

# The Parish Visitor

## January 2026



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### The Awakened Brain

As the calendar turns over to 2026, commercials for last-minute Christmas gifts will be replaced by commercials for Planet Fitness and weight-loss programs and other such companies and products which are dedicated to helping you and me fulfill our New Year's resolutions. In short, those commercials are appealing to our need to take care of our bodies.

Taking care of our bodies encompasses everything from memberships in fitness clubs to cosmetics. But it also includes medical, dental, and vision care. Indeed, the money we spend on health insurance is really money that we invest in the care and health of our bodies.

We also invest a lot of time, energy, and money to take care of our mental selves. We participate in recreational activities and take vacations to enhance our mental well-being. Many further take care of their mental health through prescription medications and therapy sessions.

John Wesley taught that caring for one's body is a moral and spiritual duty, saying that such is essential for glorifying God and doing good in the world. Wesley emphasized holistic wellness through plain living, daily exercise, maintaining a simple diet and good hygiene. In his book, *Primitive Physic*, Wesley maintained that physical health is inseparable from spiritual holiness.

I love the fact that Wesley connected the two, for we human beings are more than our bodies. We are more than our minds. We are also spiritual beings, and just as we invest our time, our energies, and our financial resources into the care of body and mind, we must also take care of our spirits.

I'm reading a fascinating book by Lisa Miller called *The Awakened Brain*. Dr. Miller is not a theologian; she is a scientist who teaches at Columbia University in New York. One of her projects was to discover if there was any connection between spirituality and depression. "In our field, spirituality was a barely studied, nearly invisible variable."

Nonetheless, Dr. Miller goes on to state that "Over the past twenty years of my career, I'd seen surprising clinical and epidemiological evidence that spirituality could have a protective benefit for our mental health. But could we discern a concrete physiological function of spirituality in our health and development? Was spirituality thus far invisible in the brain because it was insignificant to mental health or impossible to measure—or was it invisible because no one had yet looked?"

Dr. Miller then describes a study she conducted in which she and her colleagues took MRIs of the brains of persons who had reported that religion or spirituality was of medium, mild, or low importance and those for whom religion or

#### SPECIAL DATES:

- January 1 Office Closed
- January 4 Communion All Services
- January 5 LHands CHearts Food Prep 1PM
- January 11 Forge 6pm
- January 13 Loving Hands 1pm
- January 15 at 1 PM Caring Heart food prep
- January 17 Stamping
- January 19 Office Closed for Martin Luther King Holiday
- January 19 United Methodist Men Meeting 6PM
- January 22 Caring Hearts 1PM
- January 23 Parish Visitor Deadline 8AM
- January 18 Safety Meeting 5:15PM
- January 18 Trustees Meeting 6PM
- January 18 Finance meeting 6:45PM
- January 18 Ad Council Meeting 7:30 PM
- January 25 Forge 6pm
- January 27 Loving Hands 1pm

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spirituality was of high personal importance. When she and her team studied the two MRIs, “The difference between the two images made my heart race and my spine tingle.

“The high-spiritual brain was healthier and more robust than the low-spiritual brain. And the high-spiritual brain was thicker and stronger in *exactly the same regions* that weaken and wither in depressed brains...The data was persuasive. Spirituality appeared to protect against mental suffering.

“The MRI findings marked a pivotal moment on the way to my breakthrough discovery that each of us has an **awakened brain**. Each of us is endowed with a natural capacity to perceive a greater reality and consciously connect to the life force that moves in, through, and around us...The awakened brain is the neural circuitry that allows us to see the world more fully and thus enhance our individual, societal, and global well-being.

“When we awaken, we feel more fulfilled and at home in the world, and we build relationships and make decisions from a wider view. We move from loneliness and isolation to connection; from competition and division to compassion and altruism; from an entrenched focus on our wounds, problems, and losses to a fascination with the journey of life.”

As we embark on a New Year, as we make resolutions to take care of body and mind, let us also resolve to take care of our spiritual selves. And it just so happens that I know a place that will help you to connect with Someone who will awaken your brain and give you life more abundantly (John 10:10).

Connecting People to Jesus Christ with you,  
*Pastor Dave*

Sources: *Primitive Physic: An Easy And Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* by John Wesley  
*The Awakened Brain*, by Lisa Miller, PhD, Random House, 2021, pg. 5-8.  
Both resources are available at Amazon.com

## Connecting with the Word

Epiphany celebrates the arrival of magi from the East who came to pay homage to the newborn king of Israel. Epiphany is also a celebration of light because those same magi found Jesus because they followed the light of a star. In turn, they paid homage to the One who is the Light of the World.

