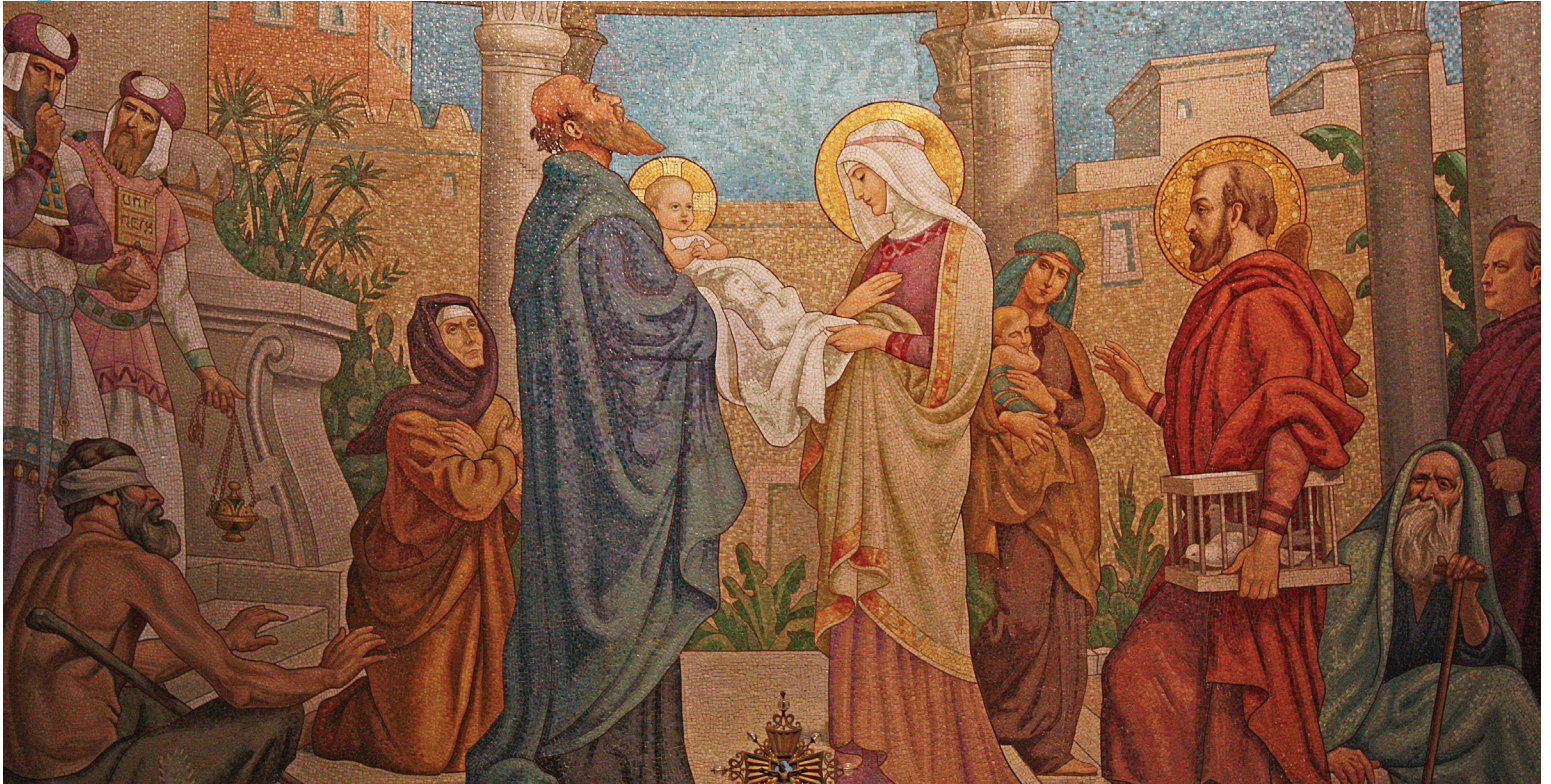


FEB 2026

THE LATEST @ PRINCE OF PEACE



ENEWS Each Friday and Sunday we send an e-news with up-to-date info about what's going on at PoP and in our community and how you can be involved. Sign up by contacting the church office today!

FACEBOOK Follow us on Facebook (Prince of Peace Lutheran Church) and share our nearly-daily posts with friends

YOUTUBE Our online worship is published each Sunday on our YouTube page, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

WEBSITE Our website has current info, updates, and links for worship and ministry. Visit poplargo.org for more.

KEEPING JESUS IN THE CENTER

February 2 is nearly upon us once again. How do you celebrate? More to the point, what do you celebrate?

