



# ***North Star***

**Winter 2025**

**January / February / March**

*An e-publication of North Presbyterian Church*

## ***From the Pastor's Desk . . .***

Epiphany marks the end of the Christmas season in the Church's calendar, so it doesn't usually get too much attention. But the stories associated with it are pretty popular. They come from Matthew's Gospel and involve the visit to Bethlehem of the Magi from the east. We don't know much about those people, but legend and tradition have limited them to three and even assigned them names. They're known as "The Three Kings," and their names are Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar. Melchior was from Persia, Caspar from India, and Balthazar from Arabia. It's believed that tradition originated sometime around 500 AD, at least there's a manuscript from that era that names them.

The gospel itself, though, doesn't name the Magi, or even say there were only three. It seems more likely the writer of the gospel had in mind an entourage of priests who were astrologers, possibly Zoroastrian. Zoroastrianism is a religion that still exists in some places but goes back to at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC in what was then Persia, but now Iran. It was still a very strong religion in the time of Jesus and when Matthew's gospel was written, and it would not have been influenced by Roman religion since the Roman Empire didn't extend to Persia. In fact, the Persian Empire was a chief rival of Rome; the two clashed many times over the centuries.

If the point of the story in Matthew's gospel is to illustrate the spread of the good news to the Gentile world, why would the writer choose Persia and not Rome? One reason could be that at the time the gospel was written, Rome may have seemed like a lost cause. Perhaps the writer believed the future of the movement was to another part of the world entirely. Or the writer may have had a broader reach in mind than just Rome. But regardless of the reason for it, the writer clearly wanted to convey the belief that what was happening through the birth of Jesus was not meant only for the Jewish world. God's entrance through Jesus' birth was meant to include all people; it was meant to be a sign of unity and inclusion.

And that's what Epiphany has come to mean today. It tells us that God is not limited to any one nation or ethnic group. God is present for all people and in all people. It's a reminder that any time we try to limit how God is known or acknowledged, we dim the light of God's presence in the world.

In some ways, the story of our faith has been a sort of tug-of-war between more exclusive and more expansive. That's reflected in scripture even within books like Isaiah, Jonah, and Ruth. We can find it reflected in Paul's controversy with James and Peter, the leaders in Jerusalem, that Paul recounts in Galatians. And we certainly see it play out in modern conflicts in the Church. I've come to believe that narrowing God's reach and the Church's acceptance is a denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like Matthew, I believe Christ comes for us all. The church is meant to be one place in the world where acceptance and inclusion are assumed. There may be

some who reject that, but not even they will be rejected.

As we enter a new year fraught with uncertainty and challenge, my hope is we at North will remain the open and accepting and including space we have been throughout our history. We can be a refuge for those in our community who are cast out or rejected or dismissed because of their immigration status or their gender identity or their ethnic heritage. No matter how many voices claim only certain kinds of people should be allowed to live in our wonderful country, at North everyone has a home and everyone belongs. May that be the epiphany to enlighten our minds and spirits and to offer the world with joy.

May the blessings of peace be for us all in the New Year,

Pastor Bill

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# The 12 Days of Christmas

by Reyne Jankowski

We all know the song. I have often wondered (and maybe you have too) about all those crazy gifts. Who would give someone 8 maids a-milking or 10 lords a-leaping? So I did a little digging and thought I would share some fun facts about this age-old song.

Contrary to what some may think, the 12 days of Christmas do not lead up to Christmas. They actually begin on Christmas Day, December 25, and end on Twelfth Night, January 5. The 12 days represent the time that it took for the three wise men or kings to travel to Bethlehem to visit baby Jesus and offer him gifts.

Common folklore attributes specific Christian symbolism to the 12 gifts. Some have even suggested that it was a secret way of preserving Christian tenants since openly practicing Christianity was forbidden in some societies centuries ago.

For example:

- Partridge in a Pear Tree = Jesus Christ
- 2 Turtle Doves = The Old and New Testaments
- 3 French Hens = Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
- 4 Calling Birds = the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
- 5 Golden Rings = The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch", which gives the history of man's fall from grace
- 6 Geese A-laying = the six days of creation
- 7 Swans A-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments
- 8 Maids A-milking = the eight beatitudes
- 9 Ladies Dancing = the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit
- 10 Lords A-leaping = the ten commandments
- 11 Pipers Piping = the eleven faithful apostles
- 12 Drummers Drumming = the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

Alas, my favorite myth buster, [Snopes](#) (you can read more here), says not so fast! They say they could find no documentation or supporting evidence for this claim other than mere repetition of the claim itself. Ok; so much for that!

