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# The Circuit Rider

Princeton First United Methodist Church  
316 S. Church Street ♦ Princeton, IL 61356  
princetonfirstumc.org

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Pastor Michael Ray Hickok

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♦ JANUARY 2026 ♦

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## A Word from Pastor Mike

As we turn the page and move into a new year, I trust that you will continue to experience God's abundant blessings. The end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026 are ways we as human beings observe the Lord's gift of time. Perhaps you have read and seen lists of significant happenings in the past year. Our nation and our world have faced daunting challenges. We continue to witness staggering levels of violence at home and war around the world. As Christian believers we pray and work for a just and lasting peace for all of God's children. We cling to the hope that our God will ultimately complete His glorious creation.

Our First United Church of Princeton family has remained faithful during this past year. It was challenging as we said farewell to many dear saints of God who were such an integral part of our ministry. We believe in the power of the resurrection and understand that death is a part of life. This belief does not diminish the level of our grief.

One of the ways we honor the memories of our dear ones who pass on is to continue to serve the church that was such an important part of their lives. I am inspired by your love, devotion, generosity and resilience. It is a blessing to worship, study, and serve alongside you.

At the beginning of a new year, people often resolve to make improvements in their lives. Some find it helpful to set goals relating to fitness, diet, relationships, and individual Christian growth. As believers in the Methodist tradition, we often begin the New Year by praying the Wesley Covenant Prayer together. This shared experience is a way to re-commit ourselves to live daily as faithful Christians. *Please join us for this beautiful service on Saturday, **January 3 at 5:30 pm** or Sunday, **January 4 at 9:00 am**.* We will make copies of the Wesley Covenant Prayer available for you to keep in your Bible and refer to regularly as you move through 2026.

*May God in Christ bless you richly,  
Pastor Michael Ray Hickok*

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### January Worship Schedule

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Sunday Worship  
Sundays 9:00

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Saturday Evening  
Service

January 3rd 5:30\*  
January 17th 5:30

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Holy Communion

January 3rd 5:30\*  
January 4th 9:00

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### From the Office

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Please coordinate with the office on any events or repairs going on at the church, so we don't have two things happening in one room. Thank you!

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## January at a Glance

January 7 - 10:00 Witness Team  
5:30 Adult Ministries  
January 10 - 9:00 UN Hanging of the Greens  
January 13 - 1:30 Care Team Meeting  
January 22 - 6:30 Finance Committee Meeting  
January 26 - 6:30 Trustees Meeting

## Holy Communion

The sacrament of Holy Communion will be served on the first weekend of January - **Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup>** and **Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup>**. If you prefer to take communion at home with the live broadcast, you are welcome to pick up a communion pack from the office during the week before.



## Our Table

Our Table will meet twice in January to provide a meal and fellowship to anyone who would like to attend. Everyone is invited to come on Mondays, **January 12 and 26 from 5:00 – 6:00 pm.**



## January Change the World

Change the World for January will be donated to Freedom House. This is a ministry that protects and houses domestic abuse victims and offers them help and hope. Please consider donating your change into the jar outside the Sanctuary, as we “change the world” with each and every coin!

## Change the World December Report

During the month of December through 12/21, we've collected \$480.15 for VIP (Very Important Person) Youth Group. With the match from Missions, the total was over \$960.30 going to this faith based youth group for special needs. Thank you for your generosity.

## Epiphany Sunday January 4

Epiphany is when the church season of Christmas ends and we remember the visit of the Wise Men to the Holy Family. This signifies the light of Christ shining out to everyone. We share the good news of Christ's birth and presence in the world because God considers us all family. We will remember the light Jesus brings into the world. We will also celebrate Holy Communion.



