



North Star

Winter 2026

January / February / March

An e-publication of North Presbyterian Church

From the Pastor's Desk . . .

Lent begins early this year. Ash Wednesday is February 18th, about as early as it can be. That means the boost many of us may have been feeling through the Christmas season will be short-lived. Then again, with Lent comes the return of daylight. So, even though we often think of the season leading up to Easter as melancholy or dark, in fact we are making our way toward the light.

During these weeks of Lent, we're encouraged to take time to look within ourselves and take stock of the condition of our spirits. The traditional way we've been taught to do this is through self-denial. We "give up something" for Lent. Often, though, what we give up is a habit or a food (like chocolate) that isn't all that good for us to begin with. It becomes more about self-improvement than spiritual growth.

The point of denial, though, whether it's something we enjoy or something we should stop anyway, is to put us in a position of dependence. The forty days of Lent are modeled on Christ's forty days in the wilderness when he denied himself food and was at the mercy of the wild beasts and cared for by the angels. It was during this period of fasting that Jesus was tempted by Satan to shape his ministry in ways that would give him power over others. Yet even in his weakened condition Jesus resists Satan and commits himself to the will of God alone.

Although we are not like Jesus, as Paul says, "it is Christ who lives in us." Lent is a time to put aside distractions so we can discover Christ within. And in discovering the Christ who lives in us, we are given strength to resist the temptations all around us. Those come in many forms, usually calling us to focus on our own needs ahead of 'others', doing all we can to ensure we are secure and safe, even as we're surrounded by people who are vulnerable.

Lent is also a time to make ourselves vulnerable. As one spiritual writer puts it: "Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give the angels a chance to feed us." (Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, from *God for Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Lent and Easter*, Introduction) Figuring out a fast that can help us enter the desert is one of the challenges of Lent we each must answer on our own.



But the fast of Lent is essential if we're to appreciate fully the feast of Easter. So, I encourage you to use these days fasting in meaningful ways, allowing yourself to be vulnerable and live for a time with your fears. Let God's Spirit care for you and prepare you to celebrate resurrection, the joyful feast that awaits us on the other side of darkness. May you enjoy a holy Lent, a sacred time of introspection and denial to help make you more mindful of the needs of others and more aware of Christ, alive in you.

Peace,

Pastor Bill

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New Year's Resolutions

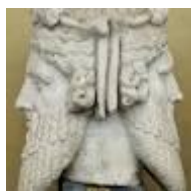
by Reyne Jankowski

Yes, it's that time of year again when we all vow to make a new beginning, improve our lives, start doing something, stop doing something, etc., etc. etc. It's time for those New Year's resolutions that we never seem to get right, or at least I don't.

I thought it might be fun to look at the history of New Year's resolutions and here is what I found.

It turns out that New Year's resolutions have been around for thousands of years. According to History.com, the Babylonians were believed to be the first people to make New Year's resolutions about 4,000 years ago. Their new year began in mid-March when crops were planted. They would hold a 12-day religious festival known as Akitu. They crowned a new king or reaffirmed loyalty to the present king and made promises to the gods to pay their debts and returned borrowed property. If they kept their promises, the gods would bestow favor upon them for the coming year. If they didn't, they would fall out of favor with the gods, and we all know what that means!

In 46 B.C. in ancient Rome, Julius Ceasar decided to mess with the calendar and made January 1 the



beginning of the new year. January was named for Janus, the two-faced god that Romans believed looked backward into the previous year and ahead into the future. The Romans offered

sacrifices and made promises of good conduct for the coming year.

For early Christians, the first day of the new year became a tradition to reflect on past mistakes and resolve to do better in the future. Around 1740 John Wesley, along with his Methodist movement, adopted a Monrovia tradition of "watch night" services. New Year's eve services would end after midnight with penitence over shortcomings in the past year and resolution of greater faithfulness in the year ahead.

Watch night took on a significant meaning for the African American community when on Freedom's Eve, December 31, 1862, African American slaves gathered in churches and homes to pray and wait for President Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation that would legally end slavery in the confederate states.

Even though the practice has deeply religious roots, the tradition of New Year's resolutions in modern times sees most people making resolutions only to themselves focused on self-improvement.