Epiphany also marks the beginning of 2026 as Epiphany Sunday is January 4. Scriptures include Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147: 12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; and John 1: 1-9, 10-18.

Baptism of the Lord Sunday follows on January 11. Scriptures include Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; and Matthew 3:15-17.

Scriptures for Sunday, January 18 include Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; and John 1:29-42. Linda Schrock will be preaching.

On Monday, January 19, our nation will pause to remember a preacher of the gospel who helped transform our society for the better. That preacher, of course, is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Scriptures for Sunday, January 25 include Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 27; 4-9, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; and 4:14-21.

*Pastor Dave*

## Sponsors for our January Radio Broadcasts

January 4 - Carol Hess, in loving memory of Ben Hess

January 11 – United Methodist Women

January 18 – United Methodist Women

January 25 – Julie Bigham in memory of her brothers Jeff & John



## January Volunteer of the Month: Bob & Andrea Parker



With images of the Aledo Lighted Parade fresh in our rearview mirror, our January Volunteers of the Month played an important role as we shared our witness to our community. For the past several years, our float entry has been decorated in the spacious garage of Bob and Andrea Parker. Not only have they helped decorate our floats, whether for the Mercer County High School Homecoming Parade or the Aledo Lighted Parade, Bob and Andrea have then towed the float through the parade, smiling and waving as they went. (See pg. 9).

In addition to providing the important ministry, Bob has been active in our Hy-Vee Bread Ministry as well as United Methodist Men and recently, our



Tuesday morning Bible Study.

Andrea provides critical leadership as the chair of our Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee. She also serves as the secretary of our Administrative Council. Both positions help our church to function as smoothly as it does.

Bob and Andrea are also the parents of Travis, who plays drums with our Forgiven Praise Band.

**Congratulations to Bob and Andrea Parker,  
our January Volunteers of the Month**

## Thank you Volunteers!

Whether you're a volunteer or a "voluntold," you are special and you help Aledo UMC to fulfill its mission of connecting people to Jesus Christ. This is a time of year when individuals and organizations often reflect on the previous year. With that in mind, we give thanks to God for *all* our 2025 Volunteers of the Month:

January: Scott Spencer

February: The Nelsons

March: Tim Hay

April: Bell Choir

May: Tech Booth

June: Shari Chandler

July: Pam Truman

August: Adam Douglas & Tammy

September: Connection

October: Richard Robinson

November: Denise Patterson

December: The Heards



**THANK YOU** so much to the Chancel Choir and the Bell Choir for the beautiful music on the 7th!





**“Galentine” is for Chocolate Lovers**  
**(Just for the “Gals” to Celebrate Valentine’s Day)**  
Sunday, February 8, 2026  
1:00 – 3:00 PM  
AUMC Dining Room  
Food, Fun, Photo Opp, and Fellowship

**(\$5.00 Tickets will be available January 4th)**

**Katie Moran & Chealsea Allen will provide beautiful musical entertainment**



Forge is our youth ministry to students in grades 6-12 and will meet at 6 pm on Sunday, January 11 and at 6 pm Sunday, January 25.

Congratulations to Jaiden LaDue who is graduating from Mercer County High School at the end of the fall term. She plans to attend Black Hawk College and begin her studies for her career in nursing. She will walk with her classmates when they graduate in May, 2026.

Congratulations to Ethan Taylor who preached his first sermon at both service on Sunday, December 14. His sermon was drawn from Isaiah 35 and was entitled, “What the World Can’t Give.”

Questions may be directed to Pastor Dave.



## STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

### Share the Harvest

As of this writing (Monday, December 15), we have received **\$39,475** in our annual Share the Harvest fund drive. Thank you! Of course, that total may increase after this edition of the *Parish Visitor* has been printed.

We met our \$10,000 Bronze Goal on November 2 and our \$25,000 Silver Goal on December 7. Hopefully we will meet and even exceed our \$40,000 Gold Goal by Christmas. Incidentally, any

gifts given to Share the Harvest above our Gold Goal will give us a head start on our 2026 financial obligations, including our apportionments to the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church. Our 2026 apportionments total \$27,816, which is \$2,124 less than they were in 2025. Nonetheless, our apportionments are a critical part of our witness and mission to the world. Your support of Share the Harvest is helping to maintain that witness.



