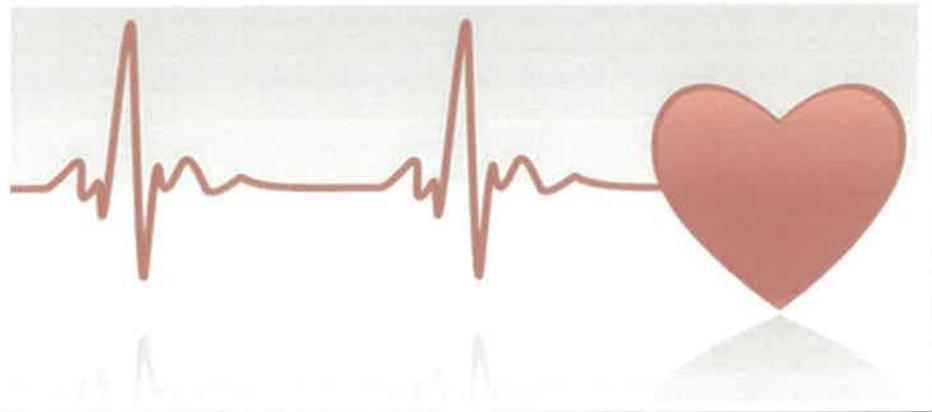


St. Paul's United Church of Christ
47 S. Whiteoak Street
Kutztown, PA 19530
(610) 683-3393

Sunday School for all ages 9 AM
Sunday Worship 10:15 AM

office@stpaulkutztown.org



The Pulse

FEB VOL 57 #2

OF ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, Kutztown, PA

do everything
in Love

1 Corinthians 16:14

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

February 1 Rejoicing Spirits

February 18 Ash Wednesday Services

February 22 Pocket Flag Project

Welcome Our New Custodian

Please welcome Sue Kunkel as the church's new Custodian. Sue started on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, filling a much-needed position for the church that has been vacant since July 2025.

Sue had a successful interview with the Personnel Committee in December and is looking forward to providing good service to the church which she has long been associated with as a member.

Welcome aboard Sue!



DECEMBER 2025

\$28,485.01



\$19,169.85

From the Desk of our Interim Pastor

Dear Members and Friends of St. Paul's UCC,

We are now half-way through the winter in terms of our physical weather. In terms of our spiritual and church weather however, we are in the midst of the church liturgical season of Epiphany.

Epiphany is the celebration of God's Word made flesh. Epiphany reminds us that God can appear to us suddenly in a flash of intuition, a flash of spiritual insight. It testifies that God comes to us not only at Christmas, but anytime our minds and spirits are awake, alert, and open to the Divine Being, the divinity disguised in each of us waiting to be greeted. Epiphany is about discovering and greeting the miracle of Divinity within self and others.

To this end, I wanted to include my annual report article as part of this month's Pulse. (It will also be included in the official Annual Report of our congregation.)

Rev. Jim's Annual Report

(written December 30, 2025)

Members and friends of St. Paul's United Church of Christ,

Time is moving right along: we have been together as Interim Pastor and congregation for over four months now. I am quite enjoying serving you. You are faithful, remarkably hard working and generous. You love God and your church. Your community outreach ministries are impressive. I find myself looking forward each day that I come to the office.

At the beginning of an interim time with a congregation, I lay out my key priorities for the early months. Below are the ones I've had for us, and I feel like we've made pretty good progress with them.

Building effective working relationships with staff and lay leadership

I feel that we have gotten off to a good start, working together well and resolving challenges as they arise. An essential part of my role as Interim Pastor is to resource and advise the basic administrative, organizational, and financial processes of the church. I have been working with individual staff and lay leaders as appropriate to problem solve and improve how we do things.

Getting connected with parishioners – sharing our stories, dreams, challenges.

The "Meet and Greet" gatherings were quite successful: thirty-eight people participated over a period of five weeks. In my experience, effective pastoral ministry needs pastor and parishioners to have some depth of connection and knowledge of each other that goes beyond the superficial. I love learning about your life experiences, joys, dreams, and challenges, and being able to share mine with you. Let's keep at it!

Having inspiring worship services

Judy and I are working well together. Along with the worship team, we have been working hard to introduce more music into Sunday services since music so enhances our worship, as well as finding another Choir Director.

On the technology side, I appreciate the excellent work of our audio-visual team which enables the online access to our worship service so important to those unable to join us in the sanctuary.

Lastly, we've made progress with people hearing me better on Sunday mornings. The new headset is working well.

