November 2026

Tidings of Peace

The newsletter of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church - Portage, MI

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"Touched by the Gospel, we seek to be instruments of God's Peace, for the sake of the world."

A note from Pastor Rachel:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. – Ps. 136:1

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
– 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The constant refrain of Psalm 136 is "for his steadfast love endures forever," which is the second half of all 26 verses of this psalm. The first half of all the verses recount God's wonderous works from creation to the exodus from Egypt, to leading the people through the wilderness, and establishing them in a new land of their own.

I'll admit, the verses recounting God's killing of famous kings (Ps. 136:18-20) each being followed up with the refrain "for his steadfast love endures forever," is jarring. And yet, 1 Thessalonians instructs us to give thanks in all circumstances. Does that include painful ones, too? What does it mean for us to thanks in the midst of exhaustion, frustration, sorrow, or pain?

In her book, A Grief Received: What to Do When Loss Leave You Empty-Handed, JL Gerhardt writes, "The practice of thanksgiving – of combing our lives for gifts, of seeing them, naming them, and labeling them as gifts from our Creator and Father – gives us the perspective we need to withstand the pain and empowers us to experience God's generous, peace-giving presence. On hard days... I make myself name one good thing, one gift, one spark of life or joy, the more specific the better." (pgs. 103-104)

In whatever season of life you find yourself these days, I invite you to comb through your days for the things that are good, those small sparks of life or joy that persist in the midst of real grief and real pain and give thanks to God for them. This could become a journaling practice, a daily prayer routine, or a way to start a conversation over a meal.

Giving thanks to God in the difficult moments takes courage and wisdom. It means speaking the truth that we can be hurting and blessed at the same time. In a world that often tries to reduce our human complexity to good/bad or happy/sad, we live in the truth that these labels can exist in the same person at the same time and that God is with us through all of it. We don't have to hide any part of us to rest secure in God's love.

Thanks be to God!

Shalom,
Pastor Rachel

STAFFING NEWS:

It is with extremely grateful hearts for her 18 years of service that we announce the upcoming retirement of Janet Hill, our music director and organist. Janet has shared her time, energy, creativity, and immense talent with us over the years and has been a blessing to us all.

She will be retiring in January, with the exact date yet to be determined. The position will be posted very soon and disseminated broadly. We thank Janet for all that she has given to us, and we know that our entire congregation wishes her the absolute best and God's richest blessings as she moves towards retirement.

If you or others have questions, please contact any of the members of the Personnel Committee listed below.

Sincerely,
The Personnel Committee:
Sue Jones, Chair, and Judson Stemaly, Dennis Stalker,
Jenny Deming, Dave Reinhold, and Pastor Rachel



The Property Committee completed a long overdue project this fall - the nearly 300 windows at PoP were washed: inside and out!

Additionally, window screens were removed, cleaned, and re-installed. Sills and frames were cleaned (goodbye dead bugs and cobwebs!).

Thank you to the whole team for their hard work and stewardship of our building and grounds. If you'd like to get involved, they are meeting again on Saturday, November 14 from 8:30am-12pm for a Work Day to tackle a few more projects. Whether you can spare an hour or stay the whole morning, all skill levels are welcome!

An Invitation to Serve on the Personnel Committee

Beginning in February 2027, we will have an opening on our Personnel Committee as Sue Jones completes her two terms of service (plus one extra year). The committee consists of the Council officers (Executive Committee) and two members of the congregation who are not on Council. Members meet monthly via Teams, and their role is to provide support and care for our church staff.

You don't need a degree in human resources to serve! We're looking for someone with experience leading a team, supervising employees or volunteers, working with policies, and helping navigate conflict and challenging situations if they arise.

Good judgment, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to supporting our staff are valuable gifts to bring to this role.

Might this be a way for you to share your gifts with our congregation? If you have leadership or supervisory experience, we hope you'll prayerfully consider serving. Please reach out to any current committee member to learn more or ask questions.Members are Sue Jones, Judson Stemaly, Dennis Stalker, Jenny Deming, Dave Reinhold, and Pastor Rachel.

We are grateful for this committee's important work on behalf of our staff and look forward to welcoming a new member!



Upcoming Adult Faith Formation Topics:

Nov 8
Review of the proposed changes to the ELCA's social message on homelessness with Laila Piosson

Nov 15 & Nov 22
Pr. Harry Biles leads a photo exploration of the consequences of Luther's teachings during the post-reformation time period.