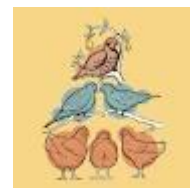
It is fun, however, to speculate on what the cost of giving these 12 days of Christmas gifts would be in today's dollars.

PNC Bank puts out an annual "Christmas Price Index", which calculates the change in price consumers can expect to pay for the items featured in the classic carol. Overall, if you bought the 12 gifts for your true love it would cost \$49,263.47.

If you counted up all of the gifts mentioned for your true love throughout the song, which would be buying all 364 gifts mentioned, the "True Cost of Christmas," for 2024 is \$209,272.

- One Partridge in a Pear Tree: \$370.18 (\$20.18 for the partridge and \$350 for the pear tree)
- Two Turtle Doves: \$750
- Three French Hens: \$346.50
- Four Calling Birds: \$599.96
- Five Gold Rings: \$1,245
- Six Geese-a-Laying: \$900
- Seven Swans-a-Swimming: \$13,125
- Eight Maids-a-Milking: \$58
- Nine Ladies Dancing: \$8,557.37
- 10 Lords-a-Leaping: \$15,579.65
- 11 Pipers Piping: \$3,714.96
- 12 Drummers Drumming: \$4,016.85

My husband will just have to be satisfied with a pair of pajamas this year.



## ***Property Updates***

### ***Nonprofit Security Grant (NPSG) Update***

by Joe Alber

A major part of the security grant was completed the week before Christmas when the new main doors were installed by a four-person crew from The Baut Studios, Inc. located in Swoyersville, PA. Baut Studios is a small family-run business that is nearly 100 years old and specializes almost exclusively in servicing religious organizations. If you want to learn more about the company, the website is [www.baut.com](http://www.baut.com).

The Baut Studios was one of the companies discovered by searching on the Internet for companies that made church doors. The companies that surfaced were then contacted to inquire about their interest and get additional information. Also, a notice called a Request for Proposal was published in the Buffalo and Rochester newspapers. Most of the interested companies visited the church including Peter Baut, the President of Baut Studios, and his brother, Jim. By the end of the selection process there was a pool of companies submitting bids, but Baut's stood out for its thoroughness, the perceived sturdiness of the doors, the company's responsiveness to questions, and very competitive pricing.



The next time you enter the church, please stop and take a careful look at the doors. You may think they are wood, but they are actually anodized aluminum and

safety laminated glass. They have an anodized bronze surface that extends their life and the doors fit well.

The old doors are believed to be original to the church and lasted a long time, but they were in bad shape. Standing back and looking at them from the inside revealed significant gaps on the bottoms and sides. On a windy day the breeze in the foyer indicated how badly they had deteriorated. More importantly, anyone could get into the building by punching out the glass wearing gloves or shattering the wood around the locks with a heavy hammer. Their vulnerability was illustrated last year when a preschooler had an emotional meltdown and kicked out one of the glass panes without injuring herself.

The final design was a team effort with major contributions by Livy Ebsary, Carly Rugg, Reyne Jankowski, and Peter Baut. The crosses on the doors match those on the exterior front wall and above the chancel. The color blends with the frames on the building's windows, and the shape and appearance were crafted to fit the overall architectural style of the building.

Completion of the security system is close behind the doors. It consists of door access controls with intercoms, alarms on the two emergency doors, three panic alarms in separate areas of the church that are manually activated, and nine cameras: four outside over the doors and five inside covering the hallways. The only work remaining is installation of several cameras and that should be completed within the next few days. The vendor is Everon (formerly ADT). The new handicap entrance was installed by Suburban Lock and Key.

Reyne has sent a message about gaining entrance to the building, but in case you missed it, if you currently have a four-digit access code the new system requires you to add a zero (0) at the end and to push the # symbol on the pin pads located at the two main entrances. Eventually, you will be able to download an app for your cell phone. Please note that your code will still not activate the access controls at the end of the two wings, because that is set up for LE3.

