



THE WORD

January/February 2026

St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church
700 Pleasure Road, Lancaster PA 17601
(717) 394-9607 www.stmatthewelc.com

Pastor's Page



Happy New Year, St. Matthew family!

God is with you.

As we step into 2026, I pray that we all embrace the message of Christmas: *Emmanuel, God is with us!*

Jesus reveals to us exactly what God means when God promises that God is with us. God came in flesh and blood, the very essence of humanity.

God didn't just wear a mask around us...one that could easily be taken off when it was convenient for him. No, God wore our skin and felt our pain. He was thick in the trenches with us.

God didn't sign a statement of support for us, from a distance. No, God abided with us; walked with us; was seen with us; did not abandon us.

God didn't send us money from a distance. No, God paid the ultimate price for standing up for us.

Does that help you better understand the phrase, "God is with us"? It sure helps me realize that even when I may not feel like it, God is indeed here.

God is With Us moments in worship.

Incorporated within our worship services, beginning in the Season after Epiphany, I intend to create a space for stories to be told about what God is doing in our midst. If you would like to tell the story of what is happening within a ministry that you are associated with at the church, please let me know. These are not just announcements of upcoming events; they are detailed stories of how God is working through a given ministry. These stories help

Pastor Robin Fero



others to see how God is with us.

Also, in 2026, I intend to dig deeper into teaching moments within the service, highlighting the liturgical practices and elements of worship, in order to help bring the Word made flesh even fleshier in our everyday lives.

God bless you every step of the way. Peace!

-Pastor Fero

Social Ministry News

A HUGE thank you to everyone who helped support neighboring families at Brecht Elementary School. Food was being provided so these families might have a more plentiful holiday season this year. Wow, that was a lot of boxes and bags that were delivered on November 17th!!

"The Lancaster County Food Hub is helping our neighbors thrive through the resources they need the most: **food, clothing, & shelter** all with faith and compassion!" This year, our own, Erin Conahan, became the Director of Advancement at the Food Hub, which is located on Queen Street.

During the months of January and February, we will be collecting a variety of items to support the Hub. Erin let us know that these items are always needed:

Cereal
Peanut butter
Rice
Dry beans
Soup
Hand warmers / Feet warmers
Men's & Women's **new** underwear, any size
Men's & Women's **new** socks, any size
Rain ponchos

*Wheeled suitcases
\$5 Gift cards (McDonald's, Turkey Hill, Subway)
Body wipes
Deodorant
Men's Clothing (all sizes - we never have enough and run through it quickly).*

These items can be placed on the tables in Fellowship Hall. Monetary donations will also be accepted. Labeled envelopes for cash or check (made out to St. Matthew) will be in Fellowship Hall and can be placed in the collection plate. Any questions, contact Sheila Charles,

Giving to those in need warms the hearts of everyone.

Quilting Workshops in 2026:
*The 3rd Saturday of the month from 2:00 to 4:00pm.
January 17, February 21, March 21, April 18, May 16
June 20, July 18, August 15*

Everyone is welcome. Please stop by Fellowship Hall during one of our workshops and see what is being created. It's always a "happening" place. St. Matthew is always very proud of the number of quilts that we are able to donate to those in need through Lutheran World Relief. Since 2001 we have donated 1,703 quilts.

- Sheila Charles

Council Corner (2025)—Community Meal

Happy New Year to all!

First, I would like to thank you all for your support as I served three years as Council President. Your support means a lot to me. At the December Council meeting, we elected new officers. Pastor Cliff Eshbach was elected President, Laurie LaBar was elected Vice President, and Kay Gontner was reelected Secretary. Barb Eshbach will continue as Treasurer.

Pastor Fero asked me to give you a community meal update. This has been an important outreach program and it's been my pleasure to lead this since Mary Catherine Noll asked me if I would do the job she had been doing. She was in her 90's when she gave up. Unfortunately, I'm not aware of how many years St. Matthew has been helping (I've been doing it for 11 years).

Before COVID, we served a hot evening meal at Zion Lutheran church in East Petersburg, serving 30-45 people. Following the COVID pandemic, a decision was made to implement a Grab and Go lunch program. As a result, 60 meals are now prepared each month and distributed at Zion. I have felt Christmas is a special time to give more, so we have cooked turkey (some donated) and all the fixings; that hasn't changed.

Now we do a cold meal and in December, it's still turkey. I have a recipe for a turkey salad with dried cranberries, and we make that our cold sandwich; we also make our pasta salad. We have made pumpkin pie in the past but now I make pumpkin custard.

My helpers are wonderful. They include Anna Neal, Carol Castline, Nancy Smith, Brenda Stauffer, Toni Sweitzer and Helen Bucher from the neighborhood.



We have applied for grants from the synod for the last two years and have received help from their hunger program and of course, we receive money from the congregation to help this program continue.

