

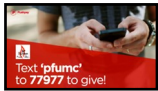


Happy February Anniversary to...

02	Terry & Sally Nohr	06	Bob & Nada Romanov
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Happy February Birthday to...

02	Cheryl Hamilton	09	Annette McCarty	21	Lerryn Darnell
03	Ruth Michko	10	Bob Romanov	21	Shannon Liesch
04	Andrea Massow	10	Sharon Kaiser	22	Amanda Massow
05	Denise Pollachek	10	Bill Liesch	24	Jayne Mantz
05	Nada Romanov	10	Madelyn Blakely	25	Leigh Coffey
06	Virginia Phillips	15	Ron Mauer	25	Betty Evensen
06	Brooke Jackson	15	Lillian Harbart	28	Allison Centracchio
06	Jack Lenburg	18	Kaitlyn Adkins	28	Mike Hopkins
07	Tod Blakely	19	Reese Welch	28	Don Kremke
07	Eddie Karsten	20	Tony Centracchio	28	Henry Ryan
08	Fred Blakely	20	Allen Long		



*Here is a convenient way to tithe!
Try PushPay with your mobile device or online!*

Have you ever come to worship and realized you left your offering envelope at home or learned of a worthwhile mission you want to support only to realize you did not bring your checkbook? Wouldn't it be a blessing to be able to give back to God in a matter of seconds using your smartphone or tablet, laptop or desktop?

We have partnered with a company named Pushpay to help us move into the 21st Century with our financial stewardship. Fewer people write checks much less use cash, especially younger adults.

Pushpay will allow us to give one-time gifts, recurring gifts or special gifts using debit or credit cards or ACH transactions from our bank accounts. It is quite easy to get started. Simply text 'pfumc' to 77977 and follow the instructions on your screen. As part of the process you will be able to download the Pushpay app for either iPhone or Android.



The Witness

ISSUE II

FEBRUARY 2020

Portage First United Methodist Church

Pastors Michael Lawson & Tara Keehn

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER



Our Mission and Vision

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. At Portage First United Methodist Church we live out that mission when we love God, love others, and offer Jesus.

 **Note from Pastor Michael ...**

THE CALL TO MINISTRY

When I received my call to ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church I was 17 years old and had only been attending church for a few months. The call to become a Pastor is just one of many expressions of ministry. It grows out of the waters of baptism and underlines the ministry which God has given to all Christians.

In the United Methodist Church, pastors seeking ordination spend years in study and preparation, pass several examinations, and must be approved after several interviews by both District and Conference Boards of ordained ministry. It is when all of this is done that we arrive at an Annual Conference and the ordination service begins. The Pastor kneels before the altar, the Bishop, your district superintendent, several members of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and two other ordained clergy of your own choosing. Placing your hands upon the Bible and after the laying on of hands you rise changed and yet the same. It's a beautiful moment.

All of this begins in a local church. It is they who first recommend you for ministry. It is they who over see your growth and help you grow in grace and mercy. Some day that I am a good preacher but I didn't start out that way. I grew into it. Watched over by the holy saints of Frankton First UMC. I wouldn't be who I am today unless my home church nurtured me.

All this leads me to a gift that we have in our midst. Hasn't it been a gift to watch each Sunday as young people lead us in worship? I have enjoyed each Sunday as they encounter the struggles of our aging systems and overcome. I have enjoyed watching as their presence become more and more comfortable, their presentation improves, and as they grow as church leaders.

Zach Rudd grew up traveling with his family making music. He knows sound technology better than almost anyone. In many ways, watching him grow into his role of both youth minister and worship leader. I am personally excited to see where his ministry will take him.

Brendan Herr, our accompanist, Is a top student in his high school in Crown Point. He holds dreams of become both a music teacher, and a music director in a church. He regularly teaches beginning piano to children and he is always ready to give a helping hand to any ministry here at Portage First. When Brendan came to interview it was during the Rummage Sale set up. He dropped off his application and then he asked me if we needed any help. He has a couple hours and he could stay! Needless to say this kind of willingness is what will make him a wonderful church leader.

