THE EVANGEL

Ministry Highlights from the First Presbyterian Church of Meadville
November/December 2026

Greetings from our Pastor

CELEBRATE GENEROSITY!

Planning to Give God Our Firsts

"You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us." — 2 Corinthians 9:11

We all know that planning matters. We plan our schedules, prepare for retirement, set aside money for unexpected expenses, and make decisions about what matters most to us. But have we ever stopped to ask whether we plan for generosity?

It is easy to give whatever happens to be left over at the end of the month, if there is anything left at all. But Scripture invites us to something deeper. Rather than treating generosity as an afterthought, we are invited to make it an intentional part of our lives. Not because God needs our money, but because our hearts need to be shaped by the grace of the God who has given us everything.

That is the heart of our stewardship theme this year:

Celebrate Generosity!

We have much to celebrate at First Presbyterian Church of Meadville. We see God's faithfulness in our worship, in the care we offer one another, in our ministries to children and families, in the relationships that sustain us, and in the ways we reach beyond our walls to serve our neighbors. We are grateful for those who have faithfully supported this congregation through the years, and we are excited about the opportunities God may place before us in the years ahead.

At the same time, we recognize that this is a difficult season for many people. The cost of groceries, utilities, housing, health care, and everyday necessities continues to put pressure on household budgets. Some are living on fixed incomes. Others are navigating unexpected expenses, caring for family members, or simply trying to make ends meet. We understand that not everyone is in a position to give more financially, and we never want anyone to feel that their faithfulness is measured by the amount of money they contribute.

Jesus made that clear when He watched people bringing their offerings to the temple. Among them was a poor widow who gave two small coins, worth very little in monetary terms. Yet Jesus called His disciples' attention to her gift. Others had given out of their abundance, but she had given out of her poverty, putting in everything she had to live on (Mark 12:41–44).

Jesus was not impressed by the size of the offering. He saw the heart behind it. Her gift reminds us that generosity cannot be measured simply by dollars and cents. A small gift given faithfully and sacrificially may represent a much greater offering than a large gift that costs its giver very little. God is not asking us to give what we do not have. He is asking us to consider what it means to give Him our hearts.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the Apostle Paul describes generosity as an expression of God's grace at work within us. He reminds us that Christ, though rich, became poor for our sake so that through His poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our generosity begins there, not with guilt or obligation, but with gratitude for what Jesus has already done for us.

Paul also tells us that each person should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). Faithful giving is a prayerful response to God's grace. It is not a competition with our neighbors, and it is not a test of whether we can reach a particular percentage.

Still, there is an important difference between giving whatever happens to be left over and making a deliberate decision to be generous. When we plan our giving, we are saying that God matters enough to have a place in our decisions from the beginning. We are learning to offer God our firsts rather than simply our leftovers.

So, what might that look like for us? Here is a simple way to think about it:

P — *Pray for a generous heart.*

Begin by asking God to shape your heart. Thank Him for His faithfulness, consider the blessings He has entrusted to you, and ask Him to show you how you might share those blessings with others. Instead of asking, "What is the least I can give?" ask, "Lord, how can I use what You have given me to bless others?" Let that prayer be shaped by both gratitude and honesty about your circumstances.

L — *Look honestly at what God has entrusted to you.*

Take time to consider your financial situation, your responsibilities, and the season of life in which you find yourself. For some, generosity may mean increasing a gift. For others, it may mean beginning a regular pattern of giving, maintaining a faithful commitment despite rising costs, or offering a smaller amount than they once could. There is no need to compare your circumstances with anyone else's. The goal is to make a thoughtful, faithful decision about what you can offer.

A — *Arrange to give God your firsts.*

Rather than waiting to see what remains at the end of the month, consider making generosity part of your plan from the beginning. You might set aside a regular amount when you receive your income or decide in advance what you can faithfully contribute throughout the year. Planning helps us give consistently and reminds us that generosity is part of our discipleship, not simply something we do when it is convenient. Giving God our firsts is about priority, not a required dollar amount or percentage.