### AUMC Endowment

This winter, we received a tremendous boost from our Endowment Fund. That boost totaled \$9,000, and it was directed to Share the Harvest. That's \$9,000 that you didn't have to put in the collection plate.

We are continuing to grow the base of our Endowment, primarily through estate planning. Won't you consider leaving a "final tithe" to Aledo UMC through your estate or life insurance policy? Your gift will become part of the principle of our endowment, generating income for the church in perpetuity.

### Roof and Light Project

In 2024, we secured a loan through Black Hawk Bank & Trust to install a new roof over our sanctuary at a cost of \$47,550. Because we secured that loan, we were able to get a most favorable interest rate of 2.15 percent. As of this writing, we have paid \$26,000 on that loan, reducing our balance to \$21,550.

Unfortunately, we have been faced with other needs in this century-old building. Specifically, we're being "nickled and dimed" with the cost of replacing an old light fixture every month or two.

Our trustees learned of a rebate program through Ameren. Rather than replacing one fluorescent fixture every month or two, as we have been doing, we discovered that if we replaced all of them at one time with LED fixtures, we would be eligible to receive a \$4,100 rebate and avoid a piecemeal approach. Additionally, we would lower our light bill by \$124 per month.

To access the rebate, the project had to be approved by Ameren and the lights had to be installed by December 31. We did not know if any such rebate would be available after this year. To fund this project, we did not feel as though another capital campaign was the answer. Rather, our finance team used our borrowing power at Black Hawk.

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Total cost is estimated at \$19,111. After much prayer and deliberation, there was overwhelming support to move ahead with this project by our trustees, finance committee, and administrative council. Soon this project will be added to our roof loan. If you choose to give toward this project, you may designate your gift above your regular tithes and offerings for either “roof” or “lights” or simply “building.”

Once again, thank you for your faithful stewardship which enables us to let our light shine for Jesus in this community and beyond.

### Heifer International

Over the past several years, Aledo UMC has supported Heifer International through our Reverse Advent Buckets. This past year, we added our December Connection Coins to the mix, and this enabled us to take advantage of some early matching grants.

First, Heifer multiplied all gifts by three, and we were able to purchase one Flock of Chicks for \$20; four Goats for \$480; and one Heifer, for \$500. That \$1,000 gift was multiplied to become three Flocks of Chicks; twelve Goats; and three Heifers.

Later, Heifer International announced a new matching program, this time with a matching multiplier of five. This time we purchased seven Flocks of Chicks for \$140; four Honeybee Hives for \$120; one Sheep for \$120; one Goat for \$120; and one Heifer for \$500. That \$1,000 gift was multiplied to become 35 Flocks of Chicks; 20 Honeybees; five Sheep; and five Goats.

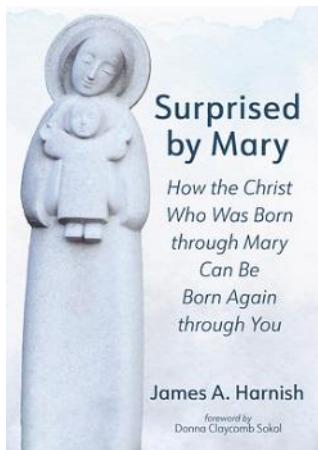
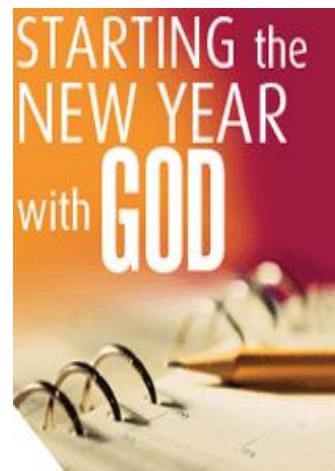
Thank you for helping us to connect people to Jesus Christ through these simple but practical means! And if you have not turned in your Reverse Advent Buckets, please do so at your earliest opportunity. We will use them again next month as we begin our Lenten journey.



