



HICKORY UNITED EPC | JANUARY 2026

# THE HICKORY MESSENGER



## Pastor's Pen

BY PASTOR CLAYTON LAPOSTA

In John 4 we find the very famous story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman (someone that would typically be avoided by someone with Jesus' earthly background) at a well. At that well, Jesus is thirsty from his journey and his ministry and he asks the woman to give him a drink. Now the woman knows that someone like Jesus and a Samaritan woman rarely ever mix so she's blown away by his request. YOU a Jew asking ME a Samaritan woman for a drink? That's crazy talk! The rest of the conversation though reveals that what Jesus has in mind is much more than water. He says to her "if you drink this water, guess what? You just get thirsty again. You'll be right back to this well someday, and probably someday soon." And this is where Jesus shares the true purpose of this whole conversation. "Whoever drinks of the water I give them will never be thirsty again." The woman's barriers are removed and her response is simple, "give me this water."

Undoubtedly for some of you the start of a New Year means implementing new practices. Maybe this is the year you decide to eat healthy and hit the gym. Maybe you'll work hard and save up for some big purchase or prepare for retirement. For you young people maybe this is the year that you finally make the Honor Roll or crack the starting lineup for some sport you're involved in. Here's the reality, while all of those endeavors are good, I could use some time in the gym myself, very few of us will actually stick with those goals. And even if you do, even if you keep those resolutions perfectly they'll never truly satisfy you. Maybe you fit in a pair of pants that you couldn't before, but then you want to get to the next size down. Maybe you save up for a trip but eventually you come home. Maybe you finally make the Honor Roll just to realize there is a High Honor Roll and an even better athlete now that you've spent the whole year practicing. Jesus' words ring true, "you will be thirsty again."

There is only one thing in the world that you can have and never want for something greater. It's to know Jesus. In him you will never thirst again. So while I fully support your goals this year, whatever they may be, and I'll be cheering you on as you go, make it a point in 2026 to have the only thing that satisfies. Make it your goal to know Jesus greater this year. Commit yourself to God's Word unlike ever before. See his majesty and his love for you unlike ever before. You might need to go out and buy a new wardrobe, but you'll never thirst again.

## THE VISION

Leading one another into growing relationships with Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit all for the glory of God.

## THE MISSION

Reaching upward to God,  
Growing inward with God, Serving outward for God.

## WORSHIP:

Sundays | 10:00 am

## SUNDAY SCHOOL:

Sundays | 8:45 am

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## THIS ISSUE:

Pastor's Pen | cover

Misc. News | 2-4

Advent Recap | 5

Kids & Youth | 6

Calendar | 7

# MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

## Deacon's CORNER



### Fort Cherry Helping Hands

Donations of canned goods, vegetables and boxed cereal and pasta are requested for collection on Sundays when Communion is served. These items will be distributed through the Fort Cherry Helping Hands program to families in our area who require additional assistance. Thank you for giving generously to help these families. Please place items on the metal rack located in the main entrance foyer.

### Spring Blood Drive

Save the date for our annual Spring Blood Drive on Saturday, March 28, 2026.

### Angel Tree

Thanks to everyone who participated in Angel Tree this year! God bless you!

## NOTES OF Thanks

*One of the real joys of the holiday Season is the opportunity to say Thank You and to wish you the very best for the New Year.*

~RBV WEALTH MANAGEMENT

*Thank you for supporting Urban Impact! We are honored to partner with you as we work to advance God's Kingdom on the North side of Pittsburgh. Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of our children and their families on the North side.*

~PASTOR ED GLOVER, PRESIDENT, URBAN IMPACT

*Your heartfelt gift of \$1,200.00 on December 5, 2025 will welcome vulnerable men, veterans, women and children into City Mission with a plate of food and the message that they're not alone for the holidays. But more than just a warm meal and a safe bed, you're giving them a real chance to see their Savior's face and change their lives forever! Your compassion is making it possible for hurting people to know the great joy of a Savior! You are bringing light into the darkness of homeless lives this Christmas! Thank you!*

~DIANA VAUGHN, PRESIDENT/CEO, CITY MISSION

*Greetings in the mighty name of Jesus, our Lord. We thank you for the privilege you give us to write this thank you note. We would not if it was not for your generosity. Thanks for check #22539 in the amount of \$1,800.00, dated 11-18-2025. Thanks for your prayers that keep the ministry going. School is going well. Children are in school and are fed. God Bless!*

~ERMITHE & PIERRE



### Nursery Relocation Update

Nursery Care on Sunday mornings has been relocated upstairs to the former Small Group room, next to the Communications office and across from the Choir Room.

