



# NEW CREATION NEWS

Jan. ~ Feb. 2025

## St. Peter's United Church of Christ

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### PASTORAL PONDERINGS

It always seems like getting from Thanksgiving to Christmas is a blur. The secular world doesn't help. Christmas decorations are up before Halloween. As we look forward to the new year, perhaps we are able to slow down just a little. It used to be there was a big deal about making resolutions. I haven't done that for a long time. I think if I really want to make a change in my life I can do that at any time of the year. There are times to contemplate what is going well for you, for those you love and for the world, and the new year may be just the time to do that. It may be the time to be prayerful as well. The world continues to meet differences with violence, here in America and far from us in other countries. I believe we often have heavy hearts when we hear or read about war, school shootings and murders within our own little piece of the world we know as Western New York. Yesterday (I'm preparing this on December 17) was the school shooting in Madison, Wisconsin. As the reporters were reflecting on what happened, one shared that it was a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader who called 911 to report the shooting in her school. What a responsibility that a 7 year old (I think that should be a 2<sup>nd</sup> graders age) took on to call for emergency help. Many of us will say: "That just shouldn't be what 7 year olds are expected to know how to do." Yet, it probably saved many lives or more injuries, at the least.

We are entering into the Epiphany season in the church, always on January 6th. It is that time when we celebrate the kings arriving to visit the baby Jesus, by following the brightness of the star. This is the time to recognize the blessings that come to us through the light that touches our souls and gives us a new desire to celebrate Jesus. That becomes our focus all the way through February. Our Annual Meeting will be on February 2, following lunch. I hope you experience the light here at St. Peter's, as we move into the New Year and through Epiphany, by worshipping with us, following us on Facebook and reaching out to each other with the love we know we have for one another.



#### Restore and Renew 2025

I have been accepted into a continuing education opportunity that I will share about and benefit from. It is sponsored by Church World Service, an organization



### Sunday, February 2, 2025

The St. Peter's Annual Meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday, February 2, immediately following worship. The Church Council members will provide a light lunch for attendees of the meeting.

**Please plan to attend this important meeting.**

that many recognize when we have put together school kits, medical kits or clean up kits, to give to areas of the world where there has been a tragedy. If you ever watch the news when there are hurricanes or massive storms and people are housed in stadiums or school gymnasiums, there are often gray or blue blankets on the cots that are set up. They are provided by Church World Service, one of the many ways they provide care for those affected by tragedy. Other churches I have served have been very involved with this ministry. It's base is in Maryland, not far from the church I served in PA. There were groups from a number of UCC churches that would travel there to package all the kits that would come in. I want to share a brief history of CWS with you from Rebekah Belase. "CWS" is soon to celebrate it's 80th anniversary, and its vision of building a world where everyone has enough: enough food, enough of a voice, and a safe place to call home. Our success has been built on partnerships with local churches and grassroots advocacy. During COVID, we started seeing people deciding to leave ministry at higher rates. How can CWS partner with local faith communities if our own faith leaders are tired and burned out? We are now in the second year of this pilot program to provide ecumenical support and resources to improve self-care and build resilience for our clergy."

I will be having several opportunities to learn and grow and to restore and renew my faith and my ministry through this program titled: "Restore and Renew". It will include Zoom meetings, retreats and counseling

throughout the entire year of 2025. It has three groups that includes clergy serving churches, some getting a life coach, some in a more intense therapeutic settings and some who are judicatories (association and conference staff) and the research company, Barna, who will be following the program throughout the entire year. I will be with other colleagues who have also been accepted into this program, after the first zoom, knowing that I have never met any of these people. It is viewed as a Continuing Education program for clergy from a variety of denominations participating throughout the U.S. I am excited about this and anticipate that I will be a better pastor as I participate through it, let alone more restored and renewed. I will be away for this three different times, the first is from January 19-25 and then April 21-25. There will be someone on-call for me during these times as I will be out of state for all of the retreats. Our church council has approved this as a continuing education program, knowing that I will bring back to St. Peter's, the results of taking part of this. I have not done any continuing education programs for more than a day, while at the New York Conference meetings and am thankful to have this privilege.

In Christ,  
Pastor Paula



## COUNCIL CORNER

Your Church Council hopes that everyone had a blessed Christmas, and that you all have a prosperous new year. 2025 will usher in many changes here at St. Peter's, but we are going into it with fervent prayers and positive hearts. We hope to implement some ideas that will keep our current congregation engaged, and maybe even bring in a few new faces!

