



First Presbyterian Church, Fargo & Baker Downer

# *The Messenger*

JANUARY 2026

## New Year, New Era

As we move into a new year, our congregation enters a season we have never experienced before. Mary's retirement marks the end of a beloved chapter and the beginning of a new one. While many of us will miss her deeply, this next season is something that you and I will walk together.

As we begin this season, it is important to restate the boundaries that accompany Mary's retirement.

**In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), when a pastoral relationship concludes, a period of separation is required by our constitution. Mary and I have agreed to one full year of separation from all pastoral functions. This allows her to step fully into retirement and gives the Associate Pastor Readiness Task Force (APRTF) the time they need to discern next steps for pastoral leadership.**

Mary will continue to live in the Fargo area, and you may see her around town. You are welcome to greet her warmly and share casual, non-church conversation. She can receive your cards and expressions of gratitude, pray for you and for the congregation, enjoy retirement, visit other churches, and engage socially in the community.

During this year, Mary will not provide pastoral care, officiate or assist at funerals, weddings, baptisms, or other rites, meet to discuss church business, attend Session or committee meetings, advise on leadership matters, or engage on social media as your pastor. All pastoral needs should come directly to me as Head of Staff.

At the conclusion of this year, once the task force has completed its work, Session and Mary may consider a new agreement that reflects the needs of the congregation at that time.

In time, I hope you will feel increasingly comfortable turning to me when you are carrying stress, grief, or simply need a listening ear. This new chapter invites us to deepen our relationship, build trust, and discover together the new ways God is shaping our life as a congregation.

With gratitude,

*Pastor Sarah*  
Pastor Sarah

## Thank you! Thank you!!

My profound thanks to the Personnel Committee, Pastor Sarah, Session, and others I don't know for all the surprises, recognitions, and gifts this past month! I am truly humbled by the appreciations and touched to be named pastor emeritus. Thank you for the "love offering." Tom and I hope to take a train trip through Canada and later to take an Alaskan cruise. (We're "dyed in the wool" northerners!) I wish you all good health and happiness. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you!

Love,

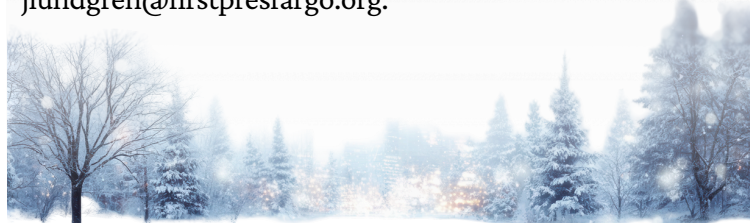
*Pastor Mary*  
Pastor Mary

## Serving at Micah's Mission

Our next date for Micah's Mission is Thursday, January 8. We need one more preparer (3:00-5:00pm) and one more server (5:00-7:00pm). Come and help with this vital project! Please sign up at the Volunteer Opportunities Board in the West Foyer if you're able to help. Thank you for your continued support of Micah's Mission and Churches United for the Homeless! If you have any questions, or if you would like to sign up, please contact Amy Wilkens at [west5@far.midco.net](mailto:west5@far.midco.net).

## 2025 Year End Giving

Please have all contributions intended for the 2025 giving year turned in to the church office by Monday, January 5th. The church office will be open from 9:00AM through 4:00PM that day. You can also use the drop box by the office door if you arrive after office hours. Any contributions received after that date will be recorded on your 2026 giving record. If you would like to know the balance of your 2025 pledge, please email Jan Lundgren at [jlundgren@firstpresfargo.org](mailto:jlundgren@firstpresfargo.org).