Thank you all for your support of this important program and for all the support you give to those of us who prepare it. We are always looking for helpers. Again, thank you.

-Barbara Elsen

New Council Officers—2026

The St. Matthew Council met on Tuesday, December 16 and elected new officers.

Rev. Cliff Eshbach will serve for one year as Council President; Laurie LaBar was elected as Vice President; Kay Gontner was reelected as Secretary. Barb Eshbach will continue to serve as Treasurer.

The Council welcomed 4 new members: Andrea Farris, Roxanne Koch, Laurie LaBar, and Rev. Cliff Eshbach.

Nancy Smith, Nancy Pokopec, and James Frazier are leaving Council, and they were recognized for their service as Council members. Barb Elsen, who was previously appointed to serve the remaining 2-year term of James Frazier, was also recognized for her service as the outgoing President.

-Pastor Fero

Council Corner - 2026

It seems that one thing we can be assured of is that each year there will be an unexpected event (or two or three ...). The most recent of these events occurred to me in mid-December, when my fellow members of the Congregation Council decided to elect me as president for 2026.

It is not an unfamiliar position for me. Many years ago, during the time I lived in Lebanon, I served as council president at the congregation I attended. At first the responsibilities of this position seems clear. Run an efficient meeting and keep people informed. That responsibility hasn't changed and I plan to fulfill that as best I can.

But I think there is a bit more to the task. And that is to raise up, when necessary, our collective needs and desires for the future of the congregation. This is where we all play a significant role.

You know that congregations, across all denominations, face challenges of spiritual and material natures. Our task is to join together to meet such challenges. It begins with our primary purpose for existing as a congregation; to offer worship to God, to serve as Jesus served, and to express that service in the significant ways the Lutheran tradition has done for five hundred years.

So, if I were to put our task into one sentence, I would like to paraphrase a famous quote and modify it to our task: "Ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church."

God's peace and best wishes to you for 2026 as we serve our Lord, together.

-The Rev. Clifton Eshbach
Council President

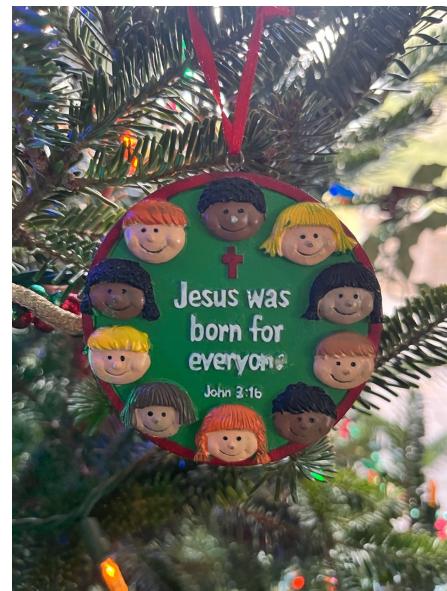
Music Ministry News - Jesus was Born for Everyone

For many years in my previous parish, I directed a children's choir and a youth choir. At Christmas-time, I enjoyed giving each of the choir members a special ornament and some treats. This year, I was looking for some pictures to put with one of our Christmas music videos so I snapped a picture of one of those special ornaments from the past that graces our Christmas tree. It is worn with age but packed full of significance. The ornament says "Jesus was born for everyone. John 3:16", and the

words are surrounded by the beautiful faces of smiling children who all look very different from one another.

During the afterglow of Christmas Eve Worship, my mind also drifted to the Creation Story, where "God looked at everything God had made, and God was very pleased. Evening passed and morning came—that was the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)

God was pleased with all of God's creation...with all of its lovely varieties of colors, animals and humans. God was so full of love for creation that God would send God's child for every single one of us.



As I reflect on Christmas Eve and the efforts of all of St. Matthew musicians, I am very grateful for the gift of music they work so hard to prepare to lay at the manger. We had 18 total musicians who prepared and recorded 8 pieces of music. There were over 80 people in attendance at Christmas Eve Worship to welcome the Christ Child through the Word and music and there were others who worshiped with us online.

St. Matthew Christmas Eve Musicians

Sheila Charles, Erin Conahan, Barb Elsen, Barb Eshbach, Pastor Cliff Eshbach, Steve Feldmann, Susan Feldmann, Pastor Robin Fero, Kay Gontner, Ann Hossler, Nora Hudack, Linda McIntyre, Nancy Pokopec, Peg Sampson, Fiona Smith, Mark Smith, Sam Sweitzer, Sandy Tucker

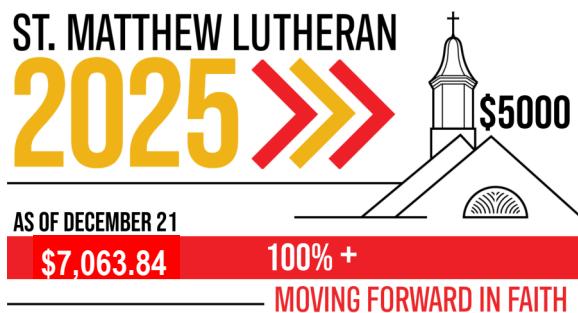
The impact of Christmas Eve and St. Matthew (the little church with the big heart) is also in the beautiful people who offer their gifts every day, all year long. God's people, who are created to vary in so many lovely ways, all coming together to "love on" our world long after the service ends.

