, Love, and Joy
Can birth and shelter.

The miracle grows with slow strength
In the one place we have all called home,
Where we do not yet know another way,
While our fullness is being prepared,
Carried, and nourished by
The One who says, "Yes."

"Advent" is from
*Speak it Plain: Words for
Worship and Life Together*
by Meta Herrick Carlson.



Get to Know the Staff



My name is Megan Zimmerman, and I have been attending POP since 2017. I am currently a student at KVCC, where I am completing my foundational coursework before transferring to WMU in the fall to pursue a degree in Social Work. I am passionate about helping others and look forward to building a career where I can support individuals, families, and communities.

Outside of school, I love spending quality time with my boyfriend and my family. They are a huge source of support and joy in my life. I also enjoy cooking and baking, and I am always trying out new recipes or making treats for the people I care about. When I am not in the kitchen, you can usually find me relaxing, exploring new places, or enjoying simple moments with the people closest to me.

Children and Youth News

The Formation Co-Op team met for a weekend to continue working on our ministry plan. We spent time reflecting and evaluating some of our projects this year, including the youth retreat in July and the revamping of our HS Faith Formation curriculum. We also refined our goal to add an element we felt was missing — our goal for youth ministry now reads “We exist to equip youth to know and experience God’s love through a life-giving community.” Finally, we established a few next steps that will involve continuing to make connections with our youth and their families. If you have questions about the work of the Formation Co-Op across the ELCA or about the work of our congregation team here, please reach out to Em or any of the other members: Kristie and Alex Z., Melissa and Kaya O., and Randi M.

The Christian Ed and Youth committees both spent time sharing God moments surrounding learning hour Faith Formations time and other youth activities. Seeing our kids and youth engage in the life of our congregation in ways they feel called to do so has been so rewarding! The Youth Committee has made a commitment to helping our kids and youth explore the many opportunities in our congregation and to help them be a part of our faith community as they feel led. Many kids and youth are participating as communion assistants, readers, nursery volunteers, and musicians. Some of our taller youth will even be assisting with lighting the Advent wreath! Even from a young age, our kids and youth know that they are valued members of this faith community not for ways that they can “give back,” but for the simple fact that they are a part of God’s family.



Seven of our youth spent a weekend in Traverse City attending CHARGE, an annual youth retreat/conference organized and hosted by Living Water Ministries. The youth spent the weekend learning about our identity as children of God — we are all human, we are all beloved by God, and we belong together. In fellowship with nearly 300 other youth from across Michigan, they sang, worshipped, and celebrated the Lord’s Supper. They reconnected with old friends and made new friends. They even had a little while to explore the indoor water park! The youth all felt the experience was transformative and are looking forward to sharing their insights with the congregation in the coming weeks.



Bethlehem PI

**Join us during morning worship on Sunday,
December 14th for Bethlehem, PI.**

Follow Investigator Z, King Herod’s personal Private Eye, as he chases down reports of a new king in Bethlehem! With the help of a few Bethlehem residents, he will search high and low to find this dangerous character and report back to King Herod.

You won’t want to miss this exciting adventure!

Justice and Diversity News

A note from the Justice & Diversity Team

The JD Team is leading the adult Faith Formation hour, Sundays **Nov 30, Dec 7, Dec 14, and Jan 4 at 9:15am in the Social Hall or on Zoom.** We are practicing skills to help us have civil conversations around tough topics. The series uses material from the Bible, the ELCA Social Statement *"Faith, Civic Life, and the Church,"* and mainstream texts like *"Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High"* by Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, et al (copies are available in the PoP Library). Here are tips for staying grounded in grace and curiosity:

1. Know your "why" for the conversation

Ask: What do I really want for myself, others, and the relationship?
Aim for connection, not correction: "I'm here to understand, not to win."

2. Check your body – a calm body gives calm conversation

Pause if you notice tension, fast breathing, or a feeling of being heated. Watch for signs of rising emotion – increasing volume, pace, or sarcasm.
Shift the tone - "Let's pause a second" - or offer a reset - "I value you more than this topic right now."

3. Curiosity can be the antidote to judgement, try:

- "That's interesting, will you tell me more about what led you there?"
- "I hadn't heard that, where did you come across it?"
- "It sounds like this matters to you. Why is that?"

4. Speak for yourself

Use "I" language: "I see this differently...", "I feel concerned when..."
Avoid globalizing ("Everyone thinks...").
Replace "You're wrong" with "Here's how I've experienced it."

5. Find the value beneath the view to help connect

Look for what's important to the other person: "You care a lot about fairness," "It sounds like freedom really matters to you."

6. Practice graceful exits

- "I love you - let's talk about something else"
- "Maybe we can come back to this when things are calmer."
- Shift to a lighter topic to protect yourself and the relationship

"Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger."
— James 1:19



Exploring Human Dignity in a Time of Political Violence

Free Online Seminar

Friday, Dec. 11, 2025,

7-8:30 PM EST

New York Avenue
Presbyterian Church
(Washington, DC)

Several JD Team members have participated in previous seminars from this program and found them thoughtful, well-facilitated, and deeply relevant. This upcoming session features:

Tim Shriver – Democratic leader, President of Special Olympics, founder of UNITE

Tom Griffith – Republican, retired federal judge

Moderator: David McAlister-Wilson, President of Wesley Theological Seminary

Together they will explore how spiritual and moral values can counter polarization and political violence.