## A Few Notes To Remember

- **Office Hours:** the Church Office will be closed on Monday, January 19 for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
- **Calendars:** 2026 Calendars are here. They are on the table outside the office. A big thank you to Fiocchi-Jensen Funeral Home for giving us the calendars every year.
- **Parking Announcement:** We have a number of people who have difficulty walking in our congregation. It is important for them to find a parking space near the ramp or the Cushing Hall entrance. *We encourage those of you with no limitations on your mobility to park on the north and west sides of the building.* This will free up spaces on the east side for those who need to park closer. Thank you for your kindness.
- **Updates and Events:** Be sure to like and follow the PFUMC Facebook page to be updated on events happening in our Church.

# SUNDAY SCHOOL



## CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



Children's Sunday School was so much fun this month! Our faith focus "God's community celebrates Jesus" and we read the Christmas story in the book of Luke. The children created their own advent candle wreaths, a Christmas tree with lights, and played a game telling the good news to the shepherds. We also discussed our plans for Christmas and the winter break.

There will be NO Children's Sunday School January 4th. Children 7 and under visit the nursery during the church service with his or her family.



*Amanda Noord- Children's Sunday School Leader*

## YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL

Youth Sunday School is for children grades 6-12 and meets in the Conference Room at 10:00 following Sunday Worship.

## YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group is for anyone interested in grades 6-12 and will be held at church on the **January 18 from 6-7pm.**

## ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL

The **Righteous Renegades** Sunday School welcome anyone who would like to **join in Cushing Hall at 10:00.**

The **Middles** Sunday School meets Sundays in **the library at 10:00.** The group will not meet January 4.



## UN Hanging of the Greens

Un-hanging of the Greens will take place on Saturday, **January 10 at 10:00am**. We will need lots of help, so please plan to join the fun!

## Upper Room



The Upper Room daily devotionals are available on the table outside the office.



## 2026 Offering Envelopes

If you are a regular monetary giver to our church, you are welcome to have your own set of envelopes to put your offering in. They can be picked up on the table in front of the church office. Remember that if you let us know what you give, it can be counted as charitable giving and help with your taxes. If you haven't received envelopes and would like them, contact the church office.

## ECUMENICAL WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

The Women's Ecumenical Bible Study is doing an 8 week Advent study called "The Messiah". Starting in January, they will begin a DVD study titled "Embraced by God". This Bible Study meets **every Monday at 10:00 am in the Conference Room**. It's a "drop-in" group which means attendance every week is not required. The Ecumenical Bible Study is open to women of all faiths or denominations. If you have questions, contact Janet Becker at 815-866-1801 or [beckerjnj71@gmail.com](mailto:beckerjnj71@gmail.com).



## YOUNG AT HEART

We had fun at the Christmas luncheon on Wednesday, December 10th. Rev Ron Eckberg entertained us with a wonderful program of Christmas music and stories.

We will take a break in January and February. We'll have a pizza party in March.



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## OUTGOING AND INCOMING LEADERSHIP

### *Thank You*

A big 'thank you' to those leaving their committee positions as of December 31, 2025. Your dedication to God's work through your church has been noticed and appreciated. (If we've forgotten anyone, please accept our apologies.)

Church Council – Ben Atkinson, Lynn Rausch, David Noord

Staff/Parish – Marg Wendle, Becky Guither

Finance – Ben Atkinson

Trustees – Shelly Grabill, Dan Kniss, Bill Wendle

Nominations – Becky Guither, Jodee Zelenik

Adult Ministries – Julie Kuhne (Chair), Paul Kautz,  
Deb Lawson, Jodee Zelenik

Missions – Janet Becker, Paul Eddy, Trent Goodale II,  
Remi Rawlings

Education – Sara Hildebrand, Nancy Huber, Rhonda Leadley

Endowment – Doug Ray (Chair), Birney Brown, Mike Vrana

Care Team – Becky Guither

We are also blessed to have many wonderful people joining our committee work in the New Year. We look forward to doing ministry with you! (New members – your term starts Jan. 1, 2026.)