So in today's newsletter, I want to say thank you to God for the gift of watching our young people grow into the next generation of Church leaders. We are truly blessed to be witnesses to what God can do in the heart and lives of our young people. Thank you God for this gift.

Many thanks to Betty Sergent, our office administrator, for her service among us this last year. Betty has improved our communication, our environment, our organization, and her kind and gentle personality has been a marvelous representation of Christian hospitality. Betty is taking a new position with the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. We are thankful for her work among us and wish her well as she moves onto this marvelous opportunity. Please remember Betty in your prayers as she transitions into her new job.



 **News from Missions and Outreach ...**

Portage First, YOU ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE! The Portage Township Food Pantry is serving over 500 people, and your donations are enabling them to do so! Please consider donating non-perishable protein items (tuna fish, canned chicken, ravioli, spam, etc.) this month by leaving them in the grocery cart in the Fellowship Hall. Thank you!

Every week some Portage Township residents receive vouchers from the Trustee's Office qualifying them to obtain free food from one of the food pantries. Occasionally, however, a family will receive their voucher but no pantry will be available to provide assistance. Picture, if you will, a hungry mother or father with their children on a Friday, being told that no Pantry would be open until Monday. The Portage First Emmaus Group has offered to oversee a mission providing boxes of food for these people through a program they call "PROVISIONS IN A PINCH". Each emergency box is filled with enough food items to last until the family can visit a food pantry. Instead of food, the group will be accepting cash donations to pack each box with a fixed menu. To help in this worthy mission your charitable contributions should be made to "PROVISIONS IN A PINCH". (With this new mission, we will no longer need the plastic tub for emergency food donations in the Narthex.)

Lent begins on Wednesday, February 26. Can you spare some small change during the Lent Season to help bring God's Word to people in third world countries? World Missions is an organization which helps people in many ways. One of their programs takes small, solar powered audio Bibles to people who have never heard the Word of God. Printed Bibles are not yet available in all languages, and where they are, not all people can read. These audio Bibles are a great solution to the problem. We will make small change banks available for people to take home and try to fill during the season of Lent. One filled bank, on the average, can purchase one audio Bible!! Let's see how many Bibles we can fund!

 **From the Finance Committee...**

Portage First United Methodist Church Finance Update		Year to Date 2019	
		Non Designated Giving	\$337,527.50
Net Year To Date		(\$1,718.38)	
December 2019		Debt Reduction Giving	\$26,961.00
Non Designated Giving	\$32,088.41	Debt Reduction Expense	\$28,397.63
Operating Expenses	\$32,150.83	Net Debt Reduction	\$1,436.63
Debt Reduction Giving	\$3,209.00	Overall Net Current & Debt	(\$3,155.01)
Debt Reduction Expense	\$2,080.92	Apportionment Paid	\$41,723.82
Apportionment Paid	\$6,121.16		



Car & Pet Show ...

This year we are looking at the possibilities of having a Car & Pet Show on Saturday, August 15th. There will be a sign up sheet at the Connection Center for anyone interested in participating. There are numerous areas with both shows that you can elect to share your abilities.

At this time I am teaming up with one of the fellows from my car club, Bruce Sanders (Winamac Old Auto Club), who actually envisioned doing a combined show. We hope this will open up a larger interest to the congregation and the community. At this time, we are going over the logistics, liabilities, and the possible charities for funds raised.

If this sounds like something you would like to participate in, sign up at the connection center or if you have suggestions regarding either show, Please contact Steve Massow. Thank you!

Annual Spaghetti Dinner ...

The annual Spaghetti Dinner will be on Saturday, February 22 beginning at 4:30 PM. Plan on an evening of delicious food, fellowship, and fun. This fundraiser will go toward helping our kids get to camp. Please be sure to reserve your spot on the sign-up sheet located at the Connection Center!

Pancake Breakfast ...

Cub Scout Pack 487 will be having a Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, March 7 from 8-11 AM here at the church. The cost is a free will offering. Please invite all your family and friends! Thank you for your support. Any questions, please contact Kim Adkins.

Attention — Church Family and Friends ...