Register for the webinar:

<https://nyapc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3280556>

Living Our Faith

Thank you so very much for all the prayers, cards, calls, visits and driving to appointments as my body was given the gift of healing from a broken bone. Most of all thank you for all the love and concern. I am truly blessed to be a part of this wonderful family!!



Diane Snyder

- *With deep gratitude for your generous support, YWCA Kalamazoo continues to live fully into our mission of Eliminating Racism and Empowering Women, while promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. Your donation enables us to meet the ever-changing needs of those who are too often marginalized and underserved in times of crisis.*
– Susan Rosas, Chief Executive Director



On-Line Giving

On-line Giving Has Never Been So Easy!



You can click or copy and paste the link

<https://tithe.ly/give?c=2250097>

or use the QR code.

You can also go to the Prince of Peace website & click on the giving button.

For questions contact either Marilyn or Tamara.

Birthdays and Anniversaries

12/1	Cheryl Thomas	12/12	Kevin Jawahir	12/21	Kay Kincaid	12/29	Layla Emrick
12/3	Ray Williams	12/13	Bette Stark	12/22	Jolaine Snyder		Noel Sederstrom
	Kathey Oosterwal	12/14	Thomas Walker	12/24	Sandra Mertz	12/31	Doug Wilson
12/6	Hannah Williams		Elijah Deming		Gail Brown		Sarah Maurer
	Howard Olsen		Susan Jones	12/25	Cody Copeland		
12/7	Verle Wiita		Ella Bovenkerk	12/26	Andrea Seguin		
12/8	Judy Middleton	12/17	Erica Timm		Beth Whately		
	Colin Hopper	12/18	Nicole Bolde		Dave Reinhold		
12/9	Elizabeth Sweeney		Alphonso Ross	12/27	Yvonne Gatz		
12/11	Grace Williams	12/20	Sandra Bennett		Meghan Beuker		
	Thomas Pederson		Bryce Maurer	12/28	Karen Hare		

Anniversaries

Noel & Cindy Sederstrom	December 3
Tim & Jennifer Gatz	December 19
Verle & Trish Wiita	December 19
Donald & Susan Jones	December 20



DECEMBER
birthdays & anniversaries

Prince of Peace Calendar — December

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30 Advent 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Christmas Program Rehearsal	1 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 7:00pm Women's Study Group - Flex Room	2 9:00am ESL 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 1:30pm Christian Education- closet clean-out 6:00pm Great Lakes Adventure Club - Social Hall/Flex 7:00pm Bells	3 10:00am Pray Without Ceasing 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 6:00pm Advent Dinners 7:00pm Advent Worship	4 9:00am ESL 1:00pm Food Distribution 1:00pm Free Store 6:30pm South County Fiber Arts 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	5 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring 10:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry - Peace Lounge 5:30pm Samaritas Family Christmas Party 7:00pm Holiday Hors d'oeuvre Party	6
7 9:15am Faith Formation All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Youth - Shop and Wrap	8 3:00pm Social Concerns Meeting 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 5:30pm Finance Committee mtg. - Zoom 7:00pm Christian Education- Zoom 7:00pm Personnel/Executive Committee - Zoom	9 9:00am ESL 9:15am Staff Meeting 1:00pm Bunko - Gathering Space 7:00pm Bells	10 8:00am Men's Breakfast @ Mark's Diner 10:00am Pray Without Ceasing 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 6:00pm Advent Dinners 7:00pm Advent Worship	11 9:00am ESL 6:00pm Partners in Profit 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	12 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring	13 10:00am Cookie Baking
14 9:15am Faith Formation Adult 9:30am Christmas Program Rehearsal 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	15 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 6:00pm Master Gardeners - Sanctuary 7:00pm Church Council meeting - Zoom 7:00pm Women's Study Group - Flex Room 7:00pm Worship Committee Meeting - Zoom	16 9:00am ESL 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 11:45am Ladies Lunch Bunch @ 5:30pm Property Committee - Zoom 7:00pm Bells	17 10:00am Book Club 10:00am Pray Without Ceasing 10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities 11:00am Library Committee - Library 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Zoom 6:00pm Advent Dinners 7:00pm Advent Worship	18 Newsletter Deadline 9:00am ESL 1:00pm Food Distribution 1:00pm Free Store 6:00pm Nurse Honor Guard of Kalamazoo 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	19 10:00am ESL Open Tutoring 1:00pm Samaritas Staff Christmas Party	20
21 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	22 9:30am Ruth Circle 1:30pm Care Team Meeting 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group 6:00pm Justice and Diversity Meeting - Zoom 6:30pm Nami Support Group	23 <i>Open Doors Men's Shelter Meal</i> 9:15am Staff Meeting 7:00pm Bells	24 Office Closed in observance of Christmas 10:00am Pray Without Ceasing 4:30pm Christmas Eve Service 8:30pm Christmas Eve Service	25 Christmas Day Office Closed in observance of Christmas	26 Office Closed in observance of Christmas	27
28 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	29 Office Closed in observance of Christmas 5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group	30 Office Closed in observance of Christmas	31 New Year's Eve Office Closed in observance of Christmas	1 New Year's Day Office Closed in observance of Christmas	2 Office Closed in observance of Christmas 10:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry - Peace Lounge	3

Legend:

AA—Alcoholics Anonymous ESL—English as a Second Language

NAMI — National Alliance on Mental Illness

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

269/343-3453

www.poppottage.org

Facebook: *Prince of Peace, Portage, MI-ELCA*