There are three final pieces that must be completed in the grant. Ground level windows will have a

transparent impact-resistant film applied. This will work similarly to what is on the windshield of your car. It can be broken but won't shatter, so it will considerably slow down an intruder. The doors at each of the wings and the adjoining glass side panels will be replaced with special laminated impact-resistant glass. Finally, attractive obstacles will be strategically located at the four entrances to impede anyone using a vehicle to crash through the doors. All of this work is somewhat weather dependent, so the committee will do the final planning in the winter with the expectation the grant work will be completed in late spring.

A final step in the implementation of the grant is the creation of a "formal" safety committee. It is hoped when the call goes out seeking members there will be individuals who will step forward to serve. The ability of the grant to achieve its intended purpose depends on establishing the necessary support by the congregation.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask any of the committee members: Joe Alber, Randy Bigler, Livy Ebsary, Reyne Jankowski, and Pastor Hennessy.

### ***New Glass Block Window***

You may have also noticed that the window between the south main entrance door and the Chapel was replaced by a new glass block window. It significantly adds to the security and beautification of the main entrance to the church building. The new window was generously donated by Louise Cooper.



## ***The Manse of North Presbyterian Church, 1975 -2024***

by Jim Atwood

The property at 330 N. Forest Rd., Amherst, NY 14221, the Manse, is a three bedroom, 1.5 bathroom, 1610 square foot house built in 1940 on a 0.26 acre lot purchased by North Presbyterian Church on October 31, 1975 with a \$11,924.17 mortgage. Until 2007, this property served as the housing for our pastors and then for a couple of Presbytery ministers. Beginning on February 3, 2014, the Manse was leased to the Family Justice Center for \$1 per year with a lease for five years with an automatic renewal for five additional years.

Initially there was considerable activity by the Family Justice Center with the Manse staffed several days each week and a couple of North members volunteering. But with the COVID pandemic, the Family Justice Center moved to electronic meetings. These meetings were satisfactory and activity in the Manse declined, and in 2023 the property was only open on Thursday mornings.

An estimate of the annual contributions to the Family Justice Center is provided in the Table below.

House value of \$250,000 <sup>a</sup> represents	
an annual annuity of	\$17,500
Insurance premium <sup>b</sup>	400
Manse Sewer/Water <sup>c</sup>	327
Manse Maintenance <sup>c</sup>	250
Snow Plowing <sup>d</sup>	265
Lawn Care <sup>d</sup>	345
Use of North's personnel <sup>e</sup>	<u>600</u>
Total	\$19,687

<sup>a</sup> *The value from the sale; the annuity is based on 7% return.*

<sup>b</sup> *The value provided by Brotherhood Mutual Insurance.*

<sup>c</sup> *From the North Annual budget.*

<sup>d</sup> *Values approximated by using the insurance percentage to our annual budget for these items.*

<sup>e</sup> *Mike Callaghan did various routine maintenance items (fixing sinks, toilets, windows, doors, snow blowing, etc.); estimated 25 to 30 hours per year.*



In addition, the renovations done to the Manse before the FJC moved in reduced the value of the manse by \$50,000 (value provided by our realtor), primarily from relocation of the stairway taking 35 cubic feet from the master bedroom and reconfiguring of the kitchen such that it cannot hold both a stove and a refrigerator. Thus, North Presbyterian Church contributed \$250,000 to the Family Justice Center in the ten years of the lease. During those ten years North Presbyterian Church had an \$87,000 deficit in its operating budget which cut significantly into the Church's reserves.

In February 2024, Session voted to sell the Manse. The Family Justice Center was given until April 30 to complete their operations in the Manse and until July 29, 2024 to return the Manse to its condition before they occupied the building. The Manse Committee (Bill Hennessy, Joe Alber, Duncan Hemink and Jim Atwood) then provided the Family Justice Center with a list of items that needed to be accomplished that was approved by Session. The list of items was not sufficient to return the Manse to a single-family home, but was hoped to be enough for us to be able to sell it "as is". The Manse Committee contacted Don and Andrea Griebner, members of North, who are involved in real estate, for their advice. They recommended to list it at \$259,000 as is. On June 19, Jim Atwood took the signed real estate contract to Andrea. The process of selling the Manse had some complications, as the Presbytery and the New York Attorney General or the New York State Supreme Court had to approve the sale. The Manse Committee enlisted Jim Smyton of Philips Lytle LLC (recommended by the Presbytery) to represent North in sale of the Manse.

