



DECORAH FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

FEBRUARY 2026 The Tower

Welcome to February.

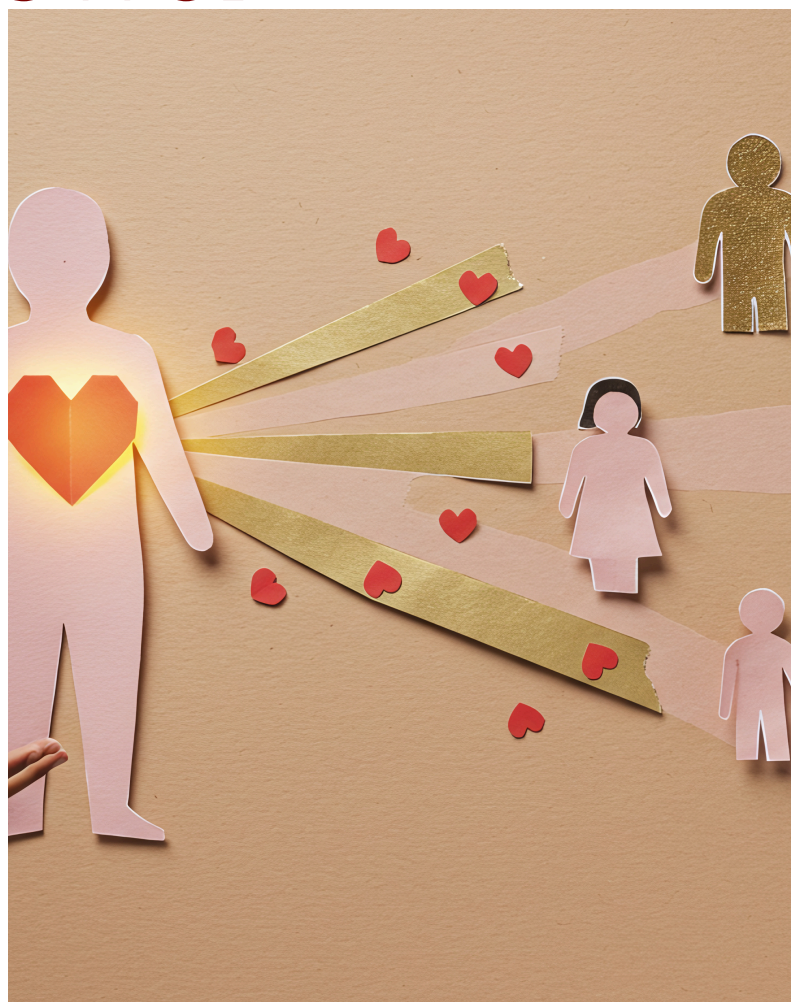
The past few weeks have been hard.

With everything going on in the world and close to home in Minnesota, it has been hard to find words to address what I am feeling.

Perhaps you feel the same way. As I scroll social media from time to time, I see many of my friends and colleagues, other pastors, saying the same thing. Anger, fear, pain, sadness, and more just seem to combine and leave us speechless.



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Continued on next page



How does one pray during so much turmoil? What words do we lift up to God? Let alone, how do we guide those we have been entrusted with when we don't know ourselves? Well, God finds ways to talk to us if we listen. I turned to the Upper Room one day last week. Specifically, the daily devotional for January 24, 2026. It started with quoting Hebrews 5:7, which reads: "During his days on earth, Christ offered prayers and requests with loud cries and tears." (CEB) The author goes on to talk about how sometimes we think we must be calm and have the right words when lifting our prayers and telling God how we feel. Jerney Mullen, the author of that day's devotion reminds us of Jesus praying in the garden. He reminds us that Jesus didn't put his prayers through an emotional filter waiting until he was calm and had the right words to pray.

No, Jesus prayed a prayer that was "honest, earnest and unrehearsed". I am grateful for his words and God pointing me to this devotional that day. No matter what we are feeling or experiencing - extreme stress, anxiety, anger, frustration, pain etc.- we can talk to God. We can pray without a filter, with tears or even nonverbal cues.