The Nursery is still seeking Volunteers to sign-up for Sunday Service hour dates. Sign-up is located outside the Main Office. All volunteers must have current PA clearances on file. Contact the Main Office if you need assistance or have questions.



The Main Office will be closed on January 1 in observance of New Years Day. Happy New Year!

# MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

## Operation Christmas Child Update

BY SUE ALRUTZ

Our bus loaded with 40 volunteers left Washington on December 5 and traveled to the Samaritan's Purse Mid-Atlantic Ministry Center in Baltimore. Our group of 40 alone with some other individuals were split into teams of 12. We were welcomed along with 100's of other volunteers from various states along the Eastern side of the country. They shared that as of noon that day, they had already processed 14,000 shoeboxes. A pastor prayed over those boxes with everyone and we were led to our work station. Each one of us had a specific job to do. After the boxes were inspected by 5 individuals in our group, they were passed along to the 2 people who would then tape the boxes shut. I had the task of scanning every boy shoebox in the 3 age categories along with the carton they would be placed into. Ken's job was to pack approximately 20 gift boxes into each carton, one for each boy age category. There were 2 others who did the same for the girl shoeboxes in the 3 age categories. From there they would go on the conveyor belt and then were loaded onto pallets several cartons high and then moved to the far end of the building. From there, fork lifts would move several pallets into the truck bays, loading them in tractor trailers for continued travels to ocean liners and international airports.

We were told that all of the shoeboxes that day would be heading to Africa, specifically to Tanzania, Ghana, Botswana, Libya, and South Africa. By the end of our shift at 5 PM, we had gone from 14,000 to 38,000 shoeboxes. Our leader Melissa was such an inspiration to us and each time we had a full carton of shoeboxes, she would shout out "Good News" & our job was to shout even louder as a team, "Great Joy".

(continued on next page)



## HICKORY CHRISTIAN Preschool

### Prince of Peace Christmas Program

BY ASHLEY LEWIS

On Friday December 19 the Preschool held a joint Christmas program for the 3 and 4 year old preschool classes in the Sanctuary titled "Prince of Peace."

Each student in the four year old class had a speaking line that wove together to share the story of Jesus' birth. The three year old class was cast as Mary, Joseph, Wise Men, Shepherds, a variety of adorable stable animals (sheep, camels, cows, horses) and even the Star of Bethlehem got a special featured appearance!

As the Nativity story was told, Preschoolers also showcased several songs including "Silent Night," where the congregation joined in by candlelight. Praise the Lord for such a powerful outreach moment! Special thanks to all staff, teachers and parent volunteers involved in making this year's Christmas program even more impactful!

Wishing all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. God bless you and we will see you all back in 2026!

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### No School Days:

January 1-2 | Winter Break

January 19 | MLK Jr. Day



# MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

(Operation Christmas Child continued)

We prayed as a team of 12 and as a body of 100's of volunteers that day! It was quite a wonderful and touching experience, feeling the presence of the Lord in this place. It was something Ken & I have always wanted to do. We hope to go on the trip again next year. If you're interested in joining us, let us know.

Our church packed a total of 150 shoeboxes which meant 150 children will be impacted by your generosity. Thank you so much to everyone who packed a shoebox, for those that helped load them on the November collection day and for the many prayers for this special mission, the children who would receive our shoebox gifts as well as for the many volunteers and for safe passage to over 120 countries worldwide, literally to the ends of the Earth! Special thanks to Lynn VanNasdale for all her help promoting the project and to Connie & Rick Weaver who are always a huge help to Ken & me. God Bless you all!

~Sue & Ken Alrutz



## Removal of the Greens

Jan. 10 | 9 am | Sanctuary

RSVP to Marilyn Grove: 724-356-2570



## Food & Fellowship

Jan. 11 | 11:15 am | Covenant Center

Bring a main, side or dessert as we gather in the new year!

## Membership & Baptism News

Congratulations to New Member Allison Marie Evans (below) and to Luca Andrew Nemec, parents Amanda & Alexander Nemec (top right) and Dawson Marcus Evans, parents Allison and Tyler Evans (bottom right) on their baptisms during service on Sunday, December 21, 2025. Praise the Lord!



# ADVENT RECAP



## Living Nativity 2025

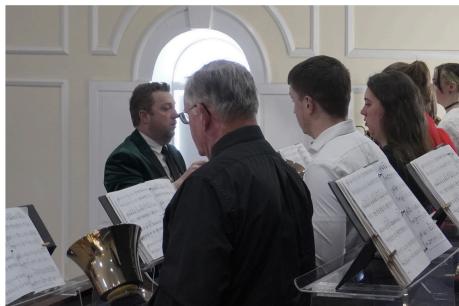
The 9th Annual Living Nativity attracted nearly 475 visitors this year! Our deepest gratitude goes out to the cast, crew and additional volunteer support that pulled together, making the Living Nativity a reality yet again. Glory to God!