The process of selling the Manse moved quickly after the Family Justice Center cleared. On June 19 we signed with Andrea Griebner of Howard Hunt Realty and followed her suggestions thereafter. The Family Justice Center completed clearing out on July 10 and we finished cleaning on July 16. On July 15 Andrea, based on some advice she had received, suggested lowering the price to \$239,000 which we did. The formal house showings began on July 22 and by July 26, 11 groups had toured and we had three offers – we accepted one on July 26, 2024 for \$250,000. Jim

Smyton had received Presbytery approval in July and approval was granted by the NY Supreme Court on September 19. Jim Smyton closed on the sale on September 25, 2024.

### **Financial Aspects of the Manse Sale of September 25, 2024**

#### **Credits**

From Closing of Sale	\$226,529 <sup>a</sup>
From Family Justice Center	\$7,980 <sup>b</sup>
TofA approval of sewer	\$6,500 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>\$241,009</b>

#### **Deductions**

Required Roof Repair	\$500
Manse Cleaning	150
Garage Electricity Disconnect	145
Title Search	660
Required Electrical Repair	121.32
Lawyer Fee	3,010.36
Final Water Bill	94.75
<b>Total Deductions</b>	<b>\$4,681.43</b>

**Net From Manse Sale** **\$236,327.57**

- a) See closing statement in the Church Office.
- b) Provided by the Family Justice Center in lieu of doing any repairs.
- c) \$6,500 was held by our lawyer until approval by the Town of Amherst of our sewer connection.

The \$236,327.57 was initially distributed with \$146,000 being used to cover the cost of the Security Project until being reimbursed by the Federal/State governments. The remaining \$90,327.57 is currently in the short-term Putnam account drawing 4.4% interest.

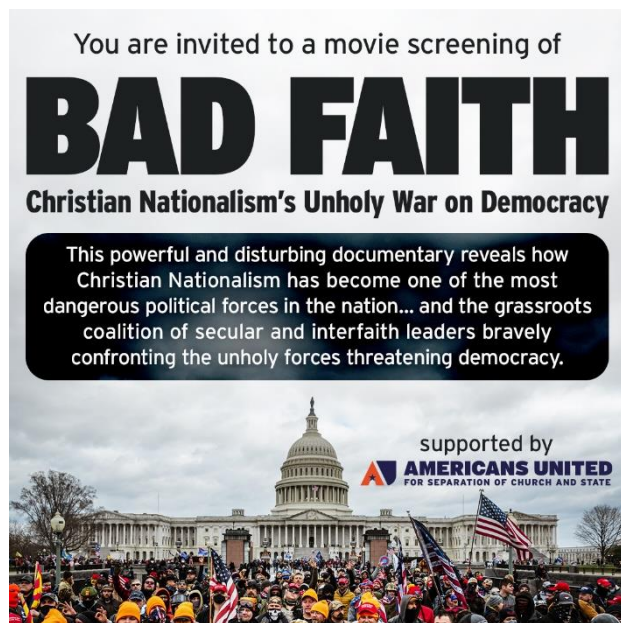


## ***Lunch and A Movie***

The Adult Ed Committee invites you to join us on **January 12, 2025**, for lunch and a movie. A simple soup lunch begins at noon and will be followed by a screening of ***Bad Faith***, a documentary made available through partnership with Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The movie will start at approximately 1 pm and runs about 90 minutes. We will have time after the documentary for a discussion.

A sign-up sheet has been placed in the Narthex or you can call the church office 716 632-1330 to sign up for lunch.



Click on this link for information about *Bad Faith*: <https://www.badfaithdocumentary.com/>.

## ***Advocacy and Outreach***

When Sharon Dittmar passed in 2023, she bequeathed a generous gift to North Church. The

Advocacy and Outreach Committee decided to honor Sharon by establishing a scholarship in her name to be awarded to a nursing student at the University of Buffalo where Sharon was a professor and alumnus.

The recipient of the Sharon Dittmar Memorial scholarship is Danielle Hurtado, a nursing student in the UB Accelerated BSN Program, which is a 1-year intense program that is designed for students who have graduated with another degree (in Danielle's case, biology) and then decide to get a nursing degree.

