

# Shepherd's Voice



## A Little Love Note

from Pastor Melissa  
December 2025

What does it mean to insist on hope? For me, hope is more than just a wordy prayer. Hope is vulnerable and tender. It is fierce. It is something that can coexist with what we are experiencing. For some, this Advent and Christmas season may be filled with joy and contentment, while others could be nursing grief, loss, sadness, and fear. Our worship lineup, including Sunday services, the Wednesday services, and the Blue Christmas service, honors where you are this season. MaryAnn McKibben Dana, author of *Hope: A User's Manual*, writes, "Hope invites us to cradle the past, rest in the present, and dream a beautiful future—however long it takes." Hope never gives up. Hope is never finished. I find that comforting and inspiring. Comforting because it feels like "love never fails" in 1 Cor 13. Hope is enduring. Hope is inspiring for me because I can join that legacy of God's people opening themselves to God's grace and love and allowing God to heal the world through my life. How do you respond to the idea that "hope is never finished"? Is that daunting or is it comforting to you?

There is no right answer. There's just where you are right now. Advent blessings to you all!

Love,

Pastor Melissa

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## Leadership Team Meeting Summary

Leadership Team has tabled voting on creating a new church website with an outside company we met with. Instead, we are giving Randy Anderson and Jim Craner an opportunity to come up with a new website on their own. The current site that is hosted through the United Methodist Church will no longer exist at the end of the year. We will be updating the congregation on the website changes soon.

Also, Leadership Team will be working on updating staff job descriptions and duties. A task force will work on these descriptions outside of Leadership Team meetings.

Outgoing Leadership Team members and new members taking their place in 2026 will be recognized and announced in January during service.

Important dates:

- Advent/Christmas Eve information: Hanging of the Greens (Worship team leads) will be after church on November 23rd the week before Advent begins (Contact Lorna about the big wreath).
- December 21st—Blue Christmas service for those in our congregation and the community who have experienced a loss or hardship that makes the holidays difficult for them. Pastor Melissa is reaching out to other churches and organizations with an invitation to attend this service and a meal afterwards.

Vicki will need a headcount ahead of the service.

- Northwest UMC staff will be recognized on Sunday, December 23rd during church. As in the past, staff will be receiving a gift from the church at that time.
- Christmas Eve: Services at Prospect UMC will be at 6pm—Northwest UMC will be 7:30pm. Congregations from both churches can attend which ever time works best for their family.

## Blue Christmas

Sunday, December 21 at 4pm

Not everyone looks forward to the holidays. Holidays can trigger tough memories: memories of losing our loved one. This might be your first holiday without your loved one or the umpteenth one without them. This Blue Christmas service is a candle-light vigil that holds space for both hope and for our fears, our grief, and our sadness.

The service will be followed by a dinner to provide extra tender, loving care for the attendees during this time of year.

Registrations are needed for dinner, you can either click on the QR code to fill out the form or email us at [office@nwunitedmethodist.org](mailto:office@nwunitedmethodist.org) with your name, phone number and how many are coming.



## Intergenerational Advent Series

Wednesday evenings during Advent, we will be gathering at 5:30pm.



On Wednesday, December 3, we will gather at Northwest in the sanctuary for a Chrismon service. Chrismons are symbols that tell the story of Jesus. We will have scripture readings and carols as we decorate the tree with Chrismons.

On Wednesday, December 10, we will gather at Prospect in the sanctuary to pray, light candles, and hear about the preparation for the birth of Jesus from John the Baptist. Afterward, we will gather in intergenerational small groups to reflect on the story, make hope luminaries, and frost and eat cookies.

On Wednesday, December 17, we will gather again at Northwest to pray, light candles, and hear Mary's story of God being with her which is a comfort in her fear to share with Joseph her news of being pregnant. Again, we will gather in intergenerational small groups to reflect on the story and make stars of courage.

A Benediction for the series, "What do you fear?"  
Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

In a fearful world, may you look for God's spirit.  
May you reach for each other's hands.  
May you choose courage whenever you can.  
And in all things, may you remember  
that good news is louder than fear.  
In the name of the one who calls,  
the one who sends,  
and the one who journeys with—  
Go in peace and be not afraid.

Amen.



## St. Nicholas Day

On Sunday, December 7, St. Nick will be visiting from the North Pole for St. Nicholas Day! He will be sharing with us the True Meaning of Christmas.