I'm willing to bet most of the people in this country think of a groundhog and its shadow, perhaps even recalling a popular Bill Murray film from the early nineties. In the Christian tradition, however, February 2nd is the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. More commonly, it's known as Candlemas.

Candlemas is a worship service that is set aside from the usual rhythms of the parish, in which parishioners bring the candles they

Continued...

KEEPING JESUS IN THE CENTER *Continued...*

anticipate using in their homes during the coming year, having these candles blessed during the liturgy. This blessing component might explain why Candlemas is seldom observed in ELCA parishes like ours.

Lutheran theology is erected on a foundation of finding what is essential for faith, and relegating all other practices and traditions to a lesser, optional importance. One can see this principle in Lutheran teaching regarding everything from penance to the blessing of inanimate objects - these may be beneficial in some circumstances, but only if they help to bolster faith in what is essential. The danger in non-essential faith practices is that they can distract from the core, the center, which is the salvation provided to us by Jesus Christ. The theological word for these potential distractions is a Greek one - *adiaphora* - and it has been giving Lutherans headaches since 1548 or so.

Here's how *adiaphora* works. A faith practice starts out innocently enough, perhaps something like the personal piety of bowing before the altar as a sign of respect. Now, logically, the altar remains the altar, whether one bows before it or not. But, if the reverence adds something to the bowing person's appreciation for the sacrifice offered for us that we celebrate at the altar, then the decision to bow has been a useful little *adiaphoron*. However, if someone is sitting in the pews and notices that a person has 'forgotten' to bow before the altar - or, perhaps, is not conditioned to bow at all - and this is cited as cause for distress in that person in the pews, then the *adiaphora* has been given too much importance (at least, by the person in the pews). Of course, it need not be this way.

One of the gifts of our tradition is its clarity. We need only be united on the importance of Jesus and what he provides for us to coexist happily together. United by a foundation in Christ, we are capable of abiding all kinds of variation in the ways we celebrate what God has provided for us. Now, here is why this matters.

Most of what divides Christians is some form of *adiaphora*. We quibble over traditions like when to

take decorations down after Christmas, or when to put them back up again, or whether we ought to bless something that is already a blessing, etc. We live in a polarized world in which being 'right' about things is too often about belonging to a particular group or perspective. It is liberating, then, when we realize the core of our identity is our belonging to Christ, who offers a grace so all-encompassing that it surpasses our more personal differences!

We are not adding a Candlemas service this year, but it's not because doing so would be wrong. We are not adding a service of Groundhog appreciation for the same reason. We are sticking with the core of our worship life, welcoming people each Sunday, and entrusting the rest of the week to each person, hoping that in that short span of time, their faith may find expression in the central purpose of each day - an appreciation of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns in our hearts.

Historically speaking, the Presentation of Our Lord precedes other traditions surrounding February 2. On this feast day, we hear the story of Mary and Joseph, bringing their young son to the Temple, according to the custom of that day (Luke 2:22-40). In this story, the impact of Jesus is not made known in the ritualistic adherence to the sacrifice of turtledoves, but in Simeon, who meets the very young Jesus and immediately knows deeply that God has proven faithful to his promise. This pattern continues today. When we allow ourselves to be drawn to Christ himself (more so than the traditions that surround him), we will share a measure of the peace and joy Simeon echoes through the generations:

"...now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles [my edit: including Lutherans!] and for the glory to your people Israel."

—Pastor Gregg

PASTOR RACHEL'S REMARKS

I wonder how many more times I'll be surprised by the differences between Florida and places I've lived before, based mainly on weather. You've heard me talk about these surprises in sermons, newsletter remarks, and passing conversation. Already, there's more than I expected. You're getting at least one more instance of my surprise here, and we'll see what else is revealed in the future.

In all my past winters, it has been a season of hibernation, of staying in and staying warm, of getting by doing what must be done as we wait for spring to welcome us back to more engaging times. There's good ministry happening, but it feels a little more subdued.

In Florida, though, winter seems to be a time of renewal and activity. It's nice outside – generally not too hot, and even the 'cold' days aren't that cold. The snowbirds are nearly all here, and our pews are at the fullest they've been since I arrived. Rather than slowing down, things are picking up around here, and there's energy moving around.

We are planning for lots of ministry in our first quarter of 2026, including a picnic OUTSIDE on the first weekend of March (!). We have pictorial directory photos scheduled (last weekend of February, be sure to sign up!). Council is having our annual retreat, centered on leadership development and looking toward the future. We are getting into details to reach our goals for 2026, Answering God's Call to Ministry, Connect, and Worship & Serve.