I still don't have the words. I still am struggling. Please know if you are too, that is okay and you are not alone. Let us lift our voices. God knows what we are asking, what we are saying. And sometimes the most truthful prayer is not words, but a pouring out of our hearts in whatever form it takes. Let us not forget to listen for God's response as well for even in the midst of tribulations and trying times, the greatest commandment will always be, "30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'31 The second is this:

"Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."
(Mark 12: 30-31)

Pray, listen and let those prayers turn into acts of love.

Rev. Cat Stokes

From Syd:

UWFaith Meeting:

Wednesday, Feb 4 , Monthly meeting
1:00 Valentine project day at the church

Hostesses: Sweet Young & Phyllis Wasta
We'll have crafting materials for cards and more to
spend time making something special for our
special someones!
Join us for treats and coffee and fun and fellowship!

Mat weaving

Wednesday, Feb 4 and 18
10:00 - Noon

Come enjoy time together working to make a
difference for someone in need. Check out the
progress!

Quilting group:

Tuesdays from 9-11ish



BOOK CLUB

From Jane: We are reading *The Emperor of Gladness* by Ocean Vuong for the month of February. Our gathering will be at the home of Cynthia Peterson located at 703 Decorah Ave. We will begin at **1:30pm on Thursday February 19**. If you would like to join us, please contact Jane Hardy at 563-382-5316 or email jhardy3333@aol.com

In December, the book group made a donation of \$650 to the Oneota Valley Literary Foundation, a part of Dragonfly Books. The foundation matched this amount and the store selected books for holiday giving for youth in programs of Helping Services for Youth and Families and Northeast Iowa Community Action. We enjoy sharing the love of reading with youth in our communities and appreciate the partnership with Dragonfly Books. This event has become a valued Christmas tradition of our book group. A special thank you to Linda Watson for organizing this donation every year with Dragonfly Books and our group.

Birthdays

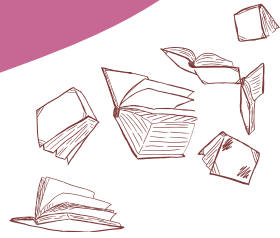
February 1	Dave Arp
February 2	Tammy Wold
February 3	Gloria Nordheim
February 3	Todd Folkedahl
February 6	Tracy Northup
February 9	Alex Bishop
February 12	Carol Hageman
February 21	Sondy Carver
February 24	Doug Johnson
February 28	Jon Young
February 28	Brady Dawley



BOOK STUDY

2026

From Pastor Cat



MEETING DATES

February 1 and 22 –
chapters 7 and
chapter 8 (one chapter
each week)

March 8 and 22 –
chapter 9 and chapter
10 (one chapter each
week)

April 12 and 26 –
chapter 11 and chapter
12 (one chapter each
week)

May 3 and 17 – chapter
13 and chapter 14 (one
chapter each week)

I am currently in a climate change cohort for the year, and I am taking you along with me. This year, our church is on a journey to look at climate change through a lens of faith and what we can do to affect change and provide care for all of creation. Our book/Bible study this year started in November, and we will be meeting after coffee twice a month to look at responses that people from various backgrounds have looked at. The question?:

Do we have a moral obligation to take action to protect the future of a planet in peril?

Each meeting we will look at various responses from a variety of people and hopefully through our discussion come to our own answer to this question. There are also suggestions on how to take action at the end of each chapter. The books are available on Amazon in various formats and range in price from \$8.99 (paperback, 2011) to \$12.05 (hardcover).

As of the writing of this article you can get a kindle version for \$9.99.

The book is entitled:

Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril,
edited by Kathleen Moore and Michael Nelson.





VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Home Visits

A message from Pastor Cat:

As you might recall, in 2025, it was my turn through the Annual conference to complete my Safe Gatherings training and background check. While going through the training, I discovered that I am supposed to have another person go with me on visits so there are always two adults doing visits to provide a safe environment for all involved. With that in mind, and with guidance from our District Superintendent, I am creating a list of volunteers who are able to join me on visits to our homebound members. I break up the visits into two days a month. Ideally, we would have enough people signing up and being willing to join me so that the volunteers would go on visits two to three times a year and not have it be a large commitment on time. I have visits scheduled for **Thursdays** mostly on our calendar, but this is not set in stone, and I am flexible on days and times for visits.

I could work within your schedule. I currently have a few volunteers but am always looking for more.



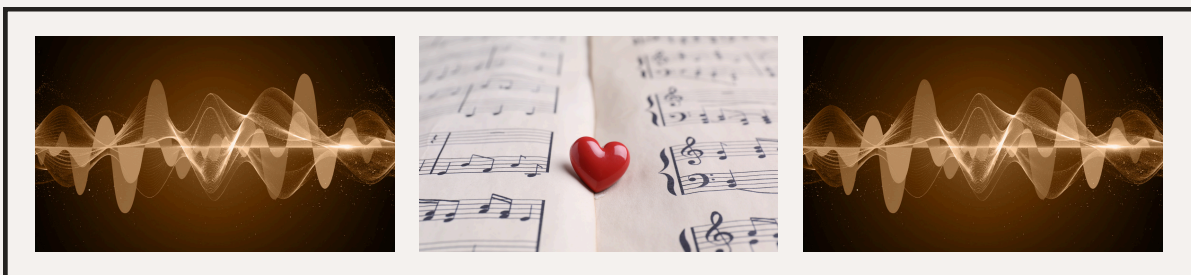
AUDIO SYSTEM UPDATE



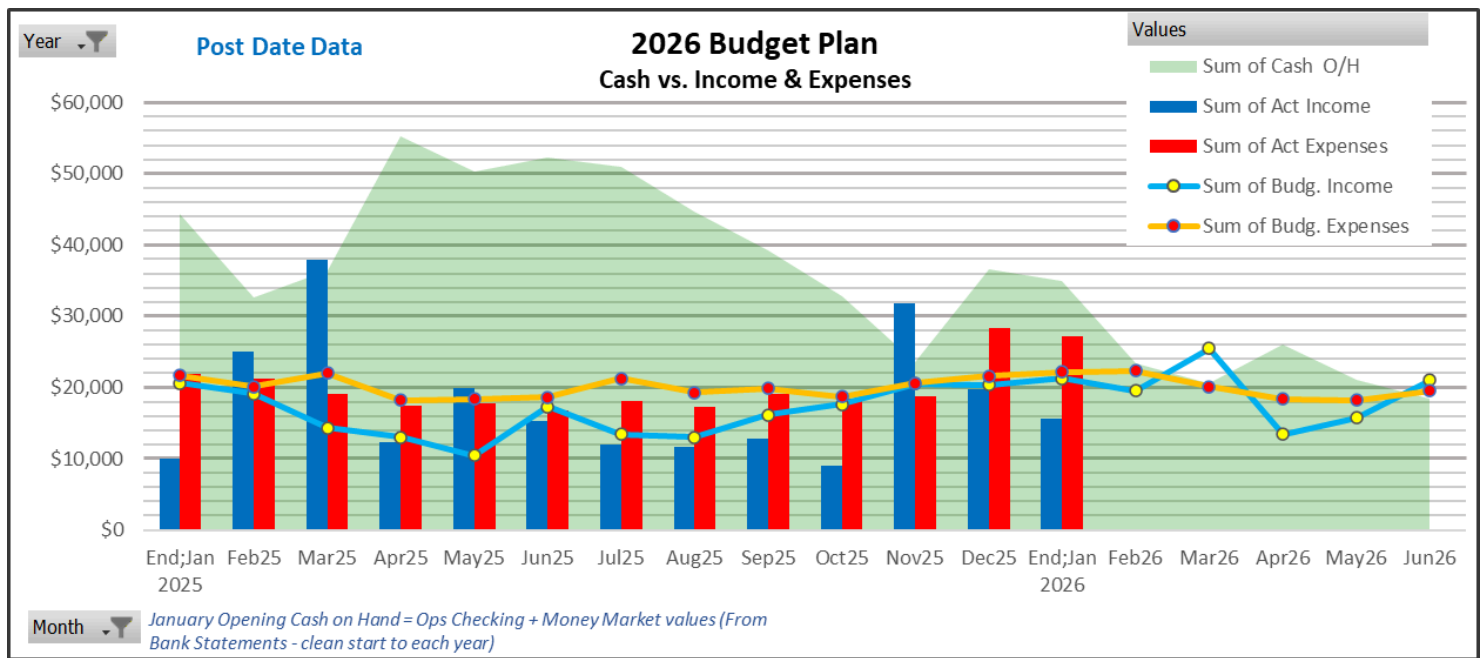
West Music has been provided with payment for our new audio system and will soon begin the installation.