Nov 29 - Dec 13 *The Hope of Isaiah*
During Advent we will take time with the weekly readings from Isaiah. We will ask, "What is the author saying?" "How does it connect with our lives today?" This first week of Advent we will explore Isaiah 64, led by Laila Poisson.

Youth and Family News

Em Witteveen,
Engagement Coordinator



On August 30, we installed the Prayground in our Sanctuary as a way for kids to engage with worship in a way that helps them make meaning of worship. After a month of experimentation, we asked for congregational feedback. Here are some answers to common questions raised in the survey.

Are parents expected to accompany their child?
Yes! Parents know best how their family's faith life looks outside the church. They can prompt their child to participate in familiar prayer postures, recognize familiar words, and respond to familiar verbal prompts. Parents can also answer questions when they inevitably arise and give a deeper explanation later on. This partnered learning helps make concepts stick.

The exception to this is the nursery children, who come to worship to participate in communion. At that time, parents are welcome to come forward and sit with their child, and nursery staff are also present to help children participate, receive communion, and return to the nursery until the end of worship.

What is the target age?
The prayground space is specifically designed for kids between 2 and 6. Kids of this age usually cannot read and don't have the attention span of an adult or older child. The ability to move around, engage tactilely, see the action, and ask questions are not just nice things to have—they are necessary tools for the way their developing brains learn.

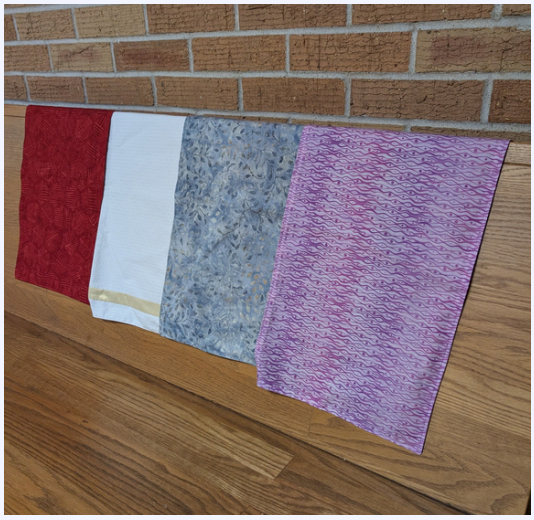
What was parent involvement in the development of the prayground?
Parents came to me (Em) asking for assistance in helping their child transition from the nursery into worship. Look back to the August 30 sermon for a full explanation and description, as well as prior newsletter articles.

What about the youth pew?
The youth pew is still active! Some youth prefer to sit one row back from the prayground so their feet aren't in the way of younger explorers of worship, while others love to be by the action. To accommodate this occasional flexibility and maximize pew space for all, we haven't had the Youth Pew sign out recently.

How is this information communicated to parents, especially visitors?
Parents who are members or regular attendees of our congregation receive the Youth Newsletter weekly. Information about the prayground has been a part of those newsletters as well as our monthly congregational Tidings of Peace Newsletter. I have also reached out to parents with "prayground-aged" kids with updates. For visitors who aren't a part of our regular communications, all the need-to-know info is laid out on the inner cover of the bulletin. Visitors have also asked staff members and ushers about options for worshipping with their children.

continued...

Youth and Family News



"Paraments" for the prayground

As part of our continued safety updates at PoP we recently installed two new 'LifeVac' anti-choking devices. These are designed to save someone in the event of a choking emergency. The kits are located in the Ed wing and Nursery.

We pray these devices are never needed, but are glad to have them if an emergency ever arises!

Additional information, instructions, and a link to a demonstration video can be found on the case.



Lifevac Anti-choking Device

Prayground update continued...

Will the items in the prayground change seasonally/to match the liturgical color? Absolutely! Thanks to Gail M, we have mini "paraments" in all the liturgical colors that will come out at the appropriate time. We've also got some seasonal symbols, such as flameless battery candles for Advent, that will make their appearance when the time comes.

From my view:
I've seen the prayground be a useful tool for children already, even in the short few weeks it's been a part of our space. We've had to order extra of the small plates and cups that the children can use to follow along with the communion liturgy because they are sad when they can't "help".