God not only created you, but God is pleased with YOU! Jesus was born for everyone.

As the new year begins, rejoice and let that soak in.
- Susan Feldmann

Moving Forward in Faith—2025

The Moving Forward in Faith campaign has been a wonderful reminder of what our congregation can accomplish together. Thanks to your generosity, we reached our \$5,000 goal two months ahead of schedule! Every contribution—large or small—has helped strengthen St. Matthew's ministry and ensure that we can continue to serve with faith and purpose.



Additional gifts will help us build a stronger financial foundation as we prepare for the challenges and opportunities of 2026. Thank you for your continued support, encouragement, and prayers as we move forward—together—in faith.

-Barb Eshbach, Treasurer

Balancing Faith and Finance



Year-End Financial Summary

In 2025, regular giving totaled \$135,303.10, about \$11,915 (8%) less than in 2024. The *Moving Forward in Faith* campaign helped offset this decline, contributing \$7,063.84 during the year.

Expenses rose by \$4,870.62, a 2.8% increase, from \$172,595.19 in 2024 to \$177,465.81 in 2025.

| January - December | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Actual | |
| Regular Giving | \$135,303.10 |
| Other Income | \$ 40,643.90 |
| Total Income | \$175,947.00 |
| Total Expenses | \$177,465.81 |
| | (\$1,518.81) |

We are grateful for the faithful generosity of our members, which allows the church to continue its ministries and mission. Looking ahead, even a modest increase of \$6 per week by half of our giving units, as discussed at the November budget meeting, would place the church in a stronger position to meet the needs of the coming year.

As Pastor Fero said, "We fought a good fight. It's an expensive world these days."

- Barb Eshbach, Treasurer

Thank You

Dear St Matthew family,

THANK YOU for your monetary gift for Christmas. You truly are the little church with a big heart!

Jeff and I wish you the very best in the new year. May you be ever more aware of the grace that God has given you. God is with you!

Pastor Fero & Jeff

Many thanks to Pastor Fero for his visits when I was in the hospital in October. I am especially grateful for his loan of his back-up cell phone charger which he delivered the morning after I was admitted!

Phyllis Wimer

Dear St. Matthew Family,

Thank you so very much for the beautiful card and Christmas gift you gave to me. It is my joy and privilege to serve our Lord with all of you at St. Matthew. God's blessings to each of you in the new year!

Susan Feldmann

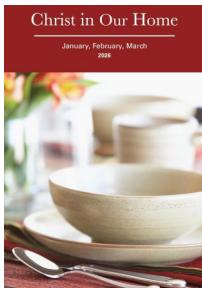
Address Change

The Fries have moved!

Neely & Pam Frye
101 N. Queen St
Suite 406
Lancaster, Pa 17603



Devotions Booklet



Christ in our Home booklets (for January, February, March) are available in the church lobby.

These are free and for anyone to take. Please take multiple copies and share Jesus in your community.

Take them with you on vacation!

- Pastor Fero

Birthdays

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Shirley Wertz 1/6 | Harold Nightingale 1/7 |
| Terry Tice 1/8 | Sarah Jordan 1/9 |
| Laurie LaBar 1/13 | Betty Sheaffer 1/13 |
| Ned Longenecker 1/15 | Sue Feldmann 1/25 |
| Eric Teichmann 2/11 | Louise Lilley 2/21 |
| Jennifer Piersol 2/22 | Chloe Haldeman 2/23 |
| Nancy Maurer 2/24 | |

Anniversaries

| |
|---------------------------|
| Terry & Linda Tice 1/27 |
| James & Mabel Frazier 2/4 |
| Neely & Pam Frye 2/25 |

Worship Assistants—January

Altar Care for January - Barb Elsen & Kay Gontner

January 3 - Saturday 5pm

- Assisting Minister: Matthew Kolb
- Reader: Matthew Kolb

January 4 - Sunday 10am

- Assisting Minister: Barb Emmerich
- Reader: Barb Emmerich
- Greeter: Roxanne Koch
- Usher: Barb Elsen
- Counters: Sandy Tucker & Linda Tice