We were pleased that you supported us in the budget we presented for 2025. Some items are our best estimates, as we figure out our way of managing business moving forward. A budget can be a leap of faith sometimes, especially in a deficit situation, but we believe in our long history and dedication to keeping St. Peter's as a vital home for worship, prayer, and community. Have faith in our future!

One protocol that we implemented at the beginning of December was our Snow Closing notification. As the weather situation worsened, Council and Pastor Paula stayed in contact to make a decision we felt was in the best interest of safety for all. Once we decided to cancel the worship service, notices were sent to local television stations, an email was sent to the church list, and our

Facebook page was updated. A few calls were made to those who do not have social media. Let us know if you have other ideas, or would like to be added to the email or call lists.

We were pleased to see the turnout at our last Meat Raffle, and also had a lot of fun decorating the sanctuary. Activities like these are really the heart and soul of what it means to be a church community. Dedicated Council members have also spent many hours cleaning the parsonage and the kitchen. A big THANK YOU to everyone who helped make the annual Strike the Rock Christmas Concert such a blessed event. We appreciate the hard work our talented musicians put in to bring us such joyous and uplifting music.

Don't forget to sign up to bring Altar Flowers. If you would like to participate, see the sheets in the church entrance for available dates, then purchase the flowers and place them on the altar before the service begins. You can use your own vase or one of those available in church. The Elders are also asking for additional people to serve as greeters on Sunday mornings, and increased participation in hosting the monthly fellowship gatherings after worship. Please sign up if you are interested in any of these activities, or see a Council member if you have any questions.

The Annual Church Meeting is scheduled for February 2 after our worship service. Please plan to attend and participate in the business of the church. Upcoming Council meetings are scheduled for January 20, February 17, and March 24 at 7:00 p.m., with an Open Forum until 7:15. Let us know if you are interested in becoming a Council member or participating in any other activities. Blessings of the New Year!



### St. Peter's Council 2024

President/Deacon	Marina Heppner
Vice President/Elder	Sandy Fiegl
Treasurer/Deacon	Donna Albert
Financial Secretary/Elder	Sue Beier
Secretary/Deacon	Christel Kasprzak
Elder	Karen Buranich
Elder	Paul Gannon
Deacon	Kathy Reandeu
Trustees	Linda Richards
	Brian Welsh

**ENCIRCLING IN OUR PRAYERS...**

**FOR GOD'S HEALING**

Renaee Johnson; Marge Applebach; Esther Woltz; John Sworen; Chuck and Irene Brooks; Tim and Sue Schrader; Milton and Elenore Keim; Janet Hunt; Audrey Seaman; Dorothy Probst; Esther Heppner; Rod Tolley; Prayers for those lost, injured and traumatized by the mass shootings across the U.S.; Continued prayers for the people of Ukraine, Sudan, and the Middle East.

**FOR GOD'S PRESENCE**

For **those in the hospital and with medical problems** known only to God and their loved ones.

For **all victims of violence.**

For all **Gold Star parents** – those who have lost sons or daughters in the military—may God be with them and comfort them in their time of loss.

**FOR THOSE IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY:**

Earle C. Heusinger III ★★ ★ Army

Justin Hurlburt ★★ ★ Army National Guard

Jacob Kruwel ★★ ★ Army

Kristin McDermott ★★ ★ Navy

Caleb Tolley ★★ ★ Air Force

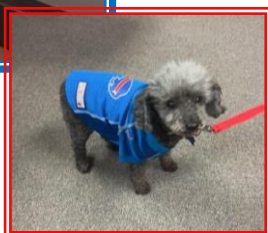
Holly Tolley ★★ ★ Air Force

Jack Welsh ★★ ★ Marine Corps

*And for all firefighters, EMTs, law enforcement & border officers.*



Pastor Paula and Beau visited Marge Applebach



Beau says...

**GO BILLS !!**



**CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:** \*Please call ahead.

The church office hours are Monday - Thursday from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. The office is closed on Fridays.

**PASTOR OFFICE HOURS:** \*Please call ahead.

Rev. Paula will be in the office on Tuesdays from 10:00 am - 12:30 pm and Thursdays from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

**PASTORAL CARE**

Rev. Paula Gustafson is available to provide pastoral care for members of St. Peter's congregation. Rev. Paula can be reached by phone at 716-476-9261 or by email at [pastorpaula2021@gmail.com](mailto:pastorpaula2021@gmail.com).

St. Peter's UCC...

***Faith, Fellowship and Service***

**Faith** in Christ,

Welcoming **Fellowship**

and Loving **Service**

**FELLOWSHIP HOUR**

We will continue to have Fellowship Hour once a month after worship service; on the third Sunday of each month. Coffee, tea, and hot chocolate will be served during winter months while iced tea, lemonade, and cold drinks will be served during the warmer months.