N — *Nurture a willingness to give sacrificially.*

Sacrificial giving means allowing our generosity to make a meaningful difference in how we use what we have. For some, that may mean giving more than they initially thought possible. For others, the sacrifice may look very different. It might mean sharing time, using our talents to serve, welcoming someone who feels alone, or giving financially in a way that requires careful planning. We should never confuse sacrifice with neglecting essential needs or the responsibilities we have toward our families. Rather, we ask God to help us loosen our grip on what we possess and become more willing to share what we can.

As we consider our giving to First Presbyterian, we also have an exciting opportunity to look toward the future. Our Session is prayerfully discerning how we might strengthen our ministry, including the possibility of adding ministerial staff. We want to deepen our care for families, invest in the faith of children and young people, provide meaningful pastoral visitation, and reach those who feel isolated or disconnected. We want our church to be a place where people of every generation encounter the love of Christ and discover that they do not have to walk through life alone.

We have begun building a fund to help support the addition of ministerial staff as we discern this next chapter. Our regular financial commitments help sustain the worship, Christian education, pastoral care, mission, fellowship, and other ministries that are already central to our life together. Our pledges also help us plan responsibly and consider what more God might be calling us to do. Every gift matters because, together, our offerings support a ministry that none of us could accomplish alone.

This is why stewardship is about so much more than balancing a budget. It is about deciding what kind of people we want to become as followers of Jesus. Will we hold tightly to what we have, or will we trust God enough to share it? Will generosity be something we do only when circumstances are easy, or will we prayerfully seek ways to give in every season of life?

We will not all arrive at the same answer, and we will not all be able to give the same amount. But every one of us can take part in the joy of generosity, whether through our financial gifts, our time, our talents, our prayers, or the care we offer to those around us.

Please join us on Sunday, November 15, for Stewardship Sunday! During worship, we will continue our cherished tradition of the Church in the Light of the Cross as we bring forward our stewardship cards for the coming year. We invite you to prayerfully consider your commitment and bring your card that morning. If you are unable to join us or forget your card, you can mail it to the church office or drop it off during the week.

Following worship, we will gather for a stewardship lunch and enjoy time together in fellowship. We would love for you to stay! We will also welcome a few helping hands for setup on Friday, November 13, at 9:30 a.m., as well as for cleanup after worship and lunch on Sunday. Every contribution of time and service is appreciated.

Thank you for all the ways you already support First Presbyterian Church. Thank you for your faithful giving, your prayers, your service, and the countless ways you care for one another. As we look toward another year of ministry, may we approach this season not with fear or guilt, but with gratitude and hope. May God continue to shape our hearts to reflect the generosity of Jesus Christ. May we learn to give thoughtfully, faithfully, and sacrificially, each according to what God has entrusted to us. And may our generosity, in

whatever form it takes, bring hope to our neighbors, strengthen our ministry, and produce thanksgiving to God.

With gratitude and joy,
Pastor Ben, First Presbyterian Church of Meadville

Notes from the Director of Music

One topic I haven't really addressed in this space is how I decide what we'll all be singing on any given Sunday. You might think that as the Music Director, I can just select a few of my favorite hymns and call it a day! While that's certainly the *simplest* approach, I would be doing all of you a disservice if I chose that route.

Invariably, I take the scripture passages chosen by the pastor as my starting point each week: I read these, ponder them, and start searching for hymns and songs that reinforce or expand on the themes they contain. In evaluating these, my guide is primarily the **text**: I aim for lyrics that are relevant to the topic but also contain some depth in their poetry. Sometimes this search leads me back to the classic hymns, but there are also a surprising amount of new, well-crafted songs being written, which opens up many possibilities. Secondary to the text is the **melody**: is it interesting? Is it singable by the average person after a few hearings? Does it support the lyrics, or work in opposition to them?

