

FEBRUARY 2026

GRACE NOTES

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highlights

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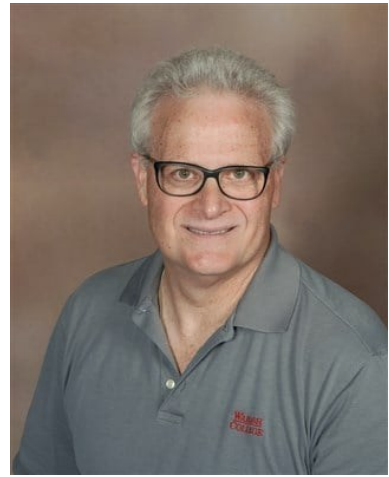
Winter X Treme 26

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of
God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with
you all.*

2 Corinthians 13:14

PASTOR'S CORNER

Just sharing some thoughts from over my years in ministry, nothing too profound.



Several years ago, I was heading to Evansville, IN, to pick up my son at college to bring him home for break. I stopped on the way for some coffee and a snack at a fast-food place. The young lady behind the counter took my order and told me how much I owed. I just stood there, confused, as it was a bit less than I expected. I paid with a confused look on my face and then realized that she just gave me the senior discount. (I was still at least 10 years away from qualifying for that discount.) I thought about arguing with her that I was not old enough for that discount yet, but then decided to just walk away, saving a little money as she was trying to do a good thing.

I have no idea who this young lady was. However, she does teach us a lesson. She treated me nicely and respectfully, even though I appeared to her as a confused old man. We have all had encounters with those who seem confused by what we perceive as something simple. Treating the other person with true respect should be a goal of ours. It requires some humbleness and self-awareness to do that.

We find a similar lesson from John the Baptist. The second Sunday in January is the baptism of our Lord Sunday. This year, the following Sunday included a text of John the Baptist talking about Jesus being the one who is greater than he, the one he had been talking about. As we look at John, we see this combination of greatness and humbleness. He had people coming to him in the wilderness to listen to his message and to be changed by those words. He could have thought of himself as great because of all that he was doing. He could have viewed himself as a prophet with a vital message that all needed to hear, and kept working at getting a larger and larger following. However, he was very willing to step back and let Jesus be Jesus. He did not try to compete with Jesus. He knew his limits and was willing to humble himself. Humbleness is a good quality, as is knowing ourselves and our limits. When we truly know ourselves and are humble, we realize that we are not better than anyone else.

We have all seen that confused old man that the young lady saw when she took my order. We have a choice to be judgmental of them or to be kind and caring. We have a choice as to viewing ourselves better than the other or viewing ourselves in them. Stepping aside, as did John, can be very important in showing that care.

Unlike that trip to Evansville so many years ago, I actually qualify for the senior discounts now.

Rev. Dr. Curt Keller

UNITEKIDS CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Emmy Thies & Dianna Miller
Co-Directors of Children & Family Ministry

Unitekids and Bible Buddies is back in full swing, and we have been enjoying getting back to basics and revisiting some of our favorite Bible verses and stories.

Winter is also in full swing and that can mean some unfavorable weather conditions. Please remember that if District 108 cancels school, we also cancel youth activities for everyone's safety. We will also text parents and post on our Facebook page if we need to cancel for inclement weather or other safety concerns.

Ash Wednesday

Can you believe it's almost February? Ash Wednesday is February 18. Unitekids and Bible Buddies will meet in the Chapel at Grace UMC at 6 p.m. for the Pastor's explanation of Ash Wednesday to the kids, and then they will join their parents in the sanctuary for service. We will not have regular class that evening.



YOUTH MINISTRY

Jill Stoner-Crouch, Brionna Goodin
Co-Directors of Youth Ministries

Important dates in February

- 2/1: Youth on Tech 9 a.m.– Be at the service at 8:45 a.m.
- 2/12: Winter Jam 2026- Youth be at church between 3:45 p.m. and 4 p.m.
- 2/15: Youth on Tech 9 a.m.- Be at the service at 8:45 a.m.
- 2/18: Ash Wednesday - All Youth are to be at the church at 5:30 p.m. We will be attending the service together from 6:30-7:30 p.m.