All are welcome and we hope you will join us!



**THANK YOU to our generous knitter for the donation of so many beautiful hats that will keep our heads and hearts warm!**







## MISSION MUSINGS

Submitted by  
Kathy Reandeu

*Sharing Christ's love and peace with all!*

Happy New Year! As I write this, I fondly look back at 2024 as a year filled with purpose and giving, and look ahead to a bright future of mission work at St. Peter's in 2025. I will be working on the benevolence distribution list soon, and will prepare a full report for the upcoming annual meeting in February. I have another piece in this newsletter about our impressive holiday giving accomplishments, but want to again say a huge THANK YOU to everyone for the love in their hearts which you choose to share so freely!

### SIERRA LEONE/JERICHO ROAD GLOBAL OUTREACH:

Phebian Abdulai continues her medical mission at the Adama Martha Memorial Community Health Center in Sierra Leone. Thank you for supporting this life-transforming work by donating money through the bi-monthly envelopes and gently-used clothing to the clothing shed. Learn more at <https://www.jrchc.org> and visit the global work tab.

### PLYMOUTH CROSSROADS:

St. Peter's provided Thanksgiving food and Christmas joy to Plymouth Crossroads as part of our sharing season. Legislator Lindsay Lorigo also visited Plymouth recently, and wrote on her Facebook page: "Plymouth Crossroads is a wonderful voluntary program serving at-risk youth ages 16-20 to help transition them from instability to the next independent steps in their lives. I had the pleasure of meeting Jennifer McAndrew, Plymouth Crossroads' Executive Director, to learn about their story and tour the expansive home in West Seneca. Since 2011, Plymouth Crossroads has been providing a bright future for children who may not have anywhere else to go. I am honored to work with such a great program in my district! Visit [www.plymouthcrossroads.org](http://www.plymouthcrossroads.org) for more info.



**CLOTHING SHED:** The clothing shed collects and redistributes gently-used clothing to organizations and people all over the world, and it continues to receive a great deal of donations every week. We use funds raised to support Phebian Abdulai's work in Sierra Leone. **DO NOT** put any household items, pillows, electronics, toys or books in the shed!

**FOOD PANTRY:** The food pantry helps address emergency food insecurity issues in our church or community, and also filled in some additional needs for the Thanksgiving dinners. Please put any donations in the barrel in the glass vestibule during church office hours, or contact Kathy Reandeu for a pick-up. Please contact me if you know of anyone in need of food.

**NY/HELP HONDURAS:** Since 1989, NY/HELP Honduras has been working with the indigenous people of La Laguna and surrounding communities to help them empower and improve their lives in these remote mountain communities. After 30 years of trips to Honduras once or twice a year, COVID stopped them cold. From 2020 - 2023, NY/HELP was unable to visit the village of La Laguna or the other villages where projects had been started. However, due to much better communications than when this mission project first started in 1989, the work did proceed.

The first trip back to Honduras was in March 2023. This trip's purpose was primarily to check in, see how the



people were doing, and get an update on the progress of each of the projects – the medical clinic, school supplies, sewing academy, and

middle school construction. The second return trip took place from September 10-17, 2024. A highlight was the all-encompassing Mobile Medical Clinic held in Mescales. Doctors dealt with basic medical needs, nurses gave immunizations, and dental professionals pulled teeth.

The building of the new middle school for 7th to 9th grades for children living farther from La Laguna in the "lower villages" is progressing. Four classrooms are complete. Eventually, the school will have six rooms: one for each grade level, a library, an office, and a space the use of which will be determined by the needs of the local people. For information about mission work in Honduras, contact Ginger Comstock [gkcomstock@gmail.com], David Makepeace [dmake8@yahoo.com], or Judy Toner [jactoner45@twcny.rr.com]. Donations gratefully accepted at: NY/HELP, c/o Arcade UCC, PO Box 95, Arcade NY 14009. Make checks payable to NY/HELP.

**THANK  
YOU!**

 A red brushstroke underline under the word "YOU!".

# BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

- JANUARY**
- 12 Pam Hurlburt
- 14 Mark Kasprzak
- 16 Grayson Vail
- 20 Renae Johnson
- 24 Elenore Keim
- 26 Susan Beier
- FEBRUARY**
- 2 Chuck Brooks
- 8 Daniel Richards
- 9 Phebian Abdulai
- 23 Marina Heppner
- 28 Christine O'Melia
- 29 Sandy Fiegl

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Join us every Sunday at 10:00 am  
for in-person worship service.  
All are welcome.