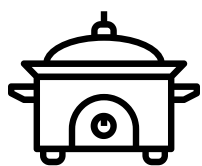


## Shine-On Campaign Update

- **Current progress:** Thanks to the generosity of over 115 families, we've received \$2.4 million in pledges with \$290,000 of cash received to date.
- **External campaign launching:** In January, we will begin the external phase of the Shine On campaign, which will run for several years. This phase will invite community partners, friends of the church, and local organizations to participate. Donation kiosks in our entryways will help share the Shine On story with everyone who visits our building.
- **New preservation fund:** Friends of First Presbyterian have opened the 650 2nd Ave. Fund with the FM Area Foundation to support the preservation of our historic building. Unlike church funds, this fund remains with the building regardless of the future of the congregation. It also allows those who care deeply about historic preservation but are unable to give to a religious institution to support ongoing maintenance and care.
- **National Fund for Sacred Places:** In November, we submitted project-ready documentation to the National Fund for Sacred Places and in late December we received authorization and partial funding to begin working on the building. A huge thanks to David Shultz and Rick Fiebiger for their hard work getting us ready for this moment.
- **Questions or participation:** If you have questions, please contact Nancy Johnson or Tom Dawson. If you have not yet participated in Shine On, there is still time. To make a pledge or contribution, please contact Jan in the church office by email or phone. Direct contributions may also be made with "Shine On" in the note/memo line. We would love to hear from you and welcome your involvement as we move into this next phase together.

## Make Stewardship Easy!

You can set up the amount you've pledged as a recurring gift to the church.



It couldn't be any easier! We offer both an ACH withdrawal from your bank account (no fees!) or Online Giving through our website. Recurring gifts are like the Crock-Pot of church giving - "fix it and forget it!"

Easy for you and it helps the church to see a steady stream of income through the year. Give it a try! There's an ACH Authorization form on our website under "Forms". Questions? Please contact Jan Lundgren in the church office at [jlundgren@firstpresfargo.com](mailto:jlundgren@firstpresfargo.com).

## FPC Financial Summary November 2025 — General Fund Only

	<u>YTD Actual</u>	<u>YTD Budget</u>	<u>Increase/ Decrease</u>	<u>Annual Budget</u>
<b>Income</b>	\$774,736	\$725,000	\$49,737	\$841,370
<b>Expense</b>	852,598	893,337	-40,740	976,243
<b>Net/Shortfall</b>	-\$77,861	-\$168,338	\$90,477	-\$134,873
<b>Insurance Proceeds &amp; Repairs</b>				
Proceeds	11,141.76			
Repairs	-38,672.58			
<b>Net P&amp;R</b>	-27,530.82			
<b>Grand Total (Income-Expenses)</b>	-\$105,391.95			



### Attention Snow Birds!

Please notify the office of your winter address along with the dates you'll be away. Year-end giving statements are mailed at special non-profit rates and will not forward even if you have a forwarding order at the post office.

Please help us stay in touch!

## Milestones

*We list FPC's births, baptisms, weddings, and deaths, hoping to stay better connected with one another.*

**Baptisms:** **Lavinia Duarte Vieira Goulart Brito** and **Alice Vieira Brito**, child of Uyara and Raphael Brito, October 19  
**Macklin Grey Sonneson**, child of Amanda and Ryan Sonneson, October 26  
**Abigail Grace Sundberg**, child of Parent and Parent Last, November 23  
**Mary Mae Martens** and **Margaret Bonita Martens**, child of Amy and Jim Martens, November 30  
**Jack Jordan Brown**, child of Austin and Jordan Brown, December 28

**New Members:** Ray Allord; Uyara, Raphael, and Lavinia Brito; Matthew Pechtl; Maxin and Rosemary Peters; and Nick Winistorfer, October 12

Join us!

**NEW MEMBER  
SUNDAY IS  
JANUARY 18TH**

If you are interested in  
becoming a member at  
First Presbyterian,  
please contact  
Pastor Sarah Bigwood.

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

THE UNIVERSITY OF JAMESTOWN  
AND DAVIES HIGH SCHOOL  
INVITES YOU

*February 27th*

*Directed by Dr. Anne Gassmann*

**Concert at 7:00pm  
in the Sanctuary**

First Presbyterian Church of Fargo  
650 2nd Ave. N.  
Fargo, ND 58102

**Dates to Remember**

**January 1, 2026** — OFFICE CLOSED

**Jan. 8** — Preparing & Serving Meal  
@ Micah's Mission – Churches United

**Jan. 11** — Ordination and Installation of Officers

**Jan. 18** — New Member Sunday;  
Annual Financial Presentation after Worship

**Feb. 1** — Chili Cook-Off

**University of Jamestown and  
Davies High School in Concert**

Dr. Anne Gassmann will be leading the University of  
Jamestown and Davies High School Choirs in song on  
Friday, February 27th. Mark your calendars and keep your  
eyes peeled for more information coming soon!