Trustees – Jon McCutchan, Michael Hickok, Jim DeWalt

Endowment – Shelly Grabill

Adult Ministries – Pam Parker

Staff Parish – Carla Towne, Gary Patterson

Memorial – Birney Brown

Witness Team – Janet Becker, Tom Newby, Anna Roadhouse



### GATEWAY GIVING TREE



A special thank you to all who participated in the "Gateway Giving Tree" project. We were able to meet our goal with your generous efforts. God Bless! Happy New Year!

*-Rhonda Leadley & Gateway Services*

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## PFUMC APP FOR IPHONE AND ANDROID NEW LOOK TO WEBSITE



The PFUMC website has a new look. The updated site contains the same information you are used to seeing, but now includes an updated events page where all PFUMC events are listed, and an integrated calendar which allows you to add these events directly to your own calendar. **No action is required for you to view the updated site** <https://princetonfirstumc.org/>.

**We are excited to now offer a PFUMC app** so you can have all PFUMC information available with you on your iPhone or Android device. The PFUMC app offers such features such as quick access to our Sunday Worship LiveStream, events page, prayer wall, and mobile Bible for on the go reading. It includes all the useful information found on the website in a convenient layout for quick reference on your phone or tablet. **No account setup, sign in, username or password is required!** Simply download the app from the App Store (iPhone users) or Google Play Store (Android) users. Or scan the QR code below to be directed to the app automatically in the app store.



THE TITHE.LY CHURCH APP

**Princeton First United  
Methodist Church**



**SCAN HERE**

If you are not familiar with scanning a QR code, step by step instructions are provided on the last page of this issue of the Circuit Rider.



## BOOK GROUP

Please consider attending our next discussion on **January 13 at 10 am** in the church library. The group will be discussing “*Sutters Cross*” by W. Dale Cramer.



## FROM THE GREEN TEAM

### **Our Living World, Part 2: Plant Life by Ask the UMC**

Please visit [UMNews.org](http://UMNews.org) for the complete article. The following is a short summary of direct quotes.

Genesis 1:11-13 portrays the emergence of plants as the first form of life on our living planet.

“Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day” (NRSVUE)

Genesis goes on to describe part of why plants are essential.

At the conclusion of the sixth day, Genesis 1:29-30 goes on to say, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for feed. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on



the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” (NRSVUE) Social Principles on plant life [www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-in-the-natural-world#plant-life](http://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-in-the-natural-world#plant-life)



“We call for the preservation of old growth forests and other irreplaceable natural treasures, as well as preservation of endangered plant species. We support measures designed to maintain and restore natural ecosystems. We support policies that develop alternatives to chemicals used for growing processing, and preserving food, and we strongly urge adequate research into their effects upon God’s

creation prior to utilization.”

The heart of these is the commitment and restoring natural ecosystems. All ecosystems in our living world depend on the presence and thriving of plant life, which provides both the food and the oxygen (in exchange for carbon dioxide) upon which all other life on this planet depends.

United Methodists should call for great care when using genetic modifying technology to modify plants and animals. United Methodists also reject all attempts of human greed to make any part of these ecosystems proprietary. “People worldwide challenge the privatization of commonly held resources such as native seeds and plants.” United Methodists call for the U.S. military to account for actions that disregard and destroy plant and animal life and lead to the generational degradation of ecosystems that negatively impact the people who depend on them. As Methodists we are called to interact with, understand, respect and work for the good of the earth’s plant life.

## ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE

Our Princeton First United Methodist Church Endowment Funds were established over 40 years ago from generous Church members.

These generous gifts over 40 years ago still pay BIG dividends to our Church today. The Endowment Funds are only used to improve and maintain our Church Building and Grounds. Endowment funds are not used for Church operating expenses.

Our Church is very fortunate to have these Endowment Funds. Without these Endowment Funds, it would be extremely difficult for Our Church to maintain the Church building and grounds to high standards. Improving and maintaining our beautiful Church building and grounds heavily depends on our Endowment Funds.

Endowment Fund Balance:

**November 28, 2025 \$849,331.51**

December 31, 2024 \$730,968.83.

December 31, 2023 \$683,466.55.