Some of our older children have been great examples for the prayground participants, showing them where to look, helping them find a worship ribbon or stuffed animal to dance with, and modeling folded hands or prompting an "amen" at the end of prayer.

The children love to dance or wave colorful ribbons during congregational singing, and their laughter and joyful smiles as they participate in sung worship has reminded me to search for the joyful moments that God puts in front of me, as well.

I fear that sometimes I lose some of the "spark" for worship. Seeing our children experience worship, sometimes for the first time, has been nothing short of a gift in renewing that spark week in and week out.

If you have additional questions about the prayground, please send me an email to set up a conversation. I look forward to all the ways that the prayground will continue to support our youngest worshipers!

From the Fellowship Committee

Our Committee strives to provide opportunities for us to share time together and getto know each other in community. Please join us for these events and share your suggestions with any member of the committee to consider in the future.

Gingerbread Houses - November 15
The annual Gingerbread house decorating will take place Sunday November 15 after worship. This is a one-Sunday event, so plan to make your creation uniquely sweet with the plentiful construction materials provided. This is a fun event to kick off the holiday season with a yummy lunch provided. Sign up is in the gathering space now! A special thank you to Kim and Wade Lawrence for leading this event!

Away in a Basement at Cornwell's Turkeyville - November 21
We had limited seats available to us for this event and boy, oh, boy did the sign-up fill fast. Those who signed up have been contacted and we're looking forward to a fun day!

Annual Hors D'oeuvres Party - December 4
Join us for our annual hors d'oeuvres party on Friday December 4. This event will be held at Pete and Michelle Eldridge's beautiful home. Details and sign up will be coming soon!

Christmas Caroling - December 13
Join us for caroling to some local nursing homes/assisted living facilities in the area. Watch for more information as we get closer.

Euchre Night - We will be taking a break, due to the busy season, until early 2027. Dates will be updated soon.

A note about fellowship time sign up: We have decided to go to a paper-only sign up for both fellowship time serving coffee and fellowship treats. This will help us to keep track of who is signing up to help a little easier. Please consider signing up for one or both!

Future Events:

Trivia Night: January 22

Kwings Game: February 5
(Pastor Rachel is singing the anthem!)

Chili Cook-off: February 7

From the Justice and Diversity Team

An ELCA Initiative on Indian Boarding Schools – Have you ever heard the phrase, *Think globally, Act locally*? With this perspective, *locally* could mean Kalamazoo county, Michigan or even the US. In 2002 the national ECLA started to **Act Locally** through the *Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative* which, according to the Synod's email, "is leading a coordinated effort to research Lutheran involvement in Indian boarding and day schools dating back to the 1820's". They began with 15 synods across four states. In 2003 they expanded to 27 synods across 10 states. They are now further expanding to all synods across all states. What does this mean for PoP? For one, it means responding to the national ECLA invitation, to both clergy and lay volunteers, to consider participating in this initiative. As the Synod's email invitation states:

> "All are welcome, including those with skills in research, data collection, organizing, education, and leadership. The goals are to find and gather information in order to share it with impacted Indigenous individuals, families and communities; for our church members to know our history of church-sponsored Indian boarding schools and their devastating impacts on Native communities; all as part of an ongoing truth and healing process... for more information, click this link: https:/www.tstti.org/."

Please prayerfully consider this opportunity and PoPs response. Those interested in accepting this invitation are asked to contact Pastor Rachel. Thank you! ~ submitted by Donna Harmon

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November is Homelessness Awareness Month. This is a good time to think about what needs to be done to support neighbors who are unhoused or at risk of losing housing. The ELCA Social Message "Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment" was adopted in 1990 and an update is being proposed. Dr. Ryan Cummings, Director of Theological Ethics, Office of the Bishop, writes:

> "This social message has guided our church's advocacy and public witness for nearly four decades. But much has changed in those years, in the church and the world. Our understanding of homelessness, including the words we use to describe homelessness, has grown and deepened. Emerging ministries with and among people who are unhoused have challenged our perspectives on housing, homelessness and what it means to be a neighbor."

The draft of the updated social message is now available for public comment from all ELCA members until Nov. 30, 2026. We invite you to read this 5-page draft and complete the survey. You can find original, draft, mark-up, and large-print versions of this draft and more information here: www.ELCA.org/Homelessness ~ Submitted by Laila Poisson

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The next JD Team meeting will be on Monday Nov 23 from 6-7pm. Ask the office for the link.