### Tuesday Morning Bible Study

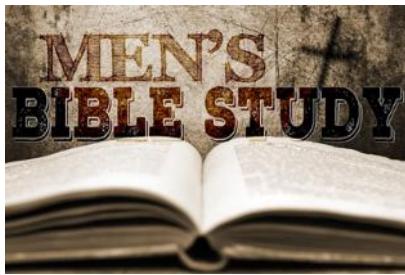
Our Tuesday morning Bible study has just launched into *Surprised by Mary*, a Bible study by United Methodist pastor James Harnish. Pastor Dave leads this 90-minute study every Tuesday morning beginning at 9am in the Seekers classroom

You are welcome to join us for coffee, fellowship, and the Word in this faith-forming weekly event.



## Bible Studies for Men

- Men's Bible Study Wednesday Morning at 6:30AM . Come for breakfast and a time of studying God's Word.
- The Men are currently studying *Ten Men of the Bible*



## OUR SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES:

- 8AM  
Blended Worship  
9:45AM  
Rock & Worship

## End Of Year Giving

If you would like to have your offering credited to 2025 please turn it into the church office or place in the offering plate by January 4th. Please clearly mark your gift as "Offering 2025".



On Monday, November 24, our Outreach Team served a meal and provided after-dinner entertainment to the folks at Vashti. The pre-Thanksgiving meal featured ham, green beans, potatoes, and cake. Entertainment was presented by Pastor Dave who

invited folks to play "Pocket/Purse Bingo." Door prizes included cookies, laundry supplies, and a quilt made by Barb Millar and Jen Anderson.

Pictured from left to right:

Masin York, Jerry Luxmore, Ruth Dulaney, Denise Patterson, Connie Alexander, Joan Luxmore, Vi Darsnek, Natalie, Emalyn, & Parker Nelson, Mike Millar, and Gary Heard.

**A huge thank you to all who helped prepare and deliver the Holiday Cheer plates and baskets!**



**The United Methodist Men** meet on January 19th There will be a meal, a short business meeting, and lots of fellowship. Join us, and bring a friend!





## UM Women Golden Age Birthdays

January 1st— Jeannine Kenney

January 1st Kathy Jenkins



The deadline for the next Parish Visitor is  
**Wednesday, January 21st at 8am.**

All articles must be  
submitted by this date!

## THOSE WE REMEMBER IN OUR PRAYERS

### General Needs

Jodie Andress  
JeAnne & Tom Balmer  
Christy Bender/pain  
Renae Brown/mental  
health/loss  
Karen Dosh  
Marie Fredrickson/I V  
Andrew Hofer/FCA  
Debbie Jasper  
Gene & Tracy Keppy  
Danny Lee  
Dennis Litwiler/lymphoma  
Cayden Logsdon/seizures  
Judy Lovett  
Paul & family/addiction  
Sharon Peterson/pain,  
Elizabeth Schroeder



### Those Living With Cancer

Nick Billiet, Renee  
Forber, Macoy & Lane  
Green, Juna,  
David Murphy, Kathy  
Newswander, Jennifer  
Olson, Janice  
Pollock, Debbie Swank,  
Shelly T., Juna, Bobbie  
Thomsen

### Those Living With Grief And Loss

The Families of:  
Lainey Jean Gladkin  
Pete Guyton  
Laura McGinnis,  
Chris Pearson,  
Bill Rutherford  
Carole Schmidt,  
Corey Thompson,  
Trudy Turner,  
Dick & Liz Zimmerman  
Also  
Alice Cantrell, Lyn Franks

### Those Who Are Healing and Recovering

Alicia, Anne, Steve  
Brown, Jayne  
Fitzsimmons, Megan Melton,  
Donna Murphy, Mike  
Newsom, Dennis Palmer,  
Dianna Spencer,  
Mark Stanley, Sarah  
Thomas, Jane  
Williams

### Those With Health Issues

Bill Breeden, Connie  
Dellitt, Jim Droste, Gabrielle, Judy Headley, Diane & Stan Hunt, Kathy Jenkins, Junie, Vicki Lowe, Megan Melton, Mitch Meminger, Phyllis Meyer, Ruby Nimrick, Mom, Ginny Orud, Cara Osborn, Marion Pinkham, Bill Pollock, Kevin Ricke, Ashley Schmidt, Nena Visser

### Ongoing Concerns

Acceptance, Respect, Dignity, Equality  
AUMC family  
Brookstone, nursing homes, Vashti residents  
Farmers as they harvest  
Loving All Neighbors  
Those who are homeless

### Those In Leadership

Bishop David Bard, Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai,  
Pastor Dave Schultz,  
Our Local and Federal  
Government, World Leaders,  
AUMC Chair persons and  
Committees, Andrew Hofer

### District Schools

*The Staff, Students,  
Teachers and Admin-  
istration of:*  
Mercer Schools  
Sherard Schools  
United Schools

## AUMC's Entry in the Holly Days Parade

Thank you for everyone who made the Luau a success in the electric parade on Friday, December 5. We appreciate the designer of the float, Candice Schultz, and the float decorators, Dave and Candice Schultz, Bob and Andrea Parker, Mike Millar and Ruth Dulaney.