From 2022 – 2025, the Endowment Fund provided \$200,000 towards \$400,000 of much needed improvements to our Church building and grounds. The Endowment Committee matched an anonymous \$50,000 donation in 2022, in addition to the 3-year capital campaign match of \$150,000 for the \$200,000 total.

The Church Endowment Committee encourages all Members to contribute to our Church Endowment Fund as you plan your Estate. New Gifts to the Endowment Fund will help improve and maintain our Church Building and Grounds for the next 40+ years.

Ways you can contribute to the Endowment Fund are: Gifts of Cash, Stocks, Bonds, Real Estate (farms, homes, commercial), retirement fund required minimum distributions, and naming the Church Endowment Fund as beneficiary of Life Insurance policies.

Please contact an Endowment Committee member with your questions. Endowment Fund information brochures are available in the lobby. Please take one.

### **Endowment Committee**

Doug Ray

Barb Skean

Mike Vrana

Birney Brown

Brian Church

Lora Corban



### Altar Flowers

If you're interested in providing flowers for the altar, let the church office know. Flowers are a beautiful part of God's creation, and people love seeing them in the Chancel area. You can order them from a florist, or pick them from your garden. Share the beauty with others as we worship God!



### Treats for Social Hour

Volunteers are needed! The church provides the coffee, lemonade and water, but we rely on your baking skills/donations for the treats. Please consider signing up on the sheet outside the office, if you can provide treats of your choice. Thank you!



### Donation Cart

If you have items to donate to Tri-County Food Pantry, please feel free to bring them in and drop them in the shopping cart located in Cushing Hall. The need is great, and all gifts are appreciated.



## PRAYER CORNER

Remember in your prayers...Family of Jackie Davis, Family of Mary Lou Hopper, Family of Francis Wright, Family of Joanne Swan, Family of Joanne Utt (Karen Newby's friend), Family of Max Lauritzen, Family of Jerry Campbell, Tom Sneed (health issues), Jim Metz (Sue Ray's father – health issues), Cal Gramer (broken leg), Jodee Zelenik (foot injury), Judd Luscher (Gewin's friend – health issues), Pat Etheridge (health issues), Ken Gruhlke (Alan Bergh's friend – hospice), John Sayers (cancer treatments), Bob Parker (health issues), Lynn Kautz (Paul Kautz's sister-in-law – lung cancer), storm victims in our nation, those with cancer, or illness in our congregation, those awaiting tests/results, those recovering from surgery & treatments, the lonely, the homeless, refugees, immigrants, military personnel, health care workers, law enforcement, fire and emergency personnel.



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Arukah Institute has provided a overnight shelter space for our local unhoused population during the cold-weather months (starting in late December), but we need our community to provide the volunteers. If you or someone you know would like to volunteer as overnight warming center staff, please sign up for a training time. Flyers with training information are on the table outside the office. We are hoping to get 100 people to help carry the load. Let's join together to love and care for our neighbors.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR FINANCIAL PERSEVERANCE

On behalf of the PFUMC Finance Committee, we would like to say a big 'thank you' to all the people who have continued to contribute financially to the ministries of our church. Below are some of the ways in which you can give to the church.

1. Via mail – 316 S. Church Street, Princeton.
2. In the locked white mailbox by the main glass doors of the building.
3. Via your bank's on-line bill pay program. A physical check is then mailed to the church.
4. An automatic withdrawal (EFT/ACH) taken from your checking, savings or investment account. This can be done through your bank, or at our bank. **Contact Shelly Grabill for the bank information (i.e. routing number and acct. number).**
5. Through PayPal. Just visit our website ([princetonfirstumc.org](http://princetonfirstumc.org)) and click on the 'giving' button. Then follow the instructions. You can set it up for a one-time use, or on-going. See Shelly if you have difficulties.

We continue to do ministry because of God's grace and your support.