A grant meeting is scheduled with The Depot for **February 10th**.

Thank you so much to everyone who has donated. If you are still interested in contributing, your donation at this time would still be very useful and appreciated and help us to further offset the cost of this important system that helps us serve community members unable to attend services in person as well as serve our members who are hearing impaired.



Treasurer's Corner



As is typical, I am preparing this report before we actually complete the month-end close, but we are fairly close to that close date, so these numbers should be pretty close to where we actually end up.

- January income is currently at \$15.6K on a plan of \$21.3K.
- January expenses are currently running at \$27.1K on a plan of \$22.1K.
- That's an \$11.5K spread between income and expenses for our very first month!
 - This "gap" caused me to move \$10K out of our Money Market account to maintain our working cash position.
- If you notice last year's income performance, we're planning on having a similar giving profile as 2025. Let's hope this comes to pass.

The big drivers to this "gap" were two major repair projects that were done in December but did not bill until January. That and we picked up our workman's comp insurance and voice messaging annual billings in January in addition to our typical higher utility and snow removal billing.

Our Money Market account now stands at \$17K, with our Operational checking account at \$6.7K; this total is less than January's total expense amount!

- With this critically low level of liquid cash, I will likely have to tap into the Trustee's stop-gap apportionment funding for at least February and maybe March.

Our benevolent activity for January is as follows:

- Giving Income = \$715.
- Total payouts for January = \$2519 (Sister Parish, Aase Haugen Chapel and Human Relations Sunday).
- Keep in mind that we'll be processing the Trustee's Grants in February, so those details will show up next month when I talk about February's actuals.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding these numbers or the chart shown.

Thank you for your strong support of Decorah First United Methodist Church!

Peace and love,

Steve Rarick, Treasurer
(847) 830-9891 mobile

Giving Commitment Cards

This year we invite you to celebrate the joy of generosity as you offer your Estimate of Giving Commitment Card for 2026. We encourage you to find greater contentment and simplicity in your lives as you put God first in your giving and living and to experience the joy that comes from knowing our gifts honor God and change lives. Our challenge as members is to find ways to grow deeper in our faith. One way to do this is to offer our financial blessings to God through our tithes and offerings. Through these gifts, we invest in God's vision and purpose and create an opportunity for God to work through us.

Our gifts to God each week are an act of worship; and our offerings are vitally necessary to change lives, transform communities, and renew mainline churches. We will be sending out pledge cards in the first week of February. We will also have some available at the church for you. We ask that you take time to prayerfully consider your giving to the church and to fill out a pledge card. If things change throughout the year and you are unable to give what you have pledged, it is okay.

We understand that things happen which are out of our control. Don't let your inability to give at this time keep you from worship. Remember that God honors your faithfulness and that your acceptance at Decorah First UMC is not based on your capacity to give. We ask that everyone return an Estimate of Giving Commitment Card even if it is a limited financial commitment at this time. You can always increase or decrease your commitment if your situation changes by calling the church.