Huge shoutout to our amazing donations from our Church Family!
With the donations, we were able to take the youth bowling before we went on winter break! A night filled with fun, food, and laughter!



- Meet weekly on Wednesdays
Mason Building, 2nd Floor
- Jr. High meets 5:30-7 p.m.
 - Sr. High meets from 7-8:30 p.m.



WINTER XTREME

Jill Stoner-Crouch, Brionna Goodin
Co-Directors of Youth Ministries

WinterXtreme 2026 was a **huge** success! We had 4 adults and 14 youth attend and for 7 of the attendees, this was their first time! We gave a post survey to the youth receiving responses that stated the trip reminded them to put their trust in God and that this experience helped strengthen their relationship with God.



Thank you to everyone that gives to the youth so we can take trips like this and give our youth discounted prices!



Grace Children's Program Stats

Grace Nursery

Total Roster:

16 children and 6 staff/volunteers

Average weekly attendance:

4 children and 2 staff/volunteers

Grace Children's Church

Total Roster:

18 children, 3 adult staff/volunteers, and 4 youth helpers

Average weekly attendance:

6 children, 1 adult, and 1 youth

UNITEkids and Bible Buddies

Total Roster:

28 children, 4 adult staff/volunteers, and 4 youth helpers

Average weekly attendance:

15 children, 3 adult staff/volunteers, and 2 youth helpers

Vacation Bible School

47 children attended, 31 adult staff/volunteers, and 22 youth helpers

Kroger Families Donations

32 Households made a donation of \$65.47. Thank you so much for taking the time to sign up for this. Grace Church appreciates you!

If you haven't signed up but you shop at Kroger our organization number is EJ122. If you could sign up for community rewards and make Grace UMC your organization we would appreciate it!

1. Sign into your digital Kroger account or sign up on the Kroger app
2. To create a new account, go to www.kroger.com/account/create
3. Select "My Account".
4. Select "Community Rewards".
5. Select "Enroll Now".
6. Enter "EJ122" then "Save".

Thank You

Dear Staff & Members of Grace United Methodist Church,

We would like to thank all of you for the generous Christmas gifts that were provided for our children in the Pekin School District.

Our families were excited and so appreciative of the generosity that your congregation provided to them.

Thank you again, you truly made a positive impact on the Christmas season for families this year.

Sincerely,

Neta Runyon & Mindy H.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for choosing to buy all of these presents for my son. Times have been especially hard for me right now and I wasn't sure how I was going to provide Christmas for him. Thank you for taking the time to pick out each individual present.

I hope you and your family have a Merry Christmas!

Anonymous

Dear Grace United Methodist Church

On behalf of Pekin District 108,

Thank you for generously allowing us to use your Family Life Center for our recent professional development gathering. Your hospitality and willingness to open your doors made it possible for our staff to come and work together in a comfortable, welcoming environment focused on learning and growth.

Thank you again for your kindness and generosity. We value our connection with the community and are thankful for your partnership and support of the work we do for students and families. With sincere appreciation,

Thank you!

Lynn Brown

Coordinator of Pekin 108

Curriculum and Instruction

Bake Sale:

Grace United Methodist Women

The United Methodist Women are hosting a bake sale on Saturday, February 7, during the evening service and on Sunday, February 8, after both morning services.

We greatly appreciate donations of cakes, pies, candy, and cookies. Please ensure that all baked goods are delivered to the church by 5 p.m. on Saturday or by 8:30 a.m. on Sunday.

Donated items should be covered and placed on plates, with portions of 4, 6, or 12. If any of your treats contain nuts, please indicate this clearly on the packaging. There is no need to price your items, as we will be accepting a free-will offering. Thank you in advance for your support!