<i>What:</i>	Guest Speaker and Breakfast from Society of St. Andrew – Feeding America's Hungry
<i>When:</i>	Saturday, February 1, 2020 at 8:00 AM
	<i>Please RSVP</i> Mike Matthew (219) 508-9616 cell

The United Methodist Men are hosting a guest speaker, Dawn Barnes – Director of Indiana, from the Society of St. Andrews on this date. Society of St. Andrew is a United Methodist Church supported and hosted nationwide ministry that helps to feed the hungry in America. Dawn will come and share with us about this ministry. We would love to have you come join us for breakfast and a chance to hear more about this ministry the we the United Methodist church support. Invite a friend or neighbor and come out for.

Please RSVP so we can amply provide for everyone at breakfast.

Sincerely, Mike Matthew, United Methodist Men



Note from Pastor Tara ...

Hello! February is the month of Love. It is also Black History Month. Both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi were believers in nonviolence as an act beyond simply not attacking your enemy, but standing up for what you believe in using the force of love and truth. Gandhi did not accept Christianity but he did think Jesus was one of history's great teachers. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was able to connect Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence to Jesus's words like "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

We have come a long way since the day of the Civil Rights movement, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Racism is still alive. People of color are still killed because of their skin. There is still a need for movements like #BlackLivesMatter.

This month, I encourage you to pray for your enemies intentionally. Pray for those who persecute you. Remember that they too have faced hardships and although you may not agree with their opinions or actions, whatever they have faced in their life created that person to be that way and they are in need of God's love and grace immensely. Pray for them. It will not be easy.

Trustee's Corner ...

A New Year and new opportunities to plan exciting things at Portage First. The trustees are busy prioritizing projects that will enhance the properties of the church. In the works is designing and installing handrails on the chancel steps. We also must address the issue of our leaky roof. A major and expensive project will be the replacement of our flat roof. Recently we have had some serious leaks that had to be addressed with temporary patching etc. However, it is now necessary to move forward with replacing the entire flat roof over the education wing and fellowship hall. More information on a capital campaign and how you can help provide funds for this project will be forthcoming. Initial steps in the planned kitchen facelift will begin too. They will include new paint, tile, and ceiling lights. At our February 21 meeting, we will be developing a task list for our May spring cleanup day. We hope many will come out for a morning of fellowship, food and get engaged in helping spruce up the church building. Until then, if you see something that needs to be repaired or replaced, please complete a form found in the trustees' box in the narthex. A genuine thank you to Bob Dixon who served on trustees for the past 3 years and a warm welcome to Steve Schulz who has joined our team.

Operation Christmas Child ...

A New Year and another opportunity to make a difference for children around the world. That is what Operation Christmas Child is all about. I am happy to report that our 300 shoe boxes cleared the distribution processing center and are now on their way to children who will hear the good news of Jesus Christ. More than 100 countries will be recipients of shoe boxes bringing some joy to children ages 2 to 14. It is just a simple gift, a shoe box, filled with basic needs such as toothbrush, paper, pencils, wash cloth and soap and toys but for the children it is a message of hope from people they will never meet offering the love of Jesus. A Christmas decorated box will once again appear in the



narthex for collection of items from our congregation. NEW for this year is that we will accept new Christmas cards of any type, especially those that would otherwise be thrown away, that come in the mail from other charitable organizations and pillowcases which will be made into drawstring sundresses. Last year we met our goal of 300 boxes. This year we are aiming for 1,000 boxes. It is exciting just to know that a shoe box could change the spiritual life of a child. So please consider donating school supplies, coloring books and crayons, toothbrushes, wash cloths, bars of soap, glue sticks, stickers, small stuffed animals, puzzles, hot wheels, small craft kits or small toys and balls, band aids, hair accessories, personal hygiene products, socks, underwear, marbles, playing card games, flip flops, and even gently used sun dresses, shorts, and T-shirts. We can recycle pencils, erasers, crayons, and larger size pill bottles. Anything is welcomed as long as it is child appropriate and will fit in a shoe box. Thank you in advance for participating in one of the many Portage First's mission ministries.