According to driverresearch.com, 3 in 10 Americans made a resolution in 2024. The most common resolutions (79%) were improving health, such as improving fitness levels (48%), mental health (36%), and diet (32%). Less common resolutions were to travel more (6%), incorporating regular meditation (5%), drinking less alcohol (3%), and better work performance (3%).

Also according to driverresearch.com, 92% of Americans will not follow through on a resolution. It seems the excitement begins to fade rather quickly: 23% quit by the end of the first week of January and 43% by the end of January!

Sticking to our resolutions takes dedication and motivation, but sometimes, life just gets in the way. Whatever your reasons for not initially following through, you can always start over or set new goals later in the year. The key is to narrow down your goals, make a plan for achieving those goals, and give yourself plenty of time throughout the year.



Property Updates

Nonprofit Security Grant (NPSG) Final Report

by Joe Alber



The physical aspects of the grant have been completed. As reported in the last edition of the *North Star*, all the doors have been replaced, security film applied to all ground level glass, and the electrical components

consisting primarily of cameras, door access controls, intercoms, and alarms have been installed and tested.

The final step occurred just before Thanksgiving when the bollards, concrete benches, and planters were positioned in front of the doors. The concrete bollard on the South side was slightly damaged during shipping. A replacement has been ordered and will be intalled in the spring.

Our final reimbursement request for \$34,187.26 was received in December. The grant was for \$150,000 and \$145,504.41 of that was spent. No additional expenses are anticipated, so the government is keeping the difference. It is possible there may be some final reporting requirements beyond what has already been submitted, but essentially the grant is complete.

However, there is still other work to do. The state-of-the-art security package that has been installed will only provide the intended safety if policies and practices are put in place. A Security Plan and the charge to create a Safety Committee are being drafted for discussion at the January Session meeting.

Also, this is an excellent opportunity to make additional enhancements to the appearance of the building. All the new doors are more attractive than the older, well-worn doors they replaced, especially the doors at the main entrances. Certainly, removing the overgrown and in some cases dying shrubbery

and installing the concrete benches and planters is a positive change.

It is the hope of the committee overseeing the grant that the church will find money in the spring for further improvement to the landscape on each side of the walkway to the main doors on the South side. Also, as previously reported, it will be a wonderful enhancement to the appearance of the campus if new plantings can be put around the sign along North Forest Road. It is a focal point for people driving past the building and helps shape their impression of the church.

The committee would like to extend its thanks to everyone for their support, interest, input, and patience as we worked through this project.

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

P.S. As mentioned above a "formal" safety committee is going to be formed. It is hoped when the call goes out seeking members, there will be individuals willing to step forward to serve. The ability of the grant to achieve its intended purpose depends on the active participation of the congregation.

Faith Formation

Sunday School

This year we will be learning Bible stories and parables, doing acting, singing, and crafts. We will plan a service project each month along with an Intergenerational event this spring. Please stay tuned for dates and activities to come!



Sunday school schedule for January - June 2026:

- 1/11/26, 1/25/26, 2/08/26, 2/22/26
- 3/8/26, 3/22/26, 4/19/26, 4/26/26
- 5/10/26, 5/31/26, 6/14/26

Advocacy and Outreach

North Presbyterian Church Funds New Boot Program for Goodskills Career Builder Graduates



The Advocacy and Outreach Committee recently partnered with Goodwill of Western New York with a \$1,200 donation to launch a Boot Fund that will equip graduates of Goodskills Career Builder with brand-new, industry-appropriate work boots as they begin jobs in manufacturing and trade-related fields.

Goodskills Career Builder is a four-week job training program started in 2021 that prepares Western New Yorkers for in-demand roles and connects them to career pathways across the region. Since its founding, more than 800 individuals have graduated and entered the workforce.

“Starting strong matters. The Boot Fund removes a practical barrier on day one, safe, compliant footwear so our graduates can step confidently into high-demand roles,” said Randi Murphy, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives and Workforce Development.