January 10 - Saturday 5pm

- Assisting Minister: Sheila Charles
- Reader: Sheila Charles

January 11 - Sunday 10am

- Assisting Minister: Steve Feldmann
- Reader: Peg Sampson
- Greeter: Kay Gontner
- Ushers: Andrea Farris & Kaye Ames
- Counters: Brenda Stauffer & Pam Frye

January 17 - Saturday 5pm

- Assisting Minister: Nancy Pokopec
- Reader: Nancy Pokopec

January 18 - Sunday 10am

- Assisting Minister: Linda McIntyre
- Reader: Linda McIntyre
- Greeter: Laurie LaBar
- Usher: Barb Elsen
- Counters: Brad Charles & Sandy Tucker

January 24 - Saturday 5pm

- Assisting Minister: Brad Charles
- Reader: Roxanne Koch

January 25 - Sunday 10am

- Assisting Minister: Barb Elsen
- Reader: Barb Elsen
- Greeters: Andrea Farris & Kaye Ames
- Usher: OPEN
- Counters: Linda Tice & Brenda Stauffer

January 31 - Saturday 5pm

- Assisting Minister: Matthew Kolb
- Reader: Matthew Kolb

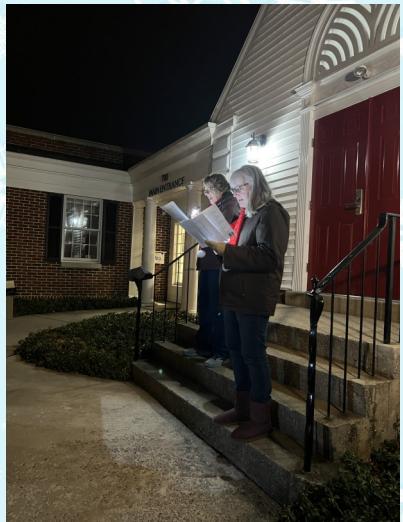
February 1 - Sunday 10am

- Assisting Minister: Barb Emmerich
- Reader: Peg Sampson
- Greeter: Linda Tice
- Usher: Barb Elsen
- Counters: Carol Rothweiler & Pam Frye





**SATURDAY
DECEMBER 13**



Christmas Eve





Officers (2026)

Rev. Cliff Eshbach, President

Laurie LaBar, Vice President

Kay Gontner, Secretary

Brad Charles, Financial Secretary

Barb Eshbach, Treasurer

Staff

The Rev. Robin Fero, Pastor

Susan Feldmann, Director of Music

Church Council

| | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Rev. Cliff Eshbach | Barb Eshbach |
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|------------|-------------|
| Barb Elsen | Kay Gontner |
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| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| Andrea Farris | Peg Sampson |
|---------------|-------------|

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| Roxanne Koch | Toni Sweitzer |
|--------------|---------------|

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| Laurie LaBar | Pastor Fero |
|--------------|-------------|

St. Matthew Lutheran Church Statement of Welcome, Affirmation and Full Participation



Welcome to St Matthew, the little church with a big heart.

We are a Reconciling in Christ (Open and Affirming) congregation, so when we say
“all are welcome”, we really mean it.

We strive to live that out in our actions as well as our words. We publicly and humbly
commit to do what it takes to truly be a sanctuary filled with warmth, love,
understanding, safety, respect and care for all who enter here.

*(Please see our Full Statement of Welcome, Affirmation and Full Participation
on our website: www.stmatthewelc.com. Copies of the Full Statement are also
available in the Education and Resources Stand in the Fellowship Hall.)*

St. Matthew

January 2026

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--------|---|---|--------------------------|--|---------------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5pm - Worship |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 10am - Worship | | 12pm - Better Bones at St. Matthew 7:00pm - Private Band Rehearsal | 12:00pm - Bible Study 6:30pm - M.T. Democratic Committee | 6:30pm - Vocal Choir Reh | 1:30pm - CPR Class | 5pm - Worship |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 10am - Worship | | 9:00am - Lancaster Conference Mtg 12pm - Better Bones at St. Matthew | 12:00pm - Bible Study 12:30pm - Head Start Mtg 6:30pm - RIC Committee Mtg | 6:30pm - Vocal Choir Reh | 2pm - Quilting Workshop 5pm - Worship | |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 10am - Worship 11:15am - Evangelism Mtg | | 9am - Community Meal 5:30pm - CPR Class | 12pm - Better Bones at St. Matthew 7:00pm - Church Council | 6:30pm - Vocal Choir Reh | 9:30am - CPR Class 5pm - Worship | |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |
| 10am - Worship | | 12pm - Better Bones at St. Matthew | 12:00pm - Bible Study | 6:30pm - Vocal Choir Reh | 1:30pm - CPR Class | 5pm - Worship |

ST. MATTHEW

700 Pleasure Road
Lancaster, PA 17601

(Return Service Requested)

The Little Church with the Big Heart