Pastoral care priorities

Given that our contract is for me to serve you 3/4 time and that I live in Phoenixville, I am not as available in person as your previous pastors may have been. That said, I am grateful for your understanding, and try to be available electronically (phone, email, Zoom) as much as possible.

I am also very grateful for the Home Communion Team who regularly bring Holy Communion to many of our members who are unable to join in person for worship.

Overall, good things are happening. Morale and energy seem to be on the upswing.

Resource & guide the Settled Pastor search process.

Guiding the Settled Pastor search process, including creating the "Long Profile," are high on my priority list, and yours too. Consistory and I created and implemented a transparent and thoughtful process for selecting the Pastor Search Committee (PSC). Thank you to all who submitted nominations. Starting in early 2026, I will work closely with the PSC.

Given that the PSC is forming, and the fact that your interim time began well before I arrived, it's tempting to rush into drawing up the long profile so as to begin soliciting candidates as soon as possible.

Yet, I fear that if we move too quickly, St. Paul's will remain caught in the pastor turnover cycle you've been experiencing in recent years, since a key piece of the process would be missing – digging deeper into the "Who are we?" strategic question in the profile.

Why do I say this? In my time serving you so far, I have become aware of some behaviors that have hampered you in recent years and will surely hinder, if not outright sabotage, your desired future if you don't address them forthrightly. I refer to a troubling lack of respect in how some of you talk to and about each other and how you treat each other. These unhealthy behaviors seem to have embedded themselves into the culture of St. Paul's to such a degree that people don't even notice any more that they are unhealthy and damaging.

These are strong words yet given my responsibility to help prepare you as well as I can for your next chapter, it would be derelict of me to step over this issue. This assessment is based not only on my own direct observations and experience, but also on what you've shared with me in the Meet and Greet gatherings and other times. Some examples:

- "I want to see us communicate better and respect each other better and respect the pastor better."
- "There is a lack of respect for female ministers. We need to respect our pastor as the leader."
- "We definitely need some skills to communicate better."
- "Less bossiness – folks often don't even realize they're doing it, but it's no fun being on the receiving end."
- "We don't communicate well. Don't have open communication. Always big secrets...which makes me feel like I'm not good enough for a job..."
- "If they think you don't agree with them, they won't invite you to join them."
- "It doesn't feel good to be put down."
- "I'm tired of the tension."
- "It's not the work, it's the atmosphere."

- “People need to be genuine with friendship, not “pretend” to be a friend, and then turn on a person because they did something you didn’t like.”
- “When members see something, they don’t like, they gossip and make unfounded accusations, no direct communication.”
- “I don’t trust Consistory to do what I think ought to be done.”

And this assessment by another of you: “St. Paul’s is not a single ‘church’. It is two churches trying to work together with the other, while each ‘church’ politely tries to exert its identity and fundamentally attempts to control the church’s vision. They do not truly wish for a blended, modern church that benefits from each church’s strengths.”

To this, another of you said, “Agreement among members must be in unity, for the betterment of the whole church membership, not individual preferences.” This is spot on. We must come together in unity if we are to have a vital future. The motto of the United Church of Christ, “That they may all be one,” (John 17:21), points to this necessity and reflects the UCC’s commitment to unity among its diverse members.

Unity doesn’t mean everyone thinking alike or having exactly the same beliefs. However, I suggest that it does mean treating each other with respect and learning from each other’s differing experiences and viewpoints. It takes seriously a core element of biblical faith that each of us is created in the image of God.

In the 2024 short profile for the transitional pastor search, you wrote, “We are at a crossroads. We have discovered that individually and as a collective congregation we need to develop more open and honest communication with our pastor and ourselves.”

While the congregation has fallen into some bad habits, there is much to be celebrated, as I mentioned earlier. There is a path forward. It will require a willingness to do the hard and sometimes scary work of examining our thinking, our allegiances, our behaviors, and learning new skills and ways of being together in Christian ministry. For example, I suggest that each of us ask ourselves, “What am I doing or how am I contributing to this unhealthy pattern?” and “How can I help to make it better?”

If you are perhaps thinking that you aren’t contributing to this pattern at all, I respectfully suggest that you think again. Each of us is part of the culture that is producing and supporting this behavior.

We’re in this together,

Rev. Jim

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace,
 where there is hatred, let me sow love,
 where there is injury, pardon,
 where there is doubt, faith,
 where there is despair, hope,
 where there is darkness, light,
 and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as
 to console; to be understood, as to understand,
 to be loved, as to love; For it is in giving that we receive,
 it is in pardoning, that we are pardoned,
 and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.