The truth is that keeping everyone consistently happy in a congregation as varied as ours can be a bit of a balancing act! Some of us find comfort in the familiar hymns of our childhood; others enjoy expanding our vistas by exploring new texts and tunes. And yes: from time to time, even ***I*** can't stand one of the hymns I myself chose for us! But it's all part of trusting that as a community of faith, we enrich and uplift each other — and that sometimes includes bearing with music that doesn't speak to us personally, if it will help our neighbors along their walk of faith.

Kevin Dill

Thank you, Chris Wade!

On the last Sunday of October we had an opportunity to recognize Chris Wade for his service to our church, originally as our evening custodian and most recently on the daytime shift.

Thank you, Chris, for everything you've done to keep this building running! We'll miss you, and we're praying for many blessings on you as begin a new chapter of your life in Maryland.

Spotlight on Youth: Henry Fischer

Henry is a sixth grader at Neason Hill Elementary. He is eleven years old and his birthday is on March 10th. He enjoys sports, friends, and his family.

1. *If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?*
Big Sky, Montana. I am going there in January with my friends to snowboard for a week!!

2. *What animal would make the best pet and why?*
A dog makes the best pet! Dogs are fluffy and are great to snuggle with when you go to sleep.

3. *Tell a favorite memory about church or Sunday school.*
My favorite memory of our church is when Lennon caught her hair on fire at the Christmas Eve service. I am glad she's okay! The smell of burning hair is a strong memory.

4. *If you could talk to an animal, what do you think it would say?*
I think it would say, "I love you, Henry!"

5. *What is your favorite toy?*
My favorite toy is my dirt bike because it's fast and I can do wheelies on it.

6. *What sports do you like?*
I really enjoy playing flag football, volleyball, soccer, running cross country, and of course my favorite is snowboarding!

7. *What do you want to be when you grow up?*
I want to be a pilot.

Our *Soulstice* gatherings have returned! *Soulstice* is a half hour in which we still our bodies and minds through candlelight, prayer, music, and silence. Join us in the ground–floor chapel at 7:15 PM on the first Wednesday of each month for this opportunity to recharge your spiritual batteries in the midst of your hectic week!

Praying for Children: Say "YES" to praying and believing in God and seeing what only He can do!! Every child and every school need prayer. Join with others to pray for our children and grandchildren and their schools on Tuesdays at 1:00 PM in the church library. All are welcome!

Knit Unto Others will meet on Wednesday, November 11th and December 9th at 1:00 PM in the church library. Anyone interested in the fellowship of knitting, crocheting or cross stitching is welcome.

Hope Bible Study will meet November 12th at 1:15 PM, continuing our exploration of the Gospel of John. This month we look at lesson 9, which covers chapters 17 and 18. Watch the Sunday bulletins for information about our Holiday get–together in December!

Librarian's Picks for November: "KNOW-VEMBER" ...Read something True, Learn something new! There's a lot to pick from in our Church Library. Come in and Check Some Out! Please remember to sign out your books and then return them in a timely manner. Thank you!

SAY YES! Begin a new adventure in your life by sharing your love of God with the children of our church. Spend one half–hour giving them lessons that will be prepared for you to present. One of our church covenants is to WITNESS BOLDLY and this is your chance to talk with these precious young people. "If we don't teach our children to follow Christ, the world will teach them not to." So, please "Say Yes" and sign up in the church office!

First Presbyterian Church's Liturgy Team wants to grow! We are looking for church participants of all ages who would enjoy reading scripture verses and leading the congregation in prayer during our weekly Sunday Service. Our calendar dates rotate so that we all share equally in duties to assist Pastor Ben. The only requirement is an enthusiastic desire to share the word of God with your voice and heart. If you have questions or would like to volunteer, please contact Rev. Ben Black via the church office.

The Stephen Ministry of First Presbyterian Church has as its goal to care and assist those who are going through a transition, a particular challenge to mind or spirit, or are in need of a spiritual friend. The Stephen Ministry is open to all people: church membership is not a requirement. A conversation with Pastor Ben or a Stephen Ministry Leader will determine the next steps of assigning a Stephen Minister who will establish a caring relationship. Many have been assisted through this ministry. Stephen Ministers are available to you. Call the church office to make a connection!