One of those goals – to Worship & Serve – includes our intention to welcome more people into volunteer roles in this first quarter of the year. Whether you're new to the congregation, or just ready to try a new role, there are going to be lots of opportunities to find a place to use your gifts at Prince of Peace. As we get started on this work, I hope you'll take a little time, maybe while you're outside enjoying the beautiful weather, to consider what new opportunity you might be called to try out this year. And then, I hope you'll share your thoughts with me, so we can connect you where your gifts meet the needs of our congregation, community, and world!



Pastor Rachel

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727.585.9969



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT POP PRESCHOOL

"They have just been really life-changing for our family and have made such a huge difference." "I encounter most of the staff during pickup and drop off. They're always filled with smiles and so much love. We're so blessed and honored to have our son at POP!" These are just some of the positive messages that have come to our Preschool Board parent representative after an invitation to share feedback. Thank YOU for your support of our Preschool!

JAN CONGREGATION COUNCIL

- + Welcomed new members of Council (Mike Carmody, Mary Larsen, Mary Jo Martin, Chloe Tyner, and Dick Williams)
 - + Elected officers for 2026 (Patti Morrison, President; Mike Carmody, Vice President; Kim Adams, Treasurer; Susan Wood, Secretary)
 - + Approved \$500 First Fruits donation to International Health Partners
 - + Approved quote for replacing carpeted surfaces in the Parish Hall (Choir Room, Care Room, Hallway)
 - + Trained Council members in the use of the new AED machines
 - + Reviewed a draft of the Council Covenant
-

FIRST FRUITS

Our February First Fruits donation goes to International Health Partners, whom we welcomed to PoP on Jan 18. Paula Lofstrom, the outstanding humanitarian and medical missionary who serves as a founding member and the Managing Director of International Health Partners (IHP), shared an excellent presentation about this organization and the vital work they do.

IHP seeks to improve health care for the people of Tanzania by integrating medical knowledge, techniques, and best practices within the East African culture. They employ and train local health care professionals and rely on the generosity of others to build resource efficient facilities without sacrificing the care for our patients.

This organization has solely focused on improving healthcare in Tanzania for the past 23 years and

currently helps to support the St. John's University School of Nursing in Dodoma. Recently they embarked on a new endeavor at Chihoni to build a full service hospital in an underserved area. This hospital will eventually serve as a training facility for professional development across East Africa.

IHP's model seeks to develop well-run facilities and provide the best care, at a nominal cost to the patients within the communities they serve. They welcome volunteers from all over the world who generously give their time to work with local people and make a meaningful difference in the world. They, and the people of Tanzania, appreciate your support.

You can learn more about IHP on their website, www.ihptz.org.



FEB 1-5, COLLECTING FOOD FOR PACK A SACK FOOD COLLECTION

Our First Sunday Food partner is Pack-a-Sack. Each week we prepare more than fifty bags of nutritious food and snacks for students at Fuguitt Elementary and our own PoP Preschool - to make sure that disadvantaged children have something to eat over the weekends. We are collecting individually packaged snacks of Goldfish, pudding, mac 'n cheese, peanut butter, juice boxes/pouches, squeeze applesauce, peanut butter or cheese crackers, instant oatmeal, cereal, and breakfast bars. Bring to worship Feb 1 or to the church office during the week.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

WEDS, FEB 4 & 11 / 6PM / COC, PEACE HYMN STUDY

We are NOT singing hymns; we are studying them. Pastor Dick has amassed much information about our familiar hymns. Did you know several Christmas hymns were originally written (words & music) for childrens' Christmas programs? Or did you know how many hymns were written by women? You will hear "I didn't know that!" often during our 2 remaining sessions. Come!

Feb 4: Hymns from other nations and cultures

Feb 11: Miscellaneous hymn stories

WEDS, FEB 25, MAR 3, 11, 18 / 6PM / COC, PEACE POETRY FOR LIFE

Since ancient times, poetry, both scriptural and secular, has served as the voice of communities, telling history,

supporting culture. Poetry also strengthens our habit of mindfulness when we do more than listen to words, when we enter fully into their meanings. This four-week course will offer a communal experience in reading poetry. Evenings will include short, guided lectures, followed by reading and discussion, along with suggestions for journaling at home as part of spiritual practice. Discover how ordinary language uncovers individual truths. Please bring "How to Love the World: Poems of Gratitude and Hope" by James Crews and a notebook. (There are 10 copies available through the office, or you may order your own copy online.)

The class will be led by Antonia Lewandowski, EdD, author of two collections of poetry, *Out of the Woods* (2008), *Tangled* (2023) and other publications.

OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT AND SERVE

SUN, FEB 8 / 10AM

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING

On Superbowl Sunday, we will join neighbors across the nation in the Souper Bowl of Caring! Bring food and financial donations and place them in the decorated grocery cart of your favored Super Bowl team. We'll see which team garners the most donations! These gifts will then be given to a local food charity, as part of our continued work to address food insecurity in our community.

