



# The Immanuel Herald

Publication of Immanuel United Church of Christ

**January - February 2026**

## Pastor's Corner

### A Message from Pr. MaryBeth

#### Epiphany People

"The star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed."

~ Matthew 2:9-10

The visit of the Magi is told only in one Gospel, Matthew 2:1-12. Later, it was the early church that shaped the story of three 'wise men' and later still, between the 6th and 8th centuries that a name for each one was created: Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior. The names were assigned to represent three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa ~ where the story of Jesus and the Good News of God's love for all had already been told.

The story of Epiphany is important for us because it reminds us that Christ can't be limited to any one nation or culture and that God's love can't be restricted to a false notion of an "us" and "them" view regarding who belongs, who is welcome and who is a Child of God. In his Christmas message, Pope Leo XIV said that Christians have no enemies, only sisters and brothers.

We are called Epiphany People for a reason: when we see the Light of Christ, the Star, like the Magi in the story, we are to be overjoyed to offer ourselves as gifts.



The Holy Family  
by Mike Moyers

"God is at work in us shaping us to be bearers of the light that has come into the world, the light that the darkness neither understands nor has overcome. God is at work forming an Epiphany people, people of the light, people who know that the joy and grace of Christmas is not a gift to be admired but one to be put to work for the sake of the world God loves so much." This quote, from David Lose, one of my favorite New Testament scholars, defines what it means to be an Epiphany People.

In a world of darkness, be the Light; in a time of fear, be the Love; in a time of grief be the Comfort; in a time of tyranny be the Courage. Show the presence of Christ in all that you are, in all that you do ~ for God is with us.

*As always, your friend in Christ,  
Pr. MaryBeth*

## Notes from the President

"Hey, hey, hey, hey, Beat is gettin' stronger. Music gettin' longer, too. Music is a-flashin' me. I want to, I want to, I want to take you higher."



2024, my inspirational melody was "We've Only Just Begun," by the Carpenters. And the music seemed to carry Immanuel into a successful year. 2025, I carried on my tradition of a musical theme to my January notes with the song "Down the Highway" by BTO. That song propelled and carried Immanuel down a good path and a successful year. Now, 2026 "HIGHER," a song by Sly and the Family Stone. Why? 'Cause I feel Immanuel will soar to new highs in 2026.

. 2025 welcomed many new faces. Faces that soon turned into warm smiles. Warm smiles became kinship. Kinship soon to become one with Immanuel. It's through our love and strength we will gain more friends into our church. Our annual reports will show how 2025 was a good year. Why? Because of each and every one of you reading these words. We all contribute in ways we can, be it liturgist, ushering, being on council or even helping sell popcorn at hotshots to cleaning up. It all adds up to greatness.

I am asking YOU to keep serving Immanuel and together we will create a magical year for Immanuel. Isn't that what we all want?

Sing with me now, "I wanna take you higher. Immanuel, Immanuel, you light my fire. Immanuel you light my fire. Boom laka-laka-laka, boom laka-lak-goon-ka boom Hey, hey, hey, hey."

Wishing everyone a wonderful 2026 filled with many blessings.

BobO

Look at the heavens, and see;  
and behold the clouds, which are higher than you.  
~ Job 35:5 ~



# Worship & Friendship at Immanuel

## JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2026

### JANUARY

Thurs. Jan. 1: New Year's Day

Sun. Jan. 4, 10am: Worship, Communion  
Second Sun after Christmas

Tues. Jan. 6: Epiphany, "Three Kings Day"

Sun. Jan. 11, 10am: Worship, **Joyful Noise**  
Baptism of Christ; Epiphany Stars!  
De-Decorating and Lunch for all

Mon. Jan. 12, 7pm: Council, Zoom

Sun. Jan. 18, 10am: Worship, Communion  
Second Sunday after Epiphany

Mon. Jan. 19: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Sun. Jan. 25, 10am: Worship, Adult Class  
Third Sunday after Epiphany

### FEBRUARY

Sun. Feb. 1, 10am: Worship, Communion  
4th Sunday after Epiphany, Adult Class

Sun. Feb. 8, 10am: Worship, **Joyful Noise**  
5th Sunday after Epiphany, Adult Class

Mon. Feb. 9, 7pm: Council, Zoom

Sat. Feb. 14: **Valentine's Day**

Sun. Feb. 15, 10am: Worship, Communion  
Transfiguration Sunday

Mon. Feb. 16: Presidents' Day

Wed. Feb. 18, 7pm: **ASH WEDNESDAY**

Sun. Feb. 22, 10am: Worship  
First Sunday in Lent

Tues. Feb. 24, 6:30pm: UCC Zoom Study  
Local UCCs Share Lenten Study



### EPIPHANY STARS

On the Sunday closest to Epiphany, January 6, folks in worship at Immanuel will draw a 'star word' from a basket and keep that word through the new year. This year, Sunday, January 4, as in years past, we will draw our 'star word' for 2026 ~ what will your word be?