You may be asking yourself, '***Why do I need to return an Estimate of Giving Commitment Card?***'

There are two reasons why it is important that every member of our church family return an Estimate of Giving Commitment Card. First, the process of prayerfully asking God to guide your decision and then making a commitment to serve the Lord with your financial gifts is an act of worship, an expression of gratitude and praise to God. Second, on a more practical note, your commitment allows our church to budget and better plan for our ministries, key objectives, and mission outreach programs.

We will have a special time of bringing the commitment cards forward to be prayed over in February.

You can also drop off your commitment card to the office or through the mail. You can complete your giving commitment form online at **DecorahFirstUnitedMethodist.org/news**.

Giving through direct deposit is also available. If you are interested in giving in this manner, please speak to Steve Rarick.

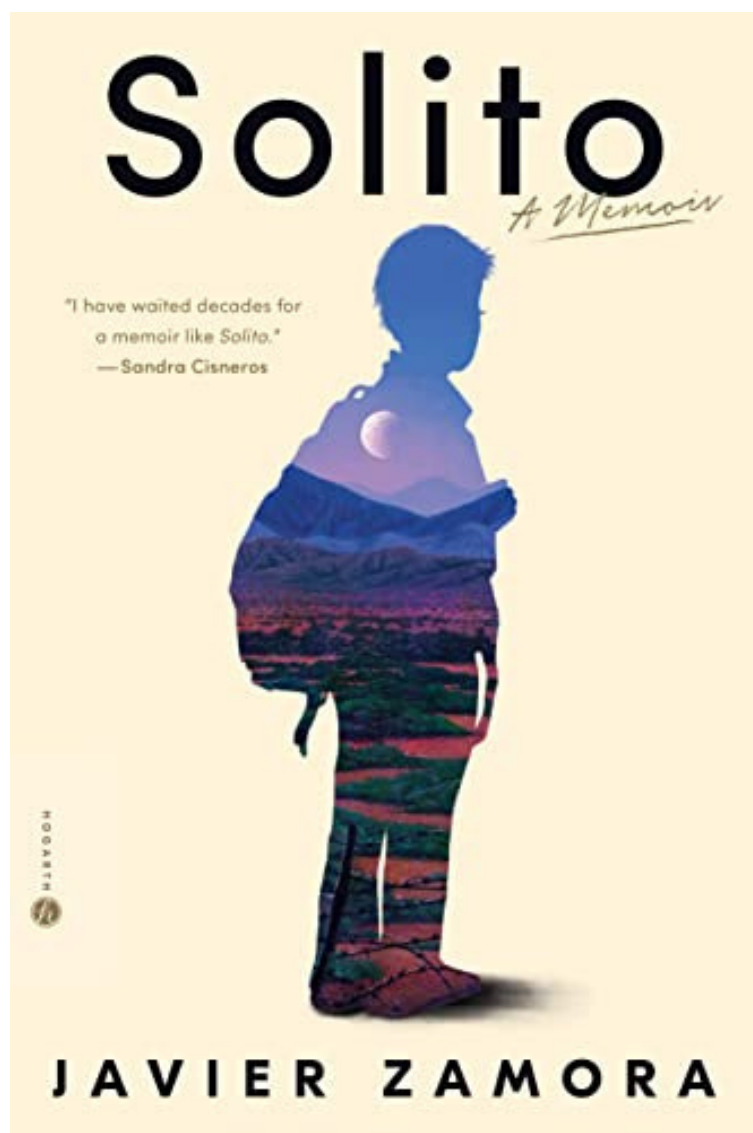
Buntrock Scholarship Applications

Any of our members are attending college this year, you are invited to apply for a Buntrock Scholarship. Applications are due to the church office by **April 30, 2026**.

They will be reviewed at our March Administrative Council Meeting. Chosen applicants will be notified following our meeting.

A copy of the Buntrock Scholarship Application is attached to this issue of The Tower. Additional copies are available in the church entryway. If you would like one emailed to you, please reach out to Cerrisa in the front office.

If emailing an application, please send to:
Decorah-First-UMC@IAUMC.net.