Royal Family Kids Camp ...

Before you know it, camp will be here for 80+ foster children, ages 7 to 12. For over 20 years, Portage First has provided a backpack for each child which includes a towel, wash cloth, blanket, 3 in 1 (shampoo, rinse & body wash) or 2 in 1 (shampoo and body wash) which can be found at the dollar tree store, comb or brush, toothbrush, and toothpaste. In preparation of camp week in July, we will be hosting a "all church birthday breakfast fundraiser" on **March 8** between services. Please consider bringing an item to the breakfast or making a monetary donation and enjoy breakfast. We also accept *gently used* bathing suits and swim trunks, clothing (especially jeans for horseback riding), new pillows, and twin bed sheet sets. Adopting a table and decorating it with a theme will also be available. A sign-up sheet will be at the Connection Center. Come celebrate your birthday month and help us fill the backpacks!

Ash Wednesday ...

This February 26, 2020 we will begin the Holy Season of Lent with an evening worship service at 7:00 PM. Come share in the season as we prepare our hearts and minds for the season of Lent and the celebration of Easter.

First Friday Fellowship ...

First Friday Fellowship will meet Friday, February 7, 2020 at 5:00 PM at the Jade Garden (Chinese), 3022 N. Calumet Avenue, Valparaiso. Anyone interested in attending, please RSVP to Sandra Robinson at (219) 764-8433 by Thursday, February 6th.



SPRC News ...

Well, it's a new year with new beginnings! Many of you know that Betty Sergent, our office administrator, has moved on to a new employment opportunity. The application process is in the works and our prayers are with Betty in her new venture. Also, please pray for God to send us someone that will be as proficient and a wonderful fit such as Betty has been this past year at Portage First.

Last September, as many of you know, the custodian position was filled by Brenda Brueckheimer. Unfortunately just a few days after she was hired, she was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Please keep Brenda in your prayers and also Connie Ellefson (Brenda's sister) in your prayers.

As a result, Brenda has withdrawn her request for employment. The Staff-Parish Relations Committee has been interviewing new candidates for the custodial position in hopes of filling this position soon.

Thanks to all who have helped and continue to help and even doing some of the small things to keep our church clean and looking fresh. Afterall, it is everyone's church home and by taking responsibility of ownership in God's House, is a reflection of how we can honor our Lord. In the meantime, please continue to keep Brenda in your prayers. Also, may God send us the best person for the job.

If you would like to send Brenda a card, her address is: Brenda Brueckheimer, 501 Francis Street, Porter, IN 46304.

Thank you and God bless, Steve Massow, SPRC Chair

Family Promise ...

We have made some great progress and are very excited. We have our first board in place and have elected officers. This allows us to begin applying for some much-needed grant funding that will support our main operations. We were also able to get the rain damage fixed upstairs at the Resource Center (farmhouse at Crossroads) along with some additional repairs made in the kitchen. More churches in the area have agreed to be a host church and/or serve as a support church. We are in the process of updating our website and social media.

We truly thank you, Portage First, for your continued support. We are very hopeful about the coming year and know we would not be where we are without you.

Something's Fishy — Can you help? ...

On February 22 and 23, we are planning to help staff an INDOOR children's area at "Fish On", a fishing and outdoor show sponsored by the Portage Chamber of Commerce. "Fish On" at Woodland Park, will run from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. each day. Please consider signing up to come out for a couple hours, talk with event visitors, and help the children have a good time by engaging them in fun activities dealing with fish. We'll provide the activities! (Hey...we could consider it an opportunity to "fish for men"!) Please sign up for a two-hour time slot at the Connection Center.

From your Missions and Outreach Team, "Thanks for all you do!"



At times we still struggle with placing the self-imposed borders on our daily thoughts and ministry. These restrictions that hinder and slow us from transforming into who God is raising us up to be.

In Hebrews 11: 1, the writer states “Faith shows the reality of what we hope for, it is the evidence of things we cannot see.” (This is an example of what trust looks like.) Also, Martin Luther is quoted as saying “Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace.”