A Word About Christmas Eve Worship: This year, we will offer *only one service* at 8:00 PM on December 24th. This recommendation was made by the Worship and Music Committee at its September meeting, and approved by the Session in October. A number of factors contributed to the decision:

- In-person attendance on Christmas Eve has fallen sharply compared to pre-COVID levels.
- We are stretched thin for volunteers right now (liturgists, musicians, ushers etc.), a situation which is compounded by many of our regulars going away to visit family at Christmastime.
- With us no longer having two custodians on staff, we would be asking one person to give up his or her entire Christmas Eve if we offered two services.

We thank you for your understanding, as we continue to discern how we can best meet the congregation's needs with the resources available to us.

Sunday School Schedule:

9:00 AM: Elementary Music (in the Chapel)
9:00 AM: Teens (in the Youth Room)
9:15 AM: K–3rd Grade (in the Mary/Martha Room)
9:15 AM: 4th–6th Grade (in the Art Room)
11:15 AM: Adult Forum (in the Culbertson Room)

Elementary Sunday School: Over the next two of months we'll work our way through some Psalms and Proverbs as well as get ready for Christ's birth. Watch the bulletin for any youth activities over the Holidays.

The Deacons will be sponsoring Kate's Angel Tree again this year. The tree with "gift ornaments" will be available November 1, 8, and 15. If you choose to take an ornament, please sign your name on the sheet so we know who to contact if we have any questions. Please return your wrapped gift with the original ornament by Tuesday, December 8th. Thank you for your generosity!

Stewardship Sunday is November 15th. The theme of this year's stewardship campaign is ***Celebrate Generosity***! Please join us in worship that morning as we demonstrate our commitment to our church's ministries and operations by placing our pledge cards in the 'Church in the Light of the Cross.' We thank you in advance for your support!

Submissions for the January/February E*vangel* newsletter are due in the church office by Friday, December 18th. Thank you!

A New Members Class is being planned for December 6. Everyone is welcome! There is no commitment to join the church after attending; this will simply be an opportunity to learn more about our church and what it means to be part of this congregation. Whether you are considering membership, are new to our church, or simply want to enjoy a free lunch: let the church office know if you will be attending.

Pastoral Visits and Ministerial Care: If you or a loved one has been hospitalized, undergone a large life change, or needs spiritual guidance and would like a visit from your pastor, please contact Rev. Ben Black or the church office. Additionally, the Stephen Ministry has six people who are available to pray with you and offer spiritual support.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL:

The Stephen Ministry needs your help! We are collecting submissions for our 2026 Advent Devotional. This year's title is "A Season of Expectation". Please drop off your devotion at the church office or email it to Mary Zahora at maryzahora@meadvillefpc.org Thank you!

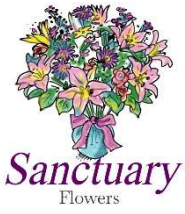
Sympathy to Don Rezek and Family on the passing of Don's wife, Rev. Ellen Marie Rezek, on October 24.

A huge thank you to Logan Luce and Vickie Fischer who pitched in working on the church grounds pruning, raking leaves, and turning mulch. The church property looks wonderful because of your generous hands!

5. Lynne Whitlock
6. Diana Smith
7. Brinlee Schutz
10. Molli Schutz
    Madyson Washburn
    Donna Junker
12. Diane Kerr
16. Paula Coulter
17. Darionna Boyd
20. Norma McClay
21. Sue Kilburn
22. Jacob Martin
24. Ruth Prest
    Barbara Henry
25. Maya Alizzeo
    Glenn A. Thompson
26. Carolyn Andrews
    Sandy Janes
29. Rick Learn
30. Luann Kirkpatrick