**BINGO**

*at Mainline Grill in Downer*

**18 JAN. 2026**

9571 STATE HWY 9, DOWNER

**1:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

*Play hard • Win big  
• Have fun •*

**Bingo @ Mainline, Jan. 18**

You are invited, Sunday, Jan. 18, for lunch and Bingo at Mainline in Downer, MN. The event is scheduled from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM; please note that lunch will be self-pay. Attendees are encouraged to arrange their own meals at the venue during the event. Following the meal we will be playing Bingo for various prizes! We want to extend our gratitude to our friends in Downer, especially Mainline, for supporting the Baker Downer Fish Fry in October, 2025.

*Snow Camp*

**Clearwater Forest**

**January 9-11**

**Per Capita 2026**

The Per Capita rate was approved at the October, 2025 Presbytery meeting and will remain \$50. This per capita apportionment is based on the funds necessary for the Presbytery/Synod/General Assembly to unite the work of over 8000+ churches into one PC(USA) body.

We will be accepting payments through the end of the year. Your contribution will be reflected on your giving record and will be greatly appreciated to help offset the Per Capita Apportionment payment sent to the Presbytery.

For more information, please review the PDF pamphlet, available on the Presbytery of the Northern Plain's website under the Clerk's Corner.

2026 rate = \$50.00 per confirmed member.



## Centering Prayer

*All are welcome to participate in group meditation and spiritual reflection, held weekly on:*

**Mondays, 9-10 AM**

**Riverview Place, 5300 12<sup>th</sup> St. S, Fargo**

**Thursdays, 12:15-12:45 PM**

**First Presbyterian Church, 650 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. N., Fargo**



Taizé Prayer

## Meditative Evening Prayer *with an international flavor*

**Held monthly:**

**First Thursdays at 6:30 PM**

**First Presbyterian Church**

**650 2nd Ave. N, Fargo**

**Third Tuesdays at 6:30 PM**

**Chapel at Riverview Place**

**5300 12<sup>th</sup> St. S, Fargo**

## Monthly Men's Bible Study

The men's Bible study continues its exploration of the Book of Ecclesiastes with Lesson 4 on January 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:45 a.m., in the Jennie Roberts Room. The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month, October through May. Egg bake, pastries, and coffee will be served again this winter. Intended to help men understand what the Bible says in relation to what is expected of a Christian man, the study guide for Ecclesiastes can be obtained online, or you can request a copy from Bruce Maylath at ring4linguist@yahoo.com. Participants may join at any time. No advance preparation is required for each month's study.

## Presbyterian Women News

**PW Bible Study Leaders:** On January 14 the PW Bible Study leaders will meet to discuss Lesson 5 of this year's Bible Study, *Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*.

**PW Circles:** The morning PW Circles will meet January 20 in the Jennie Roberts Room at 9:30am, and the afternoon Circle will meet at 1:00pm. All women of the church are invited to attend. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact Judy Rippentrop, (701) 730-1836.

## CHILI COOK OFF

February 1 after worship



Our annual Chili Cook-Off is right around the corner, so practice and perfect your recipes, then come hungry on Sunday, February 1st! Sign-up sheets and online registration will be open soon, so keep an eye out for more information.

## Church Event Parking

If you are frequently at the church during workday hours, please stop by the office for a "church event" parking permit rear view mirror hang tag, or you can call the church office and we'll leave one for you to pick up on Sunday. Occasionally, there is a walk-through done in the parking lot to identify those who should not be parking here. If you do receive a yellow warning ticket, don't panic, call the church office to let us know.

## Church Life Update

### *With Gratitude and Hope for What's Ahead*

As we turn the calendar from Christmas to the New Year, our hearts are full of gratitude for the many hands, voices, and spirits that made this Advent and Christmas season so meaningful at First Presbyterian Church. From worship leadership and music-making to behind-the-scenes preparation and hospitality, so many shared their gifts to help us proclaim the good news of Christ's coming in ways both beautiful and faithful.