# December MOMENTS

## YOUNG AT HEART CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON



## SING-A-LONG



## UWF CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON AT THE UNDERGROUND



Linda Hickok, Sharon Smith, Judy Harris



JoAnn Patterson, Pat Eddy, Myrna Roggy

## SPOTLIGHT



Josh & Landon Bush in River Valley production of Shrek (with Jean Gewin)



Anna Roadhouse  
Julie McCutchan



Julie McCutchan  
Eloise Stabler



Ruth Denault

## YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

The children, youth, and leaders had a wonderful time celebrating the holiday season with a pizza party! There were lots of games played such as holiday charades and a candy cane relay. The children and youth were partnered up to create a gingerbread church. Fun and laughter was had by all!



# JANUARY

## *Celebrations*

### **Birthdays**

**1** Brent Loftus  
Sherri Parker  
**2** Maycie Munson  
Mike Vrana  
**5** Becky Guither  
**11** Ann Lasson  
**12** Brady Frank  
Sarah Ray  
**13** Hannah Nigg

**14** Betty Sutliff  
Erick Wahlgren  
**16** Liz Friend  
**17** Maggie Davis  
Olivia Kelly  
**19** Carol Devins  
Kiera VandeVenter  
**20** Carla Towne  
**21** Sue Fehlhafer  
Levi VandeVenter

**23** Sharon Borg  
Lorrayne Cabral  
Becky Orwig  
**25** Esther Tracy  
**26** Jim Miller  
**27** JoAnn Creason  
**29** Jaxon Cruse  
Sue Shriver  
**31** Daniel Thompson

### **Anniversaries**

7 Bill and Marg Wendle

# January 2026 at First United Methodist Church

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>JanuaryChange the World: Freedom House</p>				 Church Office Closed	Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group	 5:30 Saturday Evening Worship <i>with Holy Communion</i>
4 9 am Worship <i>with Holy Communion</i> <i>in-person or live-stream</i> 10:00 Youth Sunday School 10:00 Righteous Renegades	5 10:00 Women's Bible Study	6 2:30 Prayer Shawl Group	7 10:00 Witness Team  5:30 Adult Ministries 6:30 Choir practice	8 Church Office Closed	9 Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group	10 9:00 Un-hanging of the Greens
11 9 am Worship <i>in-person or live-stream</i> 9:15 Children's Sunday School 10:00 Youth Sunday School 10:00 Righteous Renegades 10:00 The Middles	12 10:00 Women's Bible Study  5 pm Our Table 	13 10:00 Book Discussion Group 1:30 Care Team 2:30 Prayer Shawl Group	14 6:30 Choir practice	15 Church Office Closed	16 Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group	17  5:30 Saturday Evening Worship
18 9 am Worship <i>in-person or live-stream</i> 9:15 Children's Sunday School 10:00 Youth Sunday School 10:00 Righteous Renegades 10:00 The Middles 6:00 Youth Group	19 10:00 Women's Bible Study  Church Office Closed <i>Martin Luther King, Jr.</i>	20 6:00 Handbells Practice	21 6:30 Choir practice	22 Church Office Closed	23 Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group	24 Church Office Closed
25 9 am Worship <i>in-person or live-stream</i> 9:15 Children's Sunday School 10:00 All Church Birthday 10:00 Youth Sunday School 10:00 Righteous Renegades 10:00 The Middles	26 10:00 Women's Bible Study  5 pm Our Table  6:30 Trustees Meeting	27 6:00 Handbells Practice	28 6:30 Choir practice	29 6:30 Finance Meeting	30 Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group	31 Church Office Closed  6:00 Princeton Board Games Group