Pastor's Study: Hot Topics

In February Hot Topics will continue on Wednesdays from 6-7 p.m. The study will be looking at theological underpinnings using respectful discussion on some controversial topics. The topics scheduled for February will be as follows:

- **Feb. 4** The stranger among us
- **Feb. 11** Technology
- **Feb. 18** No Study/Ash Wednesday

Chili Luncheon

On Sunday, February 22, the Grace Softball team will host its annual chili luncheon.

Here are the meal options available:

- Take-home meals will be available after the first service at approximately 10 a.m.
- You can sit down for a fellowship meal at noon, with a take-home option also available.

Please note: Donations are appreciated; no tickets are needed. Funds raised will help cover the entrance fee for play. Any extra funds will go towards purchasing uniforms or equipment.

Pastor visits

If you would like for Rev. Dr. Keller to come for a visit, please call the church office at 309-347-7131 or e-mail secretary@pekingrace.org. If you are interested in communion you can contact Kathy Towne at ktowne61554@yahoo.com. Kathy will schedule a time for her and Rev. Keller to bring communion.

Acolytes

Youth interested in being acolytes during the 11 a.m. service, should let Rev. Keller know. This involves lighting the candles at the beginning of the service and putting them out at the end of the service. We prefer to have children 5th grade or older to do this.

Ash Wednesday

We will again be having joint services with First UMC for Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday. We host Ash Wednesday this year, and they host Maundy Thursday. Ash Wednesday is February 18. The joint service will be at 6:30 p.m. at Pekin Grace UMC.

For those who cannot make the joint service, but would still like the dispensation of ashes, Rev. Keller will be in the sanctuary from noon to 1 on Feb. 18. You are welcome to come and receive the ashes. You can simply come when you are free during that period of time, and the dispensation and readings will only take about 5 minutes. Rev. Keller will dispense the ashes individually and keep doing this as long as people come into the sanctuary.

IGRC Spring Work Days

Listed in the Current was the opportunity to help clean up the IGRC campsites and get them ready for the summer season of camping.

East Bay Camp date will be Saturday, April 18. For more information, email: eastbay@igrc.org

Little Grassy Camp spring work day will be Saturday, April 25. For more information email: littlegrassy@igrc.org

Church News

Reminder of Union Mission Times

The Union Mission will be once again utilizing our facilities for their basketball program during the following times:

- Tuesdays, 5-8:30 p.m.
- Thursdays, 5-6 p.m.
- Fridays, 5-8 p.m.
- Sundays, 1-8:15 p.m.

Open Gym

Our gym is open for walking whenever the office is open. Just swing by and walk around the edge of the facilities. This way, you will be warm and not have to worry about slipping and falling on ice or snow. From 8:30 a.m. -4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, there are not many activities happening in the gym. The office is closed from noon to 1 p.m. for lunch. Please come and utilize the facilities!

Peoria Area Anti-Hunger Coalition

The Peoria Area Anti-Hunger Coalition will conduct the 40th Annual Foodshare Can-A-Thon in March. Kroger stores will be having two can-a-thon events. The coalition is also encouraging churches to have a can-a-thon Sunday, collecting food to help with our food pantries.

Our church will be celebrating how we serve others to help combat hunger! Help by bringing cans and boxes of food to our can-a-thons on Sunday, March 22 and Sunday, March 29. These foods will be given to others through our food pantry and snack pack programs. Stay tuned for more details in the next month!

Grace Food Pantry Team

Supporting the Church

During cold and inclement weather, church attendance often decreases. This usually results in a decline in offerings as well. It's important to remember that church expenses continue regardless of the weather, and in fact, costs such as heating may increase. Please continue your financial support for the church during this time.

Book Club

Book Club meets Tuesday, February 10, at Pekin Estates in the library at 10 a.m. We will discuss *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. This book tells of one man's mission to promote peace...one school at a time. We welcome new members at any time. Call Sandy Isenburg 309-241-1411 if you have any questions.

Invitation to the ladies of Grace.

Susanna Circle would like you to join us for fellowship and breakfast. We meet every third month on the last Thursday. Our next meeting will be March 26 at 9 a.m. at Shelly B's Cafe in the UAW High Rise, 444 S. Parkway Drive.