This season was made even more meaningful as we celebrated and honored our beloved Associate Pastor, The Rev. Mary Jo E. Holtey, as she entered retirement. The care, intention, and love shown in sending her into this next chapter were a true reflection of who we are as a congregation. We will deeply miss her presence—both among our staff and within our community of faith—and we give thanks for her ministry, her leadership, and the countless ways she has shaped our life together.

As we move forward, we do so prayerfully and with hope—trusting in a smooth transition and in God's abiding presence with us every step of the way. Even in times of change, we remain grounded in the promise that Christ goes before us, walks beside us, and calls us onward in faith.

With the holiday break behind us, Worship Arts ministries return in full swing, with most rehearsals and youth group restarting on Wednesday, January 7, 2026. Schedules, updates, and announcements are regularly shared through, FPC Youth News and Music Ministry Update, my weekly informational emails. If you do not currently receive these emails and would like to be added, please send me a note at [rbender@firstpresfargo.org](mailto:rbender@firstpresfargo.org).

Our youth also have exciting opportunities ahead, including the annual Snow Camp at Clearwater Forest Camp early in January and a Winter Youth Retreat in Grand Forks at the end of the month. These experiences continue to be formative moments of faith, fellowship, and fun.

Looking ahead a bit further, preparations are underway for some favorite winter traditions. Be sure to mark your calendars for the Annual Chili Cook-Off on Sunday, February 1, 2026, and the Soup-in-a-Jar Sale for SOUP-er Bowl Sunday on February 8, 2026.

As we begin this new year together, may we continue to serve, sing, gather, and grow—confident in the hope of our Lord and grateful for the journey we share.

Cheerfully In Christ!

Rusty J. Bender

  
DIRECTOR OF CHURCH LIFE

## Musicians Schedule

Jan. 4	Rusty Bender Matthew Pechtl Eleanor & Erin Torpey
Jan. 11	Sanctuary Choir Matthew Pechtl, organ
Jan. 18	Kathleen Thomas, violin Kevin Thomas, voice
Jan. 25	Sanctuary Choir Westminster Ringers
Feb. 1	Second Avenue Band

### *Start the New Year in Music*

The new year is the perfect time to step into something joyful and meaningful—our Worship Arts ministries are back in action starting Wednesday, January 7, and there's room for all ages and skill levels.

#### Opportunities include:

- Sanctuary Choir
- St. Andrew's Brass
- All Church Orchestra
- Piano & Organ
- Handbell Choirs: Genesis & Westminster
- Children & Youth Ensembles: Friendship (K-2), Kids of the Kingdom (3-6), and Proclamation (7-12) Choirs
- Second Avenue Band, Singers, and Strings

We are also seeking a piano accompanist for the Friendship Choir—a wonderful chance for a high school student or anyone looking to gain experience playing in a church setting.

Rehearsals are a place to grow in skill, connect with others, and contribute meaningfully to worship. If you'd like more information or want to get involved, contact **Director of Church Life, Rusty Bender**, at [rbender@firstpresfargo.org](mailto:rbender@firstpresfargo.org). Updates are also shared through the weekly Music Ministry Update for subscribers.

Start 2026 making music, building community, and sharing your gifts—there's a place for you here!





**First Presbyterian Church**  
**650 2nd Ave. N.**  
**Fargo, ND 58102**  
Phone: (701) 293-6311  
**[www.firstpresfargo.org](http://www.firstpresfargo.org)**

Date	Elder on Duty	Deacon on Duty	Usher Team	Reader
Jan. 4	Jim McEvers	Candy Shultz	Steve Wonderlich	Toby Christensen
Jan. 11	Curt Brickman	Debbie Tight	Troy Schmidt	Abi Carlson
Jan. 18	Kathryn Byrd	Sydney Goddard	J. & B. Trumbo, D. & V. Stern	Maggie Schmidt
Jan. 25	Colleen Ford-Dunker	Gayla McGoldrick	Youth	<i>No Reader Needed</i>
Feb. 1	Jeff Wilkens		Marcia Foss	Benji Trumbo
Feb. 8	Steve Wonderlich		Dianne Connelly	Russell Ford-Dunker
Feb. 15	Tom Dawson		Shane Erstad	