Your creativity, resourcefulness, collaboration and passion are what drives this event year after year. Without you, it would not be possible. The photos below are just a small slice of the village it takes to coordinate Living Nativity every year. God bless each and everyone of you who had a hand in this momentous event. Special thanks to the Mt. Pleasant Police Dept, Jeff Lipinski, Fox's Pizza and our Christ Child family, the Nemecs!



## Christmas Choral Cantata 2025

The Choral Christmas Cantata "Hope Has Dawned, Noel" was postponed to December 21 due to inclement weather, but was well worth the wait! What a blessing this musical offering is to our congregation every Christmas season, keeping us anchored in the reason for the season. God sent His only son into the world through the miracle of a virgin birth to be the Savior of man, the Messiah. The Lord gave us hope indeed through Jesus Christ! Special thanks to the Chancel Choir for all their dedication and diligent preparation in bringing glory to the Lord through the gift of music, to Tim VanNasdale for his vision and direction, to Pastor Clayton for his engaging and passionate narration, and to our very talented and cherished guest accompanists, Mary Beth Schotting on violin and Rachel McGuire on viola.



## Christmas Eve at Hickory United

This year Hickory United expanded its Christmas Eve offerings to include an additional service. Candlelight services were held at 6 & 8 pm with Communion offered at both services.

Services were more traditional in musical offerings, featuring carols and hymns, including the annual staples "Silent Night" in candlelight and "Joy to the World."

Pastor Clayton finished his "Stargazing" four part Advent sermon series and will begin a new series on Genesis until Lent.



# KIDS & YOUTH

**SUNDAY SCHOOL WILL  
MEET DECEMBER 28!**

## HICKORY UNITED *Kids*

The Bible holds stories about people who disobeyed God, and it also tells us stories about people who faithfully obeyed God. In January, our Pre-K-5th graders will explore stories from Ezekiel and Daniel that fall into the latter category: stories about faithful people to whom we can look as they exemplify obedience to God.

## HARVEST STUDENT MINISTRY

In December, we saw Jesus make his final entry into Jerusalem, where he will be arrested and crucified. For most of this past semester, we have seen Jesus laying low, avoiding public teachings and confrontations as tensions have risen between himself, the Pharisees, and the government. In January, we will see these tensions come to the surface. Join us to discover how Jesus makes clear his identity as the Messiah as he navigates this tension.

### *Upward Scheduling:*

- 1/1 | Winter Break - No Practices!
- 1/10/26 | Games Begin

## UPCOMING EVENTS SUNDAY SCHOOL 8:45 AM



**Harvest Open Gym**  
Jan. 8 | 6th-12<sup>th</sup> Grade | Covenant Center



**Harvest Movie Night**  
Jan. 16 | 6-12th grade | Youth Room



**Harvest Winter Retreat**  
Jan. 23-25 | 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade | Camp Ligonier



**Harvest: Youth Group**  
Sundays | 6-8 pm | Covenant Ctr./Youth Rm  
*Youth Group resumes on January 4, 2026.*



**Minute to Win It Game Night!**  
Jan. 30 | 6-12th grade | Youth Room

## Joyful Noise Christmas Program

During service on Sunday, December 21 the Joyful Noise kids performed their Christmas program sharing scripture readings on the Nativity story and singing two carols, "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Joy to the World." During scripture readings, props were introduced including a manger, scroll, shepherd's crook and wise men's gifts to illustrate each part of the story. Great Job!



# JANUARY CALENDAR

ALL EVENTS, DATES & TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

## SPECIAL DATES THIS MONTH

- 1/1 **New Year's Day - Office Closed**
- 1/4 **Communion | 10 am (S)**
- 1/9 **Harvest Open Gym | 8:30 pm (CC)**
- 1/10 **Removal of the Greens | 9 am (S)**  
**Upward Games Begin (CC)**
- 1/11 **Food & Fellowship | 11:15 am (CC)**
- 1/16 **Harvest Movie Night | 8:30 pm (YR)**
- 1/19 **Martin Luther King Jr. Day - Preschool Closed**
- 1/30 **Harvest Minute to Win It | 8:30 pm (YR)**

## Staff CONTACTS:

### PASTORAL & MINISTRY

#### SENIOR PASTOR

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(CC) Covenant Center (CR) Choir Room (FH) Fellowship Hall  
(LB) Library (P) Parlor (YR) Youth Room (S) Sanctuary

CHECK ONLINE CALENDAR FOR FULL LIST OF RECURRING  
WEEKLY/MONTHLY MEETINGS: [hickorychurch.com/calendar](http://hickorychurch.com/calendar)



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