Social Concerns Update

Project Connect
On October 14 our Prince of Peace team met at Housing Resources, Inc. to distribute a Free Store to a large community of great people. Items that we gave away included personal care products (shampoo, body lotion and soap, feminine products), cleaning supplies (toilet cleaner, toilet paper, spray cleaner, paper towel, laundry detergent), plus baby wipes, diapers.

Last year we gave away a few blankets quickly, so with your help, we gathered 30 blankets for this year and they disapeared very quickly as well. Pop knitters also made a basket full of winter hats which were a huge hit with our guests. Project Connect is an amazing gathering of helpful resources from the community, from immunizations to family pictures, hair cuts, health care information, eye exams, legal help, housing aid, fresh food boxes from South Michigan Food Bank and much more. 400-500 guests were welcomed.

Extra Food Boxes
With the reduction and end of several food programs (such as SNAP), our Food Distributions have been challenged when we run out of the 150 boxes we purchase from South Michigan Food Bank. In response to running out of food boxes we put together supplement boxes with great response from all of you. Thus far we have distributed over 70 supplement boxes! Thank you all. If anyone would like to purchase components of the boxes, not the entire box full, a container will be labeled/available in the gathering space. Any donations are welcomed.

Bible Problems:
A Community Conversation
Topic: "Who Is My Neighbor?"
When: Nov 11 at 3 PM and 7 PM
Where: Prince of Peace Sanctuary

This fall Pr. Rachel and other church leaders from Portage and Kalamazoo have been discussing the ways scripture speaks to some of the cultural conversations happening in our world today. Join us this month for a final session exploring immigration and the scripture.

The **POP Book Club** will meet in the Peace Lounge at 10am on November 18. The book we will discuss is "Lula Dean's Little Library of Banned Books" by Kristen Miller.

The book is a satire about a small town in Georgia, a pitched battle over banned books and a little lending library that changes everything.

This will be our last meeting for 2026. All are welcome! Contact Marilyn Lund if you have questions about the book club.

Birthdays and Anniversaries

11/1
Rachel Laughlin

11/2
David Josuns

11/4
Michael Barnett

11/5
Melissa Copeland
Gloria Beatty
Randy Lund

11/6
Judson Stemaly

11/7
Lee Banitt
Anna DeRango

11/8
Tonya Klemm

11/9
Lorelei Koester

11/10
Claudia Lee

11/11
Inger Thoen
Adelynn-Rose Deyoung
Kelsey Steele

11/12
Joel Pennington
Diane Snyder
Ron Leversee

11/13
Elizabeth VanRenterghem
Julie Wentzel
Jason Davis

1/15
Tom Palarz

1/17
Jane Knuth

11/20
Duran Cooper
Noah Ottesen

11/21
Don Eklov
Nancy Pederson
Leah Deming
TJ Kana'an
Lisa Creed

11/23
Eric Lehman

11/24
Brooke Leversee
Tyler Leversee

11/27
Sherry Myers

11/28
Diane Wilke-Karna

11/29
Karen Josuns
Laila Poisson

11/30
Carolyn Anderson
Ben Seguin

Anniversaries

11/21
Dennis & Betsy Stalker

11/22
Mike & Sherry Myers

11/27
Erin & Ron Leversee

Stewardship Update:
Thank you to everyone who has returned their 2027 pledge cards. If you have not already turned in your pledge, please take a moment to fill out a card today and help our Stewardship committee prepare a budget for next year. Pledge cards may be returned to the office, put in the offering plate, or mailed to the church. Extras are also available at church if needed.

Dear Prince of Peace Lutheran Church,

We enjoyed being with you and having the opportunity to share in Adult Ed. Thank you to all who came to hear us!

After service, a couple said we forgot to share how to give to the sonography school in Litain. Our website is: www.healthservicecorps.org/staff/cheryl-tom-boodt/

We appreciate the partnership with your congregation! We pray God will continue to bless and expand your ministry.