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displays by Christel Kasprzak



Scan this QR code for  
St. Peter's events  
and other information



# Game Night is Back!!



Looking for something fun to do on a Friday night? Once a month we get together to share a night of friendly fun and games. Grab your family and friends, then come join us for **GAME NIGHT!** The fun begins at 7:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. **All are welcome!**

Bring your favorite games, snacks, and beverages to share.

January 17 | February 21 | March 21



billboard by Marina Heppner

billboard by Karen Buranich



For the health and safety of all our beloved members of the congregation, please remember that if you are feeling ill you should stay home, rest, and join us for worship through our Facebook Live feed.



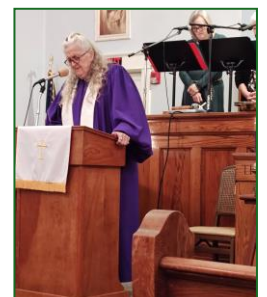
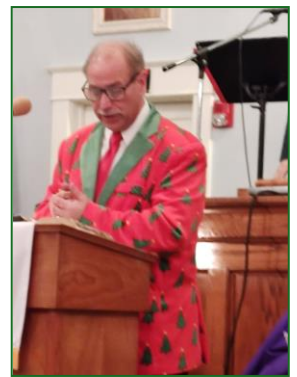
**CHRISTMAS CONCERT**

A Huge THANK YOU to everyone who came out to our Christmas Concert December 8th! Strike The Rock as a group and our incredible soloists had a blast performing to an excellent crowd of Christmas music lovers. Thank you as well to our guest drummer, Pastor Paula, and Joe Hastreiter for their invaluable participation. We truly appreciate everyone's support for our church and our music program, and wish all of you a very Blessed Christmas and Holiday Season. 🙏❤️🎵 In case you missed it, be sure to visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/StPetersUnitedChurchofChr.> [./photos](#) to watch the video and get in the holiday mood!



**CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE**

We enjoyed a beautiful Christmas Eve Candlelight service, complete with music, light, scripture, old friends, and even a chorus of "Silent Night" in German! What a place God chose for the birth of His son! God does not come in glory, but comes as a child, who tugs at the strings of our hearts. Let there be room in YOUR heart today, and every day, for His love!





## CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Most of us love our Buffalo Bills, but when one of their games was scheduled for the same time as our Christmas concert, that raised a great deal of concern as to how well the concert would be attended. It seems, though, that a lot of people were in the Christmas spirit as we had nearly a full house. It was good to see so many familiar faces as well as those of first time attendees.

This year Strike the Rock introduced two new songs, "Our Lullaby" by MercyMe, which Marina Heppner arranged and "Beautiful Star of Bethlehem" by The Oak Ridge Boys. Both songs were well received and we look forward to singing them again during the advent season.

Pastor Paula and Joe Hastreiter did an awesome job of sharing the responsibility of introducing each song. All marketing and public relations for the concert was graciously done by Kathy Reandeau, for which we are grateful.

Thank you to all those who attended and especially to the singers and musicians for their dedication to the music ministry of St. Peter's.



## HOLIDAY SERMON THOUGHTS

Remember that God is the one who sets the earth on its foundation. It doesn't matter how big our boat is, or how wide the seas; what matters is how great our God is!



Don't just love in words and speech, but in actions and deeds. Love is what we do, not just what we think. If God's love abides in us, it will not be closed off to others.

God dreams with us, hopes with us, and works with us in real time. We stand in awe of who God really is - a humble servant king. With His love and support, we can be survivors in whatever realm we find ourselves.

It is never too late to say thank you! Being grateful changes us and those who receive our thanks. We are thankful for the work of faith, our labors of love, and steadfast faith. Take time to let others know you are grateful, and to say Thank You God!

Advent cries out to us as a voice calling in the wilderness, but are our hearts truly prepared? Christmas is not just about the outward preparations, but the preparations we make in our hearts to receive the Christ child.



Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation, when we focus on love, hope, joy and peace while waiting for the light of the world to arrive. But, there is no reason we can't share the Christmas spirit throughout the year, and make every day be like Christmas with the love, of children, neighbors, self and creation. The One who loves most of all teaches us the power of love all year!



## Butternut Squash Soup (Vegan, Dairy-free)

Dive into a bowl of easy, 6-ingredient Butternut Squash Soup. Made dairy-free and Whole30-approved, this dish is a great healthy dinner option and comes together in less than 30 minutes.