Sister Parish Book Discussion

The Sister Parish group invites folks from the Decorah UCC and FUMC congregations to join a book discussion on *Solito*, by Javier Zamora. This memoir details the author's journey from El Salvador to the US to be reunited with his parents. Javier was only 9 years old when he made the trip, and his storytelling reveals much about geopolitics, family, and the notion of home. We will talk about the book along with personal connections between Potrerillos, El Salvador and Decorah, Iowa.

Please join us! All are welcome (even if you don't read the whole book)!

Thursday, February 26, 7 - 8 p.m.
at **Decorah UCC Church** (*upstairs*).



COFFEE SERVERS

LITURGIST

Flower Chair: Deborah Bishop

February 1:

Nancy Ruen
& Syd Stephenson

Deb Tekippe

February 8:

Sherry & Brian
Schilling

Nancy Ruen

February 15:

Jane & Ken
VandeBerg

Syd Stephenson

February 22:

Sally & David
Scott Family

Sara Luse

Note: Pastor Cat will be on vacation February 2nd - 16th

UPCOMING EVENTS

UW Faith Meeting

Wednesday, February 4th , Monthly meeting

1 p.m. Valentine Project Day

Here at DFUMC

Decorah Community Meal

Thursday, February 5th, 5 p.m.

Decorah Lutheran's Fellowship

Hall at 309 Winnebago St.

All Vets Breakfast for 8th Grade D.C. Trip

Sunday, February 8th, 8 a.m. - Noon

All Vet's Club, 104 State St.



Food Pantry's SOUPERBOWL Sunday

Sunday, February 8th

Here at DFUMC

Sister Parish "Solito" Book Discussion

Thursday, February 26th, 7 - 8 p.m.

Decorah UCC Church, upstairs

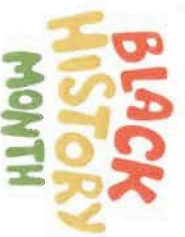
Food Pantry Annual Meeting

Monday, March 9th, 5:30 p.m.

*Winneshiek County Community Building
607 Washington St.*






Birthdays & additional event information on attached calendar.



FEBRUARY 2026

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

Note: Pastor Cat will be on vacation February 2nd - 16th

							1
							Birthdays: Dave Arp
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Food Pantry's SOUPERBOWL SUNDAY 
Birthdays: Tammy Wold	Quilting Group: 9 - 11ish Birthdays: Gloria Nordheim & Todd Folkedahl	Mat Weaving 10 a.m. - noon UW Faith Meeting: 1 p.m. Valentine project day at the church	Decorah Community Meal: 5 p.m.	Birthdays: Tracy Northrup			
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Birthdays: Alex Bishop	FUMC Depot Grant Presentation, 4 p.m. Quilting Group: 9 - 11ish	 Groundhog Day National Freedom Day	FREE CLINIC 5:30 p.m. Birthdays: Carol Hageman		HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY 		
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
	President's Day Quilting Group: 9 - 11ish	Mat Weaving 10 a.m. - noon			Birthdays: Sondy Carver		
23	24	25	26	27	28		
	Quilting Group: 9 - 11ish Birthdays: Doug Johnson		Sister Parish Book Discussion, 7-8 p.m. FREE CLINIC 5:30 p.m.		Birthdays: Jon Young & Brady Dawley		

APPLICATION

ARTHUR AND ELSIE BUNTROCK MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Given by Decorah FirstUnited Methodist Church
Decorah, Iowa

DUE FEBRUARY 28, 2026

NAME_____ DATE_____

ADDRESS_____

PHONE NUMBER_____

Are you a member of the First United Methodist Church, Decorah, Iowa?
_____ Year of joining

Have you previously received any grant from this Scholarship? _____
Grants are available two times.
If you have received a grant, When? _____

Please state your program of post-high school education, including and career goals and the school you are or intend to be enrolled in.

Please state in concise form your current Christian belief and church commitment and how your faith affects your career goals and choices.