Much like the star guiding the Magi to Jesus, the 'star word' serves as a guide for faith, meditation, prayer, attitudes and actions. Let's see a few examples:

- ★compassion ★giving ★love
- ★hope ★forgiveness ★praise
- ★laughter ★mercy ★courage

### Our 'Star Word' prayer:

God of light and darkness, we are not always ready to receive your best gifts for us: may your 'epiphany' of love guide our search and bring us to you. It is our habit to turn aside, stumble over, or even reject encounters only later to understand it as a precious gift. Open our hearts that we may accept our 'star word' to mean something for our faith, lives and relationships in different ways at different times. Enable us to live into our lives with intention and faithfulness. Amen.

A Valentine's Day Haiku  
by Seth Bensusen

Forget red and blue,  
Pizza's the color of love,  
And chocolate too.



### **Please Keep These Families in your Prayers:**

Rosemary Davidson  
Dolores and Al Eriksen  
Diane Eriksen  
Samantha Hickerson  
Gary Hickerson

Pam Gross  
Jim O'Toole  
Andy Busse  
Dennis Vail  
Neighbors at Immanuel Residence

Christine Hickerson  
Brad Stone  
Karen Wyka  
Jackie Moline



### **IMMANUEL HOT SHOTS WINTER BALL LEAGUE**

It's time for the next "Hot Shots" basketball season. We have 102 children participating this Winter! Our program has become so popular that an additional team for play has been added. There will be five games from **8am to 1pm**, starting **Saturday, January 17**. **Volunteers** are needed to work the concession stand for the Saturday games. The money made from concessions helps pay for the referee and time-keepers.



**Lend a hand on a Saturday morning, 8am-1pm  
Come for a few hours or stay for all five!**



"The Holiday Magic" is almost over, and now it's time for the great Christmas un-decorating! After Church on Sunday, **January 11, 2026** the plan is to take down the Christmas decorations, with lunch for all afterward. Everyone's help is really appreciated for this festive cleanup fun.

**Our boiler** has been faithfully keeping us warm for **over 70 winters** ~ but now it's struggling to make it through another season. We need your help to bring the heat back! Every **contribution**, big or small, will help us replace or repair this piece of history so our space stays safe, warm, and welcoming for everyone."



## MISSION, CARE AND MEMBERSHIP

Again thank you to all who have donated to Our Lady of Tepeyac School pantry. Because of you, Jane Feurer and friend, Pam Civik, were able to go shopping and fill the car trunk for three trips with specific pantry items to support the children and their families.



Over \$600 was gathered in addition to many pantry donations brought to the church. The eighth grade boys who helped carry the gifts into the school were near tears of joy. Many school families have been afraid to go to work and the mercado (the market): worried they would be unlawfully kidnapped by migra (ICE, DHS), without due process despite legal status.



Students of Our Lady of Tepeyac Elementary School in Chicago's Little Village Community said:  
**"Muchas Gracias"**

We've Just Removed the Christmas Decorations and All of a Sudden ...  
**Lent Begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18**

As with many churches, the United Church of Christ understands the season of Lent as a journey of preparation for following the way of Jesus, mirroring the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry. We are encouraged to engage in prayer, fasting, meditation, Bible study, and acts of service or charity (almsgiving). The core idea is to reorient oneself away from worldly distractions and toward God and neighbor. Lent in the United Church of Christ is about spiritual awakening and preparation to more fully celebrate the joy of Christ's resurrection at Easter.

## Immanuel Sunday School Christmas Pageant

On December 14, we were treated to an amazing Christmas program by the Sunday School children about the symbols of Christmas, made into ornaments for a tree, and the Nativity of Baby Jesus skit. The congregation joined by singing familiar carols. Skits connect the younger audiences and this one definitely put smiles on the faces of the people in the congregation. Jesus taught using stories!



### THANK YOU

Candace Busse, Ann Ritter and Maria Barbarasa for your time helping the young ones in our congregation to share this Bible lesson.





## Happy New Year 2026

**SUN. FEB. 8: SOUPER BOWL SUNDAY LUNCH**

The Immanuel Herald

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