Danielle is from the Buffalo area and plans on staying here after graduation this May. Danielle met our criteria of a student who has been very involved in volunteer activities to serve her community. She volunteered at local hospitals during Covid and went to Denver to work with homeless men housed in the stadium. She is also involved in many nursing organizations whose focus is service.

The Advocacy and Outreach Committee, who facilitated the award of the scholarship, as well as Pastor Bill and Mitch Roemer met with Amanda Rebeck, Director of Advancement, School of Nursing, who was the coordinator of the selection process, and Annette Wysocki, Dean of the School of Nursing on Tuesday December 3 at a luncheon at UB to meet and talk to Danielle. The committee was very pleased with the recipient and felt Danielle will be successful in her nursing career and continue to engage in volunteer activities to serve the community, especially the underprivileged.



Pictured left to right: Mitch Roemer, Pastor Bill, Danielle Hurtado, Faye Wohlhueter, Lois Anneler, Jim Loree, Marcia Hunt, Lynda Roemer, Kerri Bigler



### ***Keep Fit!***

Keep fit with the many fitness opportunities that are happening here at North:

#### **LifeFitness with Olivia**

Classes are specifically designed to support older adults in maintaining strength, flexibility, balance and overall well-being.

Chair Yoga Mon/Wed 10 am

Pilates Tues 10:45 am

Circuit Mon 9 am

*Classes free, no registration!*

**Chair Yoga** offers a seated (to standing if accessible) low impact way to improve flexibility, joint mobility and strength through yoga postures, both seated and standing using a chair for balance. Class will end with seated meditation. Bring water and a positive mindset!

**Pilates** Using classic Pilates exercises and breathing, class will focus on gentle core strengthening and posture improvement, enhancing overall strength and stability. Bring a yoga mat and water.

**Circuit** class combines strength and cardiovascular exercises, encouraging muscle tone, endurance and heart health moving through the Activities of Daily Living (ADL). Members should wear adequate footwear for movement and be able to stand for the class. If you have your own equipment, bring some light weights, exercise band, a small 6" ball. Some equipment is available. Bring water.

#### **Sheila's Aerobic Jazz**

Mon/Wed 6:00 in Westminster Hall

Contact Patrice Rosenberry 716-912-0842

#### **Bodyshaping Fitness**

Strong & Fit Wed 6 pm (Chapel)

Hello Fitness Tues & Thurs 6 pm (Chapel)

Taichi Thurs 9 am (Chapel)

Contact Sandy Manella 716-868-0246

#### **Love is Real**

Latin partner dance classes for beginners

Couples and Singles Welcome

Details or questions at [www.SalsaSarah.com](http://www.SalsaSarah.com)

### ***This 'n That***

#### ***Spreading Christmas Cheer!***

Sunday school students and youth group members collaborated on spreading Christmas cheer to others! They decorated gift bags which the Deacons filled with goodies and delivered to homebound members.






## ***Looking Ahead***

### ***Mark Your Calendars***

January 12 – Lunch and A Movie: *Bad Faith*  
January 20 – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday  
January 26 – Annual Congregational Meeting  
March 5 – Ash Wednesday  
March 9 – First Sunday of Lent  
April 13 – Palm Sunday  
April 17 – Maundy Thursday  
April 18 – Good Friday  
April 20 – Easter Sunday



## ***Final Thoughts***

### ***Your North Church Family Wants to Know About YOU!***

We would love for North Church Members to share about the activities of their children and grandchildren. It is important to us to know more about our Youth and what makes them *More Than Enough!* (Montreat 2022 theme).

Please share concert and athletic schedules, pictures and achievements, a short story about a youth you know who is related to North Church. *Together We are North!*

## ***Share Your Ideas***

Do you have an interesting story or idea you would like to share in an upcoming issue of the NorthStar? All submissions are welcome! Just email your stories and ideas to [n.church.npc@gmail.com](mailto:n.church.npc@gmail.com) and we'll do our best to include them in an upcoming edition.

*The NorthStar is published in January, April, July, and October. The deadline for submissions is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month before publication.*

### **Contact Information**

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**Office Hours:** M-Th: 8:00 am-3:00 pm

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