One project we do is to collect ladies' personal items at each meeting, and then they are delivered to the Pekin Outreach Center. Another project is prepare a meal for the Pekin Outreach Center every third month, which is also delivered to Pekin Outreach. For questions or if you are planning to attend, please contact Carol Booth at 309-256-0075.

Communion Stewards:

If you would like to help with communion at Grace, please contact Rev. Keller at ckeller58@hotmail.com.

You can volunteer for one Sunday a month to see that there is grape juice and bread for that Sunday, or you can volunteer for more than one Sunday a month. Thank you for your help.

Mason Building Usage

This is a reminder that all activities in the Mason Building must be coordinated through the office. We are establishing a calendar to schedule all events in this facility to ensure optimal use. Thank you for keeping the office informed.



February Birthdays

Charlie Stroemer	1
Donald Jackson	2
Lisa Poole	3
Bill Russell	3
Joyce Hill	3
Judy Dietrich	4
Jana Swisher	5
Joy Wojtas	6
Chris Ward	7
Emily Weyhrich	7
Theresa Holly	9
Nancy Springer	10
Kristy Whitman	11
Savannah Butler	13
Diane Clark	14
Marcia Gazza	14
Debra McKinley	17
Joseph Jacobson	17
Willie Fahnstrom	20
Branson Whitman	23
Donna Bignell	24
Elisabeth Sandoval	24

Connect!

601 N. 4th St.
Pekin, IL
309-347-7131
secretary@pekingrace.org
pekingrace.org

Worship Times
Saturdays 5:30 pm
Sundays 9 & 11am

Office Hours
M-TH 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Closed 12 -1 pm

Prayer Concerns

*For the family of Donna Bradshaw
on her passing*

Duane Hill

Linda Stoner

Pat Stark

*For the family of Ron Garman
on his passing*

Willie Fahnstrom

Names are kept on the prayer list for four weeks. If you would like to be kept on longer, please call the office, 309-347-7131.

Co-Rec Volleyball meets on Mondays at 6:30 p.m.

February 4

Pastor's Study, The stranger among us, 6-7 p.m.

February 7

Open Table Café at Pekin First UMC 11 a.m.. -12:30 p.m.

(Free Hot Lunch)

February 7 & 8

Grace Methodist Women Bake Sale *between services*

February 10

Reminder: Men's Fellowship always meets on Tuesdays, Hospitality Area, at 8 a.m. All men are welcome to join!

February 11

Pastor's Study, Technology, Upper Room, 6-7 p.m.

February 12

Youth Activity: Winter Jam, at the Civic Center, meet at Grace in the hospitality area at 3:45 p.m. Van will leave at 4 p.m.

Cost will be \$15

February 14

Grace Drive-Thru Food Pantry, 11 a.m.

February 10

Book Club, Pekin Estates, 10 a.m.

February 19

Office Closed for President's Day

February 17

Grace Notes Articles Due

February 18

Disposition of Ashes, Pekin Grace Sanctuary, 12-1 p.m.

Pastor's Study cancelled for the Ash Wednesday Service.

Kid's Lesson (PreK-5th) and youth will meet in the chapel at Pekin Grace at 6 p.m. to learn the meaning of Ash Wednesday. (Regular Bible Buddies and Unitekids will not meet.)

Both Youth groups will meet at 5:30 p.m. They will combine with the UNITEkids at 6 p.m. to learn about the meaning of Ash Wednesday. Then they will attend the service as a group.

Combined Choir will meet at 5:45 p.m. in the Sanctuary for the Ash Wednesday Service.

Ash Wednesday Service at Pekin Grace (with our sister Church Pekin First UMC), Sanctuary, 6:30 p.m.

February 22

Softball Chili Fundraiser Luncheon.

February 24

Leadership Board Meeting, Upper Room, 6 p.m.

February 25

Communion at Pekin Estates, 2 p.m.

February 28

Grace Drive-Thru Food Pantry, Hospitality Area, 11 a.m.