The Boot Fund will prioritize graduates entering positions that require steel or composite toe footwear in manufacturing and trades related careers, ensuring compliance with employer and OSHA standards while avoiding out-of-pocket costs for graduates who may be transitioning from unemployment or underemployment. The program complements Goodskills’ classroom instruction, hands-on training, interview coaching, resume building, and three-year access to a Goodskills Job Coach.

“The North Presbyterian Church Advocacy and Outreach Committee is committed to lifting up our neighbors and creating opportunities for meaningful

work,” said Harvey Blakely, member of the Advocacy and Outreach Committee. “By supporting the Boot Fund, we’re helping Goodskills graduates take their first steps into new careers with confidence and safety. It’s a simple gift that can make a lasting impact.”



Keith Gillogly & Harvey Blakely presenting a check to Randi Murphy, VP Strategic Initiatives and Workforce Development

Mission in Action

2025 Turkey Basket Project

We had a record-breaking number of Thanksgiving meals to distribute this year. A total of ***541 complete Thanksgiving meals*** in hand-made reusable, sturdy tote bags along with a frozen turkey were delivered to



the following agencies: Citizens Community Development Corporation; City of Buffalo Senior Services; Vineland Ministries/Schiller Park Senior Center; CAO/Headstart; Women’s Respite Program; Hispanics United; Catholic Charities; Westside Community Services; Oishei Healthy Kids; North Presbyterian Church (3 requests from non-affiliated individuals); and Buffalo City Mission.

We also distributed an additional 18 separate frozen turkeys, hundreds of pounds of potatoes, and over 1,600 food and personal care items to three food pantries: Tiger’s Den at St. Paul’s Lutheran Eggertsville; Amherst Little Free Food Pantry at Unitarian Universalist Church in Williamsville; and

University Presbyterian Church Food Pantry in Buffalo.

Congratulations and job well done to our Project Coordinators, Tim and Debbie Hutton!



Know Your Numbers

by Olivia Ebsary

As we head into the new year, we usually talk about resolutions—but this year I’m suggesting you also “know your numbers”. Not just your goals, but your blood pressure, blood sugar (A1C) and cholesterol... the stuff your body actually cares about. And while you’re at it, check on your brain power too—can you recite your Social Security number? I bet you know your phone number when you were a kid! A healthy year starts with awareness, a little humor, and knowing where you stand. You’re worth it!



Keep Fit!

LifeFitness with Olivia

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

Circuit Mon 9 am

Pilates Tues 10:45 am

Chair Yoga Mon/Wed 10 am

Zumba Thurs 9 am

Classes are free, no registration!

***as schedule can vary, please email
oliviaebsary@gmail.com for up-to-date details***

This ‘n That



A group of folks gathered for a membership social in November to attend “She Loves Me”, a musical by Joe Masteroff at the Ellicott Creek Playhouse.

She Loves Me is a 1963 musical based on a book by Joe Masteroff, music by Jerry Bock, and lyrics by Sheldon Harnick. The story follows two feuding clerks in a 1930s Budapest parfumerie who are unknowingly falling in love with each other through anonymous romantic letters. The musical is the third adaptation of the 1937 play *Parfumerie* by Miklós László. Adapted to film in 1998 “You’ve Got Mail”.

A pre-play dinner was hosted by Jim & Mary Atwood at their home. A great time was had by all who attended!





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.



Advent Potluck

An Advent potluck dinner was held on Sunday, December 7 followed by a Christmas carol sing-along led by Kurt Ebsary. It was a joyous kickoff to the Advent and Christmas season!



The Inn-Spectors

The annual Children's & Youth pageant, *The Inn-Spectors*, was presented on Sunday, December 21. The cast did a wonderful job under the direction of Alanna Carlins, music accompaniment by Mary Atwood.



Looking Ahead

Mark Your Calendars

January 19 – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday
(Office Closed)
January 25 – Annual Congregational Meeting
February 16 – President's Day (Office Closed)
February 18 – Ash Wednesday
February 22 – First Sunday of Lent
March 29 – Palm Sunday
April 2 – Maundy Thursday
April 3 – Good Friday
April 5 – Easter Sunday



Leah Cox, Great Granddaughter of Marge and Harvey Blakely, an 8th grader at Williamsville East, made the Junior High Basketball team. Quite an accomplishment!

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 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 15th of the month before publication.



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