Prep: 10      Cook: 20      Total: 30 minutes

Yield 8 servings

### Ingredients:

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 small white onion, diced
- 4 tsp minced garlic
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pepper
- 12 heaping cups butternut squash, peeled and cubed
- 8 cup vegetable broth
- Optional: yogurt + thyme for garnish

### Instructions:

1. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat.
2. Add onion and garlic, let sauté for a few minutes. Add in salt and pepper.
3. Add in butternut squash and stock, then cover and bring to a boil.
4. Once boiling, crack lid and let simmer for 15 minutes or until butternut squash is fork tender.
5. Using a vitamix or a hand blender, blend until completely smooth.
6. Top with optional yogurt and thyme.

Recipe submitted by Sandy Fiegl





**FAITH IN ACTION!**

Submitted by Kathy Reandeau

*"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." (James 2:14-18)*

I have often said that St. Peter's is small, but mighty, and that point is always driven home when we are asked to show our faith by our deeds. We may not be many, but the response I receive when I put out a need is always instant and impressive.



Our "little group" was able to feed almost 40 people for Thanksgiving (not including leftovers!). Some of that was in the form of freshly-prepared food that we took over to Plymouth

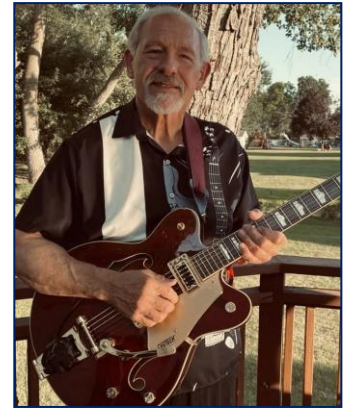
Crossroads, while the rest was deliveries that included everything needed to make a full Thanksgiving dinner. Just when I thought everything had been distributed, I received a call asking if we might be able to provide a Christmas meal for a family in need. Thinking that we had little to offer, God stepped in and I received news that somebody had a turkey available that they were not able to bring in for Thanksgiving – definitely moving in mysterious ways, I'd say. So, we will be able to provide that meal, and the giving keeps on going.

For Christmas we put almost 100 tags on the Giving Tree (and thank you to the special angel who helps me with those!). Then we didn't have worship service one week, and then we had mountains of snow. I was beginning to think it would be a bare bones Christmas this year, but I should know better than that! These are just a few of the packages that poured in. Thank you to the special shoppers who went above and beyond, to those who helped me carry everything to my car, to Page 1 for their support, and to all of you at St. Peter's who go out of your way to show your faith in action!

**WNY MUSICAL COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT  
JANUARY MUSICIAN OF THE MONTH**

WNY Musical Community Spotlight named St. Peter's very own **Mark Kasprzak** as its featured musician for the month of January!

Mark started playing the guitar at the age of 6 and the trombone in 4th grade. His dad was an Army band leader and taught Mark well. He was a music major in high school and college, and received a degree from the US Navy School of Music in Little Creek Virginia.



Mark started playing on the Buffalo music scene at the age of 16 in various groups. In 1979 he toured with a band called The Colleagues, a great show band. In 1984 he accepted a gig as a staff guitarist at Walt Disney World Resort's EPCOT Center in Orlando, Florida. In the summer of 1985 he auditioned for, and was accepted into, the Navy School of Music in a guitarist position,



becoming one of five guitarists in the Navy at the time. He was stationed at the US naval air station in Memphis, Tennessee, during which time he was fortunate to perform with Charlton Heston, Whitney Houston and the Hager twins from the TV show Hee Haw.

Mark has performed in every state except Alaska and Hawaii! In 1989 he returned to the Buffalo area playing in the local scene, currently playing with the Slim Chance band and, of course, founding and leading Strike The Rock for over 25 years.



Congratulations Mark on a well-deserved recognition!





**FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, SERVICE SNAPSHOTS**



**Annual Congregational Meeting – February 2**

**Palm Sunday – April 13 at 10 am**

**Maundy Thursday – April 17 at 7 pm**

**Easter Sunday – April 20 at 10 am**

Please note: there will be NO Ash Wednesday service.



Dear Members of St. Peter's United Church of Christ,  
 Thank you so much for helping to bring the spirit of Christmas to Plymouth Crossroads with your generous donation of gifts for our young men. We appreciate your ongoing support.  
 Best Wishes in the New Year!  
 Friends of Plymouth



The following appeared in church bulletins or were announced at church services. Laughter is good for the soul:

- “Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a good chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- Don’t let worry kill you off - let the Church help.
- Miss Charlene Mason sang: “I will not pass this way again.” Giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- Potluck supper Sunday at 5 p.m. - prayer and medication to follow.
- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be: “What is Hell?” Come early and listen to our choir practice.