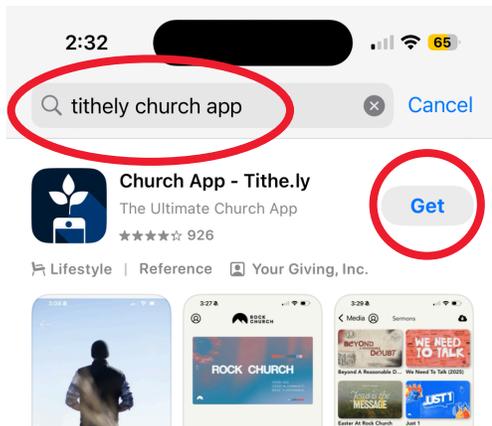
## PFUMC APP DOWNLOAD/INSTALL INSTRUCTIONS



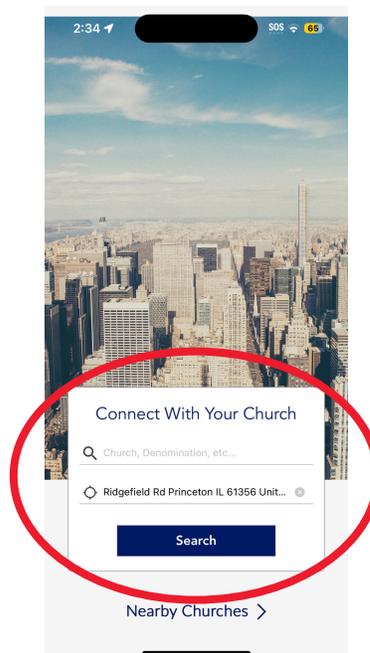
To download and install the PFUMC App on your phone you can scan the QR code previously provided, or follow these step by step instructions (these instructions are for iPhone users and may vary slightly for Android users).

1. **Open the Google Play Store** (for Android) **or the iOS App Store** (for iPhone/iPad) on their mobile device.
2. Search for **“Church App - Tithe.ly.”**
3. **Download and install** the “Church App - Tithe.ly.”
4. **Open** the app, then use the search bar to **enter Princeton First United Methodist Church** or city, state, or zip code (your phone settings may ask you to enable location and notification settings).
5. **Select our church from the search results**, and the app will update to display your church’s custom content and logo.

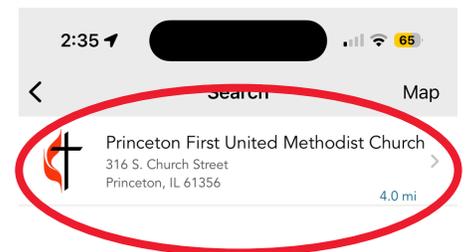
### Steps 1, 2, 3



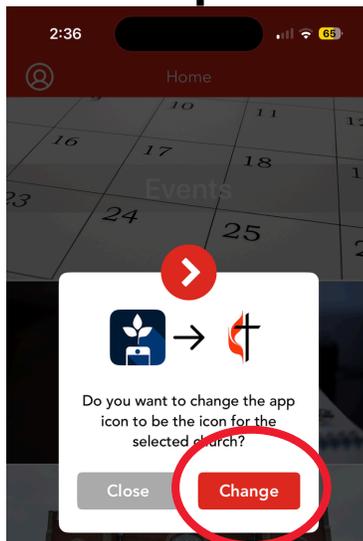
### Step 4



### Step 5



### Step 5





## The First United Methodist Church of Princeton, Illinois

Worship Service

9:00 a.m.

Saturday Service (1st & 3rd Saturdays)

5:30 p.m.

Michael Ray Hickok

Pastor

Fallon Bush

Treasurer

Josh Bush

A/V Technology Director

Charles Gebeck

Organist

Pat James

Chancel Choir Accompanist

Shelly Grabill

Office Manager & Financial Secretary

Amanda Noord

Children's Sunday School Leader

Shelley Orwig

Youth Sunday School Leader

Karen Newby

Handbell Choir Director/Chancel Choir Director

Tom Newby

Lay Leader

Elizabeth Schlender

Communications Director

Chris Rucinski

Nursery

Church Office

(815) 872-2821

Church General E-mail

[office@princetonfirstumc.org](mailto:office@princetonfirstumc.org)

Church Website

[princetonfirstumc.org](http://princetonfirstumc.org)

**The First United Methodist Church of Princeton  
316 South Church Street  
Princeton, IL 61356**

**POSTMASTER:  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



**January 2026 Circuit Rider**