When A Person Changes

Change can feel overwhelming and uncertain. It is easy to resist because stepping into the unknown requires trust, faith, and surrender. But when God initiates changes in someone's life, it is always purposeful and good. He does not just transform, "what we do"; He renews who we are at the very core of our being.

The bible promises that through Christ, we become a new creation. This transformation does not mean we will not face struggles and setbacks. It means God is continually working within us to mold us into His image. He takes our brokenness, regrets, and even our sins, and replaces them with hope, strength, and a heart that beats in alignment with His will.

Personal change can also be a testimony of God's power to others. When people see a new kindness in your words, an unexpected peace in your trials, or a quiet confidence that stems from faith, they may be drawn closer to God themselves. Transformation does not happen overnight, but it is a process fueled by His Spirit, filled with growth, and blossoming into something beautiful.

Sometimes, the change God brings starts small – a softened heart, a more generous spirit, or a stronger commitment to Him. Other times, it is radical, as He breaks chains of sin, heals deep wounds, or redirects an entire life. Regardless of how it happens, God's power to make us new is real and certain. He is always ready to do a transforming work in anyone who seeks Him.

Take a moment today to reflect on the ways God has worked in your life. Celebrate where you have seen growth or healing and trust Him for the areas where you still long for change. Remember, it is not about striving for perfection; it is about daily allowing God to shape you into who He has created you to be.

- Dr. Joe Pettigrew

Church Staff

Rev. Dr. James Latimer.....Interim Pastor
Barbara Merkel Admin Assistant
Judy Heffley Organist
Donna Sheaffer Bell Choir Director
Cathy Dill.....Bell Choir Director
Sue Kunkel.....Custodian

Church Officers

Kathy LandisConsistory President
Sherry Leinbach.....Consistory V.P.
Gerald Silberman....Consistory Secretary
Laraine Wuchter..... Treasurer
Marjorie WeidaFinancial Secretary

St. Paul's UCC belongs to the Covenant Association, Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Association Website:

<https://covenantassociation.org>

Keystone Conference Website:

<https://keystoneucc.org>

United Church of Christ website:

<https://www.ucc.org>

PASTOR SEARCH TEAM

Rev. Jim is coordinating with our Pastor Search Committee to ensure a smooth and prayerful transition for our congregation.

Daryn Keim, Chair
Mandy Boyer
Barbara Krause
Sue Kunkel
Ray Oswald
Keith Wuchter

REJOICING SPIRITS of EASTERN BERKS COUNTY

January 4th was the first Rejoicing Spirits worship service of the new year. Pastor James Schlegel was the lead pastor. His message was The Gift. Pastor Jim spoke about Jesus being “the gift” followed by a skit about the gifts the wisemen brought to the manger. The skit featured only two wisemen (Keith Wuchter and Pastor Jim) discussing the gifts they were bringing to the baby. The skit was very funny, especially the gift of myrrh purchased on Amazon!

After the service we adjourned to fellowship hall for a snack, a craft and sharing highlights of the Christmas season.

Pastor Susan will be the lead pastor for the February 1st service. Please consider joining us!

Each month I will be highlighting one of our Rejoicers on the hallway bulletin board. This month’s Rejoicer, Hannah, was very happy to see her pictures and profile on the board! She even asked her mother to take a picture.

Respectfully submitted,
Erin Webb, Co-chair of Rejoicing Spirits of Eastern Berks County



Hannah in deep conversation with Keith.



Meet Louise, our newest member of Rejoicing Spirits



Evan enjoying fellowship.



Greetings from Consistory

The Consistory met on January 14, 2026, and here is a summary of the meeting. You can always learn more by reading the minutes as posted on the bulletin board outside the office each month. According to Personnel, the cleaning of the church has been resolved. One outside organization will come once a month to perform the heavy jobs like wet mopping and other more strenuous tasks. Sue Kunkel has taken on the job of Custodian (instead of Sexton.)

There may also be a group of high school students to help occasionally as a part of their work experience. We thank all those church members who have stepped up to help in the meantime. You now have been relieved of your housecleaning tasks. However, if you see anything amiss, please let the Property Committee know. Individual committees and other groups will still be responsible for setting up the fellowship hall as needed for their gatherings.

On Sunday, November 23, the congregation had nominated members for the Pastor Search team. The team is now complete consisting of three people who are continuing from their experience on the Transition Team set up by Pastor Deb—Mandy Boyer, Sue Kunkel, and Keith Wuchter-- and three more nominated in November by the congregation and approved by the Consistory—Daryn Keim, Barbara Krause, and Ray Oswald. The nominating team recommended Daryn Keim to be the Chair of the Pastor Search and the Consistory approved. The team will be meeting with Pastor Jim in the next couple of weeks.