1. Scott Ladner
8. Chris Thomas
   Kathy Spencer
11. Laurel Porter
14. Dianne Moore Eakin
    Norma Miller
15. Rick Green
    Emmet Stoner
16. Dennie Finton
    Kevin Dill
    Sidney Brown
17. Richard Young
20. Rich Eakin
    Nancy Zinn
22. Carol Young
26. Perry Hilburn
    Jonathan DeArment
27. Nancy Alexander
29. Marilyn Robb
31. Terri Lyons

2026 Annual Reports are due in the office by December 30. If you have any questions, please call the church office at 814–333–2161. Reports are due from the following: Pastor, all Committee Moderators, Board of Trustees, Board of Deacons, Presbyterian Women, Cornerstone Child Care, Fairview/Fairmont Outreach, Stephen Ministry, and Financial Secretary. Thank you!



The 2027 Flower Chart is hanging in the foyer adjacent to the sanctuary. Sign up for the date of your choice to provide chancel flowers for Sunday worship.

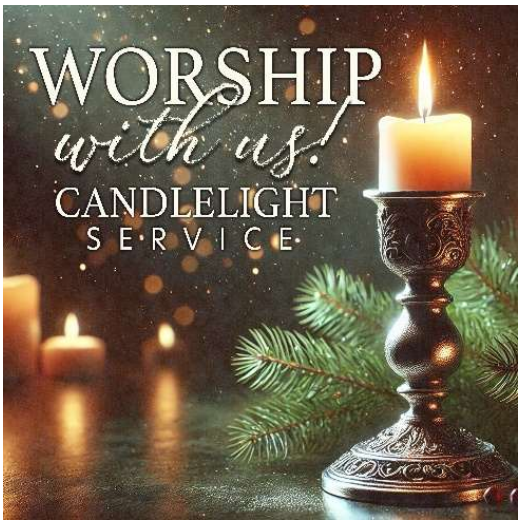
Our Mission Focus for December is the Greenhouse. We're collecting unwrapped items (scarves, hats, slippers, jewelry, candy and related items) and gift-wrapping supplies (wrapping paper, bows, tags, and tape) so the children can give their moms Christmas presents. If you would like to help, place unwrapped gifts and wrapping supplies into the Presbyterian Women's bin in the church office by December 15th. These items will be delivered to the Greenhouse in time for Christmas.

The Mission Committee will continue to collect sample sized shampoo, hand sanitizer, bath gel, lotion and toothpaste for the homeless patients at the Free Clinic. Please place your donations in the PW bin in the church office.

Our Annual Festival of Lessons and Carols will be on December 6 at 10:00 AM. Through Scripture, music, and prayer, we'll encounter anew the story of humanity's fall from grace and the promise of the Messiah.

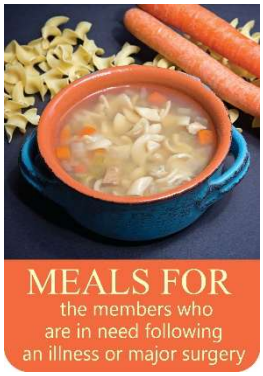
"Chili, Cornbread, & Carols" will follow the service on December 6. The Worship and Music Committee will provide the chili and cornbread; the congregation is invited to bring a dessert to share. (*Rumor has it there may be some carol singing as well!*)

Christmas Poinsettias: Orders can be placed at the church on Sunday, November 22nd and 29th, or by phoning the church office no later than Friday, December 4th. Watch for pricing in the November bulletins and on the church's Facebook page.



Christmas Eve
8:00 PM

The Christmas Joy Offering prepares the way for the leaders of our Church: past, present, and future. 50% of your gifts smooth the path for current and retired church workers and their families in their time of need. 50% of your gifts prepare students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian–related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The Christmas Joy Offering is received at the Christmas Eve service.



The Deacons are recruiting some of the excellent chefs from the congregation to volunteer to be part of the *Caring Crew Team*. We are looking for someone who will contribute a meal to a member of the congregation in need following an illness or major surgery. Fortunately, we generally only need help once or twice a year. So, if you would like to help feed members of the congregation in need, please call Carol Ann McCall at 814–720–8272 for more information or to volunteer your culinary expertise. Thank you!

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