Once again, Bob and Andrea provided their garage to build the float and drove the float in the parade using Gary Heard's trailer.

Also, thank you to those that helped load the Beach house onto the trailer: Mike M., Julie B., Dave P., Jon Swanson and Pastor.

A huge thank you to all who participated,



Ruth Dulaney,  
Outreach Director

## JANUARY CONNECTION COINS

The Connection Coins (the “thinly-veiled Pringles cans”!) are doing great things in the life of the Aledo UMC! On the 2nd Sunday of each month, those cans are set out. You are encouraged to drop your change in one of the collection cans. And yes, we do accept folding money and checks payable to AUMC. All proceeds this month will go to our **Network of Caring**, which provides people with short term financial assistance to help them pay their bills.

Please remember to include this ministry in your giving on Sunday, January 11.



## EPIPHANY

January 6<sup>th</sup> is Epiphany (Greek for “appearance or manifestation”), also known as the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas or Three Kings Day. Epiphany is a Christian feast which celebrates the revelation of God to humankind in the person of Jesus Christ. According to various traditions, it recognizes both the coming of the Wise Men to Jesus and the baptism of Jesus- both revelations of God in their own way.



### Church Website

Have you looked at your church's website? If not, go to [www.myaledoumc.com](http://www.myaledoumc.com) and see what's going on! Not only can you see the “basics” about the Aledo United Methodist Church, you can find the most current church calendar. Also, the monthly newsletter can be found on our website.

### Thank You!

Thank You to the UMW and UMM for their generous gift to us in the office.

We love being a part of the AUMC family.

Joanne and Julie

Dear AUMC congregation, I'd like to **Thank** all of you who generously brought in Christmas gifts for the residents of Mercer Manor and Arcadia Care. This is a collaborative effort of many churches and I am always glad we participate with many useful donations, such as personal items and blankets. Gifts were taken to the Baptist Church where they were organized and delivered to the two nursing homes for Christmas. Again, thank you very much for caring about the nursing home residents.



God is Good...all the time,

Mary Flint

**Thank you** so much to the United Methodist Men for the delicious Omelet Breakfast on the 7th! We appreciate you so much!



Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for the Cheer plate! It was delicious. We so appreciate being thought of! Also, very grateful for all the cards, messages, and PRAYERS and Support this past 20 months, I know I am very blessed by all the support! Rick & I wish all a very Merry Christmas and a healthy New Year!

Your friends in Christ,  
Rich & Kathy Newswander

## Family Fun at Hanging of the Greens

One of our great church traditions was held on the First Sunday of Advent, November 30 as dozens of kids, youths, parents, and grandparents gathered for Hanging of the Greens. Thank you to everyone who made this another successful event!



## NOMAD NOVICES NO LONGER



Chris and Jon, pictured third and fourth from left, were part of a larger team of NOMADS serving at Wesley Woods.

In early October, Jon and Chris Swanson embarked on their first NOMADS mission trip to work at Wesley Woods in Indianola, Iowa. Among the tasks they performed with other NOMADS, they removed several hundred boards from a fence; power-sprayed a deck; repaired a sink; and painted.

NOMADS (Nomads On a Mission Active in Divine Service) provide volunteer labor for historically Methodist organizations. Traveling by RV or camper, NOMADS demonstrate God's love through our work and by listening to the people with whom we work. Projects may include new construction, remodeling, and repairs for churches, children's homes, camps, colleges, outreach missions and disaster rebuilding.

Wesley Woods is part of the camping ministry of the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church.

For more information, log onto [methodistnomads.org](http://methodistnomads.org)

## FINANCIAL MATTERS

(WEEKLY NEED TO HOLD STEADY \$6,018.00)

Date	12/07/2024	12/14/2024	12/21/2024	12/28/2024
Attendance	175	87	N/A	N/A
Receipts (Toward Budget)	\$24,991.00	\$12,391.00		\$