God continues to amaze as He utilizes some awesome and compelling means of showing His presence and influence in our lives. Ways that both awaken our soul and grow us further into who He wants us to be as we serve in His earthly kingdom.

In the contemporary song “Oceans Where My Feet May Fail” the lyrics are about the experience Peter and the disciples had that stormy night on the Sea of Galilee as they continued their journey of committing to follow and learn from Jesus, and to trust their future lives to Him and His cause.

<i>Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders.</i>	<i>In the presence of my Savior.</i>
<i>Let me walk upon the waters.</i>	<i>I will call upon your name.</i>
<i>Wherever You would call me.</i>	<i>Keep my eyes above the waves.</i>
<i>Take me deeper than the feet could ever wander.</i>	<i>My soul will rest in your embrace.</i>
<i>And my faith will be made stronger.</i>	<i>I am yours; you are mine.</i>

May we seek daily to surround ourselves with other Followers of the Way and together put our trust in Him and Him alone – without borders; without restraints.

Final Thought: While the bulk of the scripture may have centered on Peter's actions, the final words were of the disciple's saying - “Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” Another sign of trust being formed.

Prayer: Holy Spirit of God, guide me as I seek to become more of who you are raising me up to be. Give me the boldness and confidence to seek you and to trust your will for my ministry efforts. Empower me, Lord Jesus, to be a shining light to the people you put in my path, so they will see you in and through my love for them. May we trust you and each other as the 12 trusted you and your ways. It is in your holy name we pray. Amen.

Hope to see you for breakfast on Saturday, February 1, 2020 at 8:00 AM.

Because of Him, Mike Matthew

Pretty in Pink ...

Pretty in Pink is the theme of our 70th Valentine Tea and we would be honored if you would join us on February 8, 2020, 1:00 PM at First United Methodist Church, 121 E. 7th Street, **Michigan City**, Indiana. There is nothing quite like an afternoon of music, goodies, tea, friendship, and love. Please join us as we celebrate the memories of the past and look forward to making new friends and memories.

We would be tickled PINK if you would join us in celebrating 70 years of community, friendship, and love. If you were unaware of this on going tea, please know that this tea has always been and will always be a gift to all in our community and surrounding area.



United Methodist Women ...

Our next meeting time will be February 7th at 9:30 AM. Join us for POTLUCK FEBRUARY Breakfast snacks, this month, will be "Potluck." If you would like, bring a dish to share and join in the conversation and fellowship! We would LOVE to see you there!

United Methodist Men ...

Dear brothers in Christ – praying your holiday times with your family and friends have been a warm and wonderful time of sharing and fellowship with many memories made.

At our upcoming Saturday, February 1 UMM meeting, we have a guest speaker – Dawn Barnes, the Indiana director from Society of St. Andrews (Feeding America's Hungry). She will come and share with us in this much needed ministry that is a national United Methodist Church sponsored ministry. Also, we would like to invite our whole church family and friends to also come and hear what Dawn has to share, so all are invited.

Below I would like to share with you a UMM devotional from Thirty Stops on the Journey - “We Are Called to Trust” by Jim Boesch.

At the center of all servant leadership development training, the best teaching model Jesus demonstrated was with the 12 disciples after he called them to follow Him and also, as He was equipping them to become fishermen for people.

An important stage of Jesus' leadership influencing of these men centered on building their unconditional, unrestricted trust of Him. This trust would prove to be paramount to the success Jesus had in preparing them to be servant leaders who would establish His church for the ages that still thrives in this 21st century.

One biblical example of Jesus seizing an opportunity to build this trust:

Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him, they were terrified. “It's a Ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.” Peter replied, “Lord if it is you tell me to come out to you on the water.” “Come,” Jesus said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he felt the wind and saw the waves, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the winds died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” - Matthew 14: 25-33

Instead of saying “why did you doubt me,” Jesus could just have well said “why did you NOT trust?”

What stopped Peter from concluding his water-walking journey was the borders of his human thinking that people just don't do that. He was internally guided by what he couldn't do himself rather than by the possibility of what he could do through Christ. That's a huge difference!