Here are some details of the R & K Sandwich Sale being a fundraiser for the church and headed by Louise Moyer. Yes, these are the same kind of sandwiches offered for Vacation Bible School funding. Please pick up an order form that Barbara Merkel has placed on the table outside the office. The pick-up date will be Tuesday, February 24th from 5:00-6:30 PM. Louise will be taking orders on February 1, 8, and 15. To make this a successful fundraiser, she also encourages you to take orders from others like neighbors, friends, and family. In addition, consider taking orders from coworkers at your place of employment as other members have done in the past with great success.

At the meeting, the Consistory elected its President, VP and Secretary. According to the bylaws, all officers must be selected from within the Consistory, from those who will be continuing next year and those joining in January. Jerry Silberman was nominated to serve as Consistory Secretary, Sherry Leinbach as Vice President, and Kathy Landis as President. All were approved unanimously to serve for 2026. Please pray that God will continue to guide them as they consider suggestions and make decisions to help the church move forward to be what God is calling St. Paul's to be. Feel free to ask questions or offer positive ideas to be part of a unified, healthy congregation, and lend your support to the Consistory and St. Paul's leader Reverend Jim.

At the end of the meeting, the Consistory recited the Prayer of St. Francis followed by Rev. Jim leading a hands-on blessing of those members who are leaving the Consistory.

You can learn more by reading the Consistory 2025 Annual Report, and the Pastor's Annual Report in this issue of the Pulse as well as St. Paul's 2025 Annual Report, which will be sent by email with a few printed copies also available in church.

"Let me be an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love, etc." (St. Francis)

Submitted by Kathy Landis

YOUNG AT HEART



On Wednesday, December 17, 2025, the sanctuary was filled with the energetic voices of forty-three Shaynah Kinner children singing their Christmas program to 182 of their leaders, family and friends. Yes, about 225 people filled the sanctuary at St. Paul's that morning. As expected, it was an exciting and endearing time for the children to perform

all the tunes and motions they had learned and practiced over and over to thrill parents and grandparents. It is to the credit of many leaders, including those from St. Paul's, (Denise Keim, Rosalie Angstadt, and Priscilla Farber) that the young children remain in their seats and exhibit good behavior. Afterwards, everyone met in the Fellowship Hall for an abundance of refreshments provided by Young at Heart volunteers and donated refreshments from church members. Many of the family members expressed their appreciation for the church's hospitality. Shaynah Kinner is planning to return in December of 2026.

Here is the schedule of planned events occurring in 2026:

- **January 21-Rev. Harry Serio, PA Dutch and Celtic Spirituality**
- **February 18-Annette Fisher, Greeting Card history and making a card.**
- **March 18- Dannenhower Honey Farm**
- **April 15- Jane Choc, Art and Stuffed Animals**

Many thanks to our presenters, but also to the Young at Heart team: Marcia Keiser, Sharon Kozlowski, Sandi Madeira. Also, kudos to Barb Merkel for support, printing materials, creating the posters, and advertising. And thank you to those members who are generous in donating refreshments.

Young at Heart 2026 SCHEDULE: Every third Wednesday of the month, 10 AM – 12 noon. Come, bring a friend and enjoy the program and fellowship. Sign up on the attendance sheet posted outside the office.

If you have any ideas for presenters, please let one of our YAH team members know about it.

Submitted by Kathy Landis

Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ's first **Annual Meeting** will be held **June 8-7** at Millersville University in Millersville. Overnight accommodations will be on campus as well as the DoubleTree Hilton in Lancaster. Registration will begin in March 2026.

Our theme is **"Joy at the Table Together"** and our centering scripture is Acts 2:46-47 "Every day they met together, breaking bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God." The meeting will include a Service of Consecration for Keystone Conference.

Speakers will include Rev. Dr. Marcia McFee, author of *Think Like a Filmmaker: Sensory-Rich Worship for Unforgettable Messages*; Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ; Rev. Dr. Mary Luti, author of *Do This: Communion for Just and Courageous Living*; Rev. Greg Edwards, Executive Director of POWER Interfaith; Secretary Russell Redding, PA Secretary of Agriculture; and Rev. Freeman Palmer, Conference Minister for the Central Atlantic Conference.

Save the Date!