WED, FEB 18 / 10AM / PARISH HALL QUILT MINISTRY

Learn how to create a LWR quilt from start to finish. Session includes cutting squares, piecing the quilt top, stitching the backing, building the sandwich, zigzagging to secure, and tying to finish. Not familiar with these terms? We will demonstrate. **Contact:** Jan Brewster or the church office

THURS, FEB 26 / 7PM / PARISH HALL BOOKED FOR DESSERT

The book selection for February 26 is "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" by Rebecca Skloot. All are welcome to join the group for lively conversation, fellowship and refreshments whether or not you have read the book. Contact the church office for information.

FRI, FEB 27 / 10AM / PARISH HALL CARD PRAYER MINISTRY

We gather to write words of love, hope and compassion for those who are homebound, hospitalized, living in assisted care or needing words of encouragement. **Contact:** Debbie Freedman or the church office



FEB 2 / 3PM / PARISH HALL HUNGER TASK FORCE

Prince of Peace Hunger Task Force has two very special projects. Every Thursday evening, one of our team picks up the leftover bakery items at the Panera in Belleair Bluffs and delivers the items to area facilities that support people in need of food.

Our second project is part of the Pack-a-Sack program which provides food and snacks for the weekend to children at one

of the local elementary schools. The children must qualify and register at the school. Many of the children are fed by the Pinellas County school breakfast and lunch programs. The bags are packed by our Ruth's Promise guests each week and delivered for distribution to the children on Friday. We currently support approximately 45 students at Fugitt Elementary School.

We are blessed with faithful volunteers and grateful for the support of our Prince of Peace congregation. If you would like to be part of this ministry, please call the office at 727.585.9969 or join the task force at its next planning meeting on Monday, Feb 2 at 3pm in the Parish Hall.



SAT, FEB 14 / 6PM / PARISH HALL SPAGHETTI DINNER AND HYMN SING

Join Shawn Thomas and John Lowe on dueling pianos as we sing some of our favorite hymns. Tickets are \$15 each and all profits raised will go toward PoP Youth summer camp expenses. Dinner includes spaghetti, salad, bread, and dessert. Be sure to provide the titles of your favorite hymns when purchasing your tickets, and as many of your requests will be honored as time permits. Space is limited. **Tickets must be purchased by February 11** and are available in the church office, on Wednesday nights, and on Sundays. Email for more info: shawn@poplargo.org.



Three Organ Spectacular

SUN, FEB 15 / 3PM / SANCTUARY THREE ORGAN SPECTACULAR

Featuring Seth Bott, John Lowe, and Shawn Thomas. The Festival Choir performs Charles-Marie Widor's Mass for Choir and Two Organs, along with other music for three organs. Featuring organs provided by Central Music (Clearwater, FL). This AFFS concert is free of charge, though donations are accepted and appreciated. Invite your friends!



WED, FEB 18 / NOON & 7PM / SANCTUARY

ASH WEDNESDAY

- Palm Burning, 11:45am, Portico
- Worship with Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes, Noon, Sanctuary
- Pancake Supper, 6pm, Parish Hall
- Worship with Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes, 7pm, Sanctuary



SUN, FEB 22 / 10AM / COC, PEACE

WITNESS AT THE CROSS

The Gospels mention many folks who were with Jesus during Holy Week. Amy-Jill Levine brings to life these many persons. She challenges us about things we might have learned about them and does so with humor and insight. We hope you can join us as we learn about the soldiers, the scoffers, Mary, the 2 criminals hanging on either side of our Lord and others. See you in the Peace room for this great Lenten study.



WEDS, FEB 25, MAR 4, 11, 18, 25

WEDNESDAYS IN LENT

Along with our Sunday morning worship times, on the five Wednesdays in Lent we set aside other times for gathering in Jesus' name for worship.

- Lenten Worship, 12pm, Chapel
- Holden Evening Prayer, 7pm, Sanctuary



FRI & SAT, FEB 27-28 / PARISH HALL

PHOTO DIRECTORY

On Friday, Feb 27 and Saturday, Feb 28, Universal Church Directories will be at PoP to take photos for our new Pictorial Directory! You can sign up to have your photo taken in 2 ways: visit the signup table on Sunday before or after service, or go online to ucdir.com and use our Church Code FL1073 and Password PHOTOS. *If you are unable to have your photo taken on these days, you can submit your own photo for the directory through the church office.*



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Kellie Dreger

Mary Kay Koch

Cailey Mateo

Ken Abkemeier

Richard Landeen

Ashley Behrendt

Rafael Camacho

Gabriel Camacho

Beth Behrendt

Marilyn Holmes

Casey Temple

Tony Hanson



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