## NUMC Book Club

Currently the Book Club is in the midst of reading three books for our next meeting in February 2026. One book shares stories about "unrecorded lives," one book tells about a life transformed by an unexpected "package," and the last book relates a moving story of tragedy and survival by a group of children. The titles are:

- \* Tell Me Everything by Elizabeth Strout, 2024 (Fiction)
- \* The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry by Gabrielle Charbonnet, 2014 (Fiction)
- \* Shelterwood by Lisa Wingate, 2024 (Historical Fiction, setting 1909 and 1990 Oklahoma)

*We hope you will enjoy reading this group of insightful titles. Mark your calendars to join us in discussing these books on February 17th at 6 pm.*

### Birthday's

Help us CELEBRATE our congregation! Wish them a HAPPY BIRTHDAY if you see them this month!!

3<sup>rd</sup>- Vicki Baumgarten  
Betty Hogan

16<sup>th</sup> Sophia Engel  
Mary Staley

20<sup>th</sup>- Harrison Hartley Tapp

21<sup>st</sup>- Mike Wasson

31<sup>st</sup>- Cindy Scott

### Altar Flowers 2026

The calendar is open for altar flowers for the 2026 calendar year. If you would like to reserve flowers, please either email the office or fill out a form! The new calendar will be posted soon!!

## Advent Worship

### What do you fear?

Have you ever really sat with the opening lines of Luke's Gospel that begin Jesus' story with the words, "In the time of Herod..."? We are immediately introduced to Jesus' setting into which he is born: a fearful world filled with oppression, economic disparity, uncertainty, and instability. Throughout space and time, the angels in the stories of Christ's birth whisper the surprising message, "Do not fear." In our "What do you fear?" Advent worship series, we will hear Mary, Joseph, the magi, the shepherds, and others hold on to courage and trust in God's good news for all people as they hear God's call on their lives, and acknowledge their fears and move through them. This Advent, we will learn from the stories of Jesus' birth how we might form a different relationship with fear, asking ourselves if we might acknowledge fear without letting it rule us and how we might catalyze our fears into love and action. By doing so, we might just be able to see more clearly how God is breaking in and where God is at work. This Advent, we remember that hope that trembles is still hope. This season, we will insist on hope and trust that good news is greater than fear.

Sunday, November 30—"In the Time of Herod, We Long for God to Break In" Luke 1:5-13; Lamentations 3:55-57

Sunday, December 7—"When We're Running Out of Hope, God is at Work" Matthew 11:1-11; Isaiah 43:19-21

Sunday, December 14—"Even in Our Fear, We Are Called Forward" Luke 1:26-39; Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sunday, December 21—"When You're Afraid, Give Me Your Hand" Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 41:5-10

Wednesday, December 24—"Good News is Louder Than Fear" Christmas Eve Luke 2:1-20

Sunday, December 28—Cozy Christmas Carols

Sunday, January 4—"Fear Doesn't Stop Us" Epiphany Star Word Service Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18

This Advent's worship series is from A Sanctified Art whom created a plethora of resources that we are blessed to share with you all!

## Advent For the Family

### For Children

Throughout Advent, there will be weekly children's bulletins available filled with activities and opportunities to color and connect to the weekly scripture and theme. An advent calendar that can be colored and turned into a paper lantern is also available, complete with instructions for support from caregivers.

### Daily Devotional Booklet

Get ready for a devotional that accompanies us this Advent season with the worship series themes! Booklets will be available at the church.

### Advent Calendar

An Advent calendar is also available. Each day of Advent features a new breath prayer to bring into your prayer life.

### Advent Prayer Group

Throughout Advent, the Tuesday morning Bible Study will be the Advent Prayer group. Meetings are Tuesdays at 10:00AM at Northwest. Poetry will be discussed and we will pray with one another.

## Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24 at 7:30 pm

Come celebrate the birth of Jesus in story and song at Northwest on Christmas Eve. The service will include singing "Silent Night" by candlelight and a special surprise! If 7:30pm doesn't work for you, our sister church, Prospect UMC, will be worshipping at 6:00 pm.

## Cozy Christmas Carols

December 28 at 10:30am Worship Service

We invite you to come in your jammies/cozy clothes, bring a blankie and stuffie, and come sing!

Who doesn't love a good Christmas carol? And, for that matter, who doesn't love being cozy?!

## Star Word Service

Epiphany Sunday, January 4 at 10:30am Worship Service

Star words, or star gifts," is a prayer practice that is connected to Epiphany. These star words are a gift from God that help guide us and speak to us as we seek and reflect on God's presence among us.

## Staff and Office Information

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