"Joy at the Table Together"

Keystone Conference's
FIRST Annual Meeting



June 5 -7, 2026
Millersville University

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Evelyn Kistler	February 1
Pamela Kemmerer	February 3
Debra Schaeffer	February 3
Kate Swan	February 3
Ronald Reinhard	February 5
Abigail Hilbert	February 7
Kay Schwalm	February 7
Gerald Silberman	February 8
Ronald Angstad	February 9
Philip Schmoyer	February 12
Ronald Metzger, Jr.	February 14
Judy Daub	February 17
Denise Keim	February 17
Cynthia Schaeffer	February 17
Leslie Stump	February 17
Erma Gruber	February 20
Greg Stricker	February 21
Benjamin Herman	February 22
Louise Moyer	February 22
Wayne Lobb	February 23
Reed Garner	February 26
Jean Follweiler	February 27
Brian Balthaser	February 28



GRACE NOTES

"I want to let everyone know how much I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the Sunday School classes for the gift bags that I get from them. Although I do not attend in person the Sunday church services, I do watch every week the service on my Ipad. I still feel that I am an active member because I see everyone each Sunday. Going to church has always been a "Sunday thing" my entire life and I am so happy with this technology which is a blessing to me."

- Ann Burrows

A MUSICAL EXPEDITION

ON DECEMBER 13, 2025, an adventurous group from St. Paul's took a drive to the United Church of Christ at Valley Forge on a potentially snowy day. Judy and Colin Heffley, Carl Mantz, and Kathy Landis were excited to hear Rev. Jim sing with the Concordia Choral Arts in "A Celebration of Treasured Stories and Enduring Spirit of Christmas." There were Christmas tunes from Broadway shows, movies, beautiful melodies. Pastor Jim surprised us with a bass solo part. It was a fun, memorable afternoon.



TRAINING



You could save a life!

Valuable Emergency Medical Course

Available at St. Paul's

The American Heart Association will deliver first-class training in lifesaving skills of first aid, CPR, and AED use right here at St. Paul's. A certified trainer from the American Heart Association will train you on site at no charge. You will prepare for accidents, emergencies for yourself, children, grandchildren, friends, church members, neighbors.

The course is designed to meet workplace safety and regulatory requirements. It can also be taken by anyone who wants to be prepared to act in an emergency. Upon successful completion, students earn a course completion card valid for 2 years.

Ideal for: Anyone who has little to no medical training that wants first aid, CPR and AED training, as well as the public, childcare workers, teachers, coaches, and babysitters. You will have the opportunity to practice what you learn in the class!

The trainer does not charge a fee for your participation in the class. She is a well-experienced trainer and dedicates her time to providing training to as many individuals as possible to ensure safety and well-being. If you choose, the only cost would be for an official manual at \$25 to take home. The class is for five to ten people. Schedule is for a Saturday in February or March, date yet to be determined. SIGN UP on the posting outside the office AND INVITE OTHERS (friends, family, etc.) Ask Barb or Kathy with any questions.

[CPR is Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation; AED is Automated External Defibrillator.]

Worship—10:15 AM (**FELLOWSHIP AFTER WORSHIP EACH SUNDAY**)

Sunday School—9:00 AM Adult SS 8:45 AM

Office Hours; Tuesday—Thursday, 8 AM—12:00 PM

FEBRUARY 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Pastor Sunday 3 PM Rejoicing Spirits	2 6 PM Yoga	3 10 AM Worship Mtg. 7 PM Bible Study	4	5 5-9 PM KB Cougars 6-9 PM Lions Club (FH) 6:15 PM Bells	6	7 9:30 AM Yoga
8	9 6 PM Yoga	10 7 PM Financial Meeting w/ Rep (L)	11 7 PM Consistory	12 5-9 PM KB Cougars 6:15 PM Bells	13 7:30 PM Kutztown Music Society— Charlie Zahm	14 9 AM Prayer Walk 9:30 AM Yoga
15 PULSE DEADLINE	16 6 PM Yoga 6:30 PM Fellowship (FH) 6:45 PM Missions	17 6-8 PM Relay K-Town at Heart 7 PM Bible Study	18 10 AM—Noon Young 7:30 PM Ash Wednesday Service	19 2-9 PM H & H Quilt 5-9 PM KB Cougars 6-8:30 PM Lions Club (L)	20	21 9:30 AM Yoga
22 Pocket Flag Project	23 6 PM Yoga 7 PM Property	24 7 PM Christian Ed	25 6 PM Personnel (L)	26 5-9 PM KB Cougars 6:15PM Bells	27	28 9:30 AM Yoga