Fellow servants of Christ, Tom & Cheryl Boodt

Prince of Peace Calendar

November 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 All Saints Day Daylight-Saving Time Ends 8:30am Flu Clinic 9:15am Faith Formation for All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	**2** *5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group* 6:00pm SA Troop 287	**3** 7:00am Election - Gathering Space & Gym *9:00am ESL* 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 7:00pm Bells Rehearsal	**4** *10:00am Literacy Tutoring* *10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities* 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Teams 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing *6:00pm Great Lakes Adventure Club - Social Hall/Flex*	**5** *9:00am ESL* **1:00pm Food Distribution** **1:00pm Free Store** ~~*6:30pm South County Fiber Arts*~~ 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	**6** Charge! *10:00am ESL Open Tutoring* 10:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry - Peace Lounge 1:00pm Liturgical Arts	**7** Charge! 11:00am Portage Community Resources Expo @ Crossroads
8 Charge! 9:15am Faith Formation for All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Kzoo Community Foundation 1:00pm BSA Troop 287	**9** **3:00pm Social Concerns Meeting** *5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group* **5:30pm Finance Committee mtg. - Teams** 6:00pm SA Troop 287 7:00pm Personnel/Executive Committee - Teams	**10** *9:00am ESL* 9:15am Staff Meeting 1:00pm Bunko - Gathering Space 7:00pm Bells Rehearsal	**11** **Veterans Day** 8:00am Men's Breakfast @ Mark's Diner *10:00am Literacy Tutoring* *10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities* 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Teams 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing *3:00pm Community Conversations* *7:00pm Community Conversations*	**12** *9:00am ESL* *6:00pm Partners in Profit* 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	**13** *10:00am ESL Open Tutoring*	**14** 8:30am Fall Clean Up
15 9:15am Faith Formation for All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Fellowship Committee Meeting 12:00pm Gingerbread Houses	**16** *3:00pm Alpha Delta Kappa* *5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group* 6:00pm Evangelism Committee *6:00pm Master Gardeners - Sanctuary* 6:00pm SA Troop 287 **7:00pm Worship Committee Meeting - Teams**	**17** *9:00am ESL* 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 11:45am Ladies Lunch Bunch @ 2:00pm Stewardship Committee Meeting 4:00pm Women's Study Group 5:30pm Property Committee - Teams 7:00pm Bells Rehearsal 7:00pm Youth Committee - Teams	**18** 10:00am Book Club *10:00am Literacy Tutoring* *10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities* 11:00am Library Committee - Library 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Teams 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing **7:00pm Church Council meeting - Teams**	**19** Newsletter Deadline *9:00am ESL* **1:00pm Food Distribution** **1:00pm Free Store** *6:00pm Nurse Honor Guard of Kalamazoo* 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	**20** *10:00am ESL Open Tutoring*	**21** 12:00pm Turkeyville Dinner & Show - Marshall, MI
22 9:15am Faith Formation for All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time	**23** 9:30am Ruth Circle 2:00pm Care Team Meeting *5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group* 6:00pm Justice and Diversity Meeting - Zoom 6:00pm SA Troop 287 *6:30pm Nami Support Group*	**24** *Open Doors Men's Shelter Meal* *9:00am ESL* 9:15am Staff Meeting 7:00pm Bells Rehearsal	**25** *10:00am Literacy Tutoring* *10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities* 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Teams 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing	**26** **Office Closed** **Thanksgiving Day**	**27** **Office Closed**	**28**
29 **First Sunday of Advent** 9:15am Faith Formation for All Ages 10:30am Worship 11:45am Fellowship Time 12:00pm Christmas Program Rehearsal	**30** *5:30pm AA "Promises" Support Group* 6:00pm SA Troop 287	**1** *9:00am ESL* 9:15am Staff Meeting 9:30am Quilters - Social Hall 7:00pm Bells Rehearsal	**2** *10:00am Literacy Tutoring* *10:00am WMU Center for Disabilities* 11:00am Pastor's Bible Study - Teams 12:00pm Pray Without Ceasing **6:00pm Advent Dinners** *6:00pm Great Lakes Adventure Club - Social Hall/Flex* **7:00pm Advent Worship**	**3** *9:00am ESL* **1:00pm Food Distribution** **1:00pm Free Store** *6:30pm South County Fiber Arts* 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	**4** *10:00am ESL Open Tutoring* 10:00am Prayer Shawl Ministry - Peace Lounge **7:00pm Holiday hors d'oeuvre Party**	**5**