

Shepherd's Voice

March 2026
Volume 2, Issue 3



A Little Love Note

Ash Wednesday Message (Joel 2:12-14; Matthew 6:1-6,16-21)

I will never forget the first Thanksgiving I said grace with my family with three generations and my new boyfriend (who is now my husband) around the table. I don't remember what I prayed, but I spoke from my heart. After I said, "Amen," my grandma piped up saying, "And now for the real prayer."

Now that it's been many years since that dinner scene, I love to share that story as your pastor. I still fully expect that if I were to pray at a meal, my Grandma would say the same thing. Because I am still a child to her. I don't always use all of the words she expects to be there. It's humbling. And, for me, it's a great reminder that I am perfectly imperfect. That prayer and every prayer before it and every prayer after it isn't a performance. It's real talk. It's real.

Just as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, our Christian faith isn't for show. What Jesus calls us to is a faith in which we have an earnest desire for relationship with God. When you are performing, your brain is like a split screen of the audience's perception of you and what you are saying. God wants your undivided attention, for your brain to be on one channel – and that is tuning in to spending time with God.

This season of Lent is all about our earnest desire to spend time with God – that we want to be in God's presence and we aren't just performing because we think it's what people want us to do. This isn't about a right or wrong way of doing it. It's about wanting to do it because you hear God's call to return, to turn back to God and start fresh with love, just as God called God's people through the prophet Joel.

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Birthday's

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

2nd- Betty Callais

8th- Jackie Luebcke

13th- Luca Hernandez

18th- Wil Engel

20th- Ellie Swain

30th- Nylene Bradburn

Altar Flowers 2026

The calendar is open for altar flowers for the 2026 calendar year. If you would like to reserve flowers, please **fill out a form** with the amount owed. You can put it in the offering basket or turn it into the office. The new calendar is up!

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Tonight, this Ash Wednesday 2026, I invite you to open your palms in your lap. This posture is one of offering and receiving. It is one of willingness and welcoming. It is a posture of courage in this way – you are willing to enter the presence of God knowing that you will never be the same. In this posture, I invite you to ask God how you might return with all of your heart. Is there something that is keeping you from spending time with God? Maybe there is something for which to honestly express your remorse. Maybe there is something you need to let go of during this Lenten season as you seek to return. Perhaps, there might be something to take up that will help draw you closer to God. Ask how God desires for you to re-imagine your life when you live as a sanctuary for God's love to be made real in our families and in our community.

Just imagine: when we all turn to God and live as sanctuaries, when there is a communal turning, the whole world is God's sanctuary. In our Lenten worship series called "The Work of Imagination," one theological summary for today states, "The imagination required for this work is not fanciful. It is fierce. It is honest. And it begins in dust and quiet, with the courage to turn." The courage comes from that authentic relationship with God that transforms ordinary practices into acts that respond to God's love, into acts that nurture community, into acts that have the power to reveal God's kingdom and to transform the whole world.

And this is where it starts. In the dust and the ashes. In the willingness to begin again.

Love,

Pastor Melissa

Membership Sunday



Welcome to our new members!

L to R: James Scott, Cindy Scott, Donna Yanders, Pastor Melissa Engel, Kathleen Close, Jennifer Murfin

Leadership Team Meeting Summary

Hi Church Family!

I'd like to take a few minutes to update you on the NUMC Leadership Team meeting held in February, and to let you know what your Leadership Team is working on.

- Pastor Melissa is spearheading the creation of our leadership team covenant, an agreement reflecting our team's values, communication policies, and responsibilities. During the February meeting we brainstormed ideas for this agreement; Pastor Melissa will present a draft version soon.
- Pastor Melissa shared about our new members - very exciting and welcome to all of them!
- Ministry Teams are being restarted! So far, the Worship team and the Congregational Care team have restarted and are underway. See the Pastor's report for more details!
- The Leadership team is planning a spring spiritual retreat in the form of a Saturday vision workshop led by our leadership team accountability coach Carol Stufflebeam. (Think of her like a consultant helping us move from the old multi-committee model to the single leadership team model. We're applying for a \$1500 grant to fund her coaching work and our retreat.)
- We are planning quarterly Town Hall meetings to keep the church body informed as well as to seek feedback from everyone on our missions and activities. The first Town Hall meeting is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, March 15th, after worship ends. Stay tuned for more details!
- The team discussed some routine staff issues.
- Pastor Melissa updated us on the new girls youth group formation and upcoming plans.

Next Meeting: March 9th, 2026 @6pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Craner, secretary

From the Pantry

Our church family and all pantry volunteers are to be commended! Your contributions in any form are so appreciated by those we serve in our community. You have supported us in amazing ways, ie. Scalding hot temperatures, sub zero temperatures in January (while are churches closed), and SOUP'R BOWL is amazing!

THANK YOU THANK YOU!

Natalie & Faedean

NEW OFFICE HOURS!

We are making changes in the office. We hope with these new changes that we are able to better serve the congregation.

Pastor's Walk In Hours:

Tuesdays 8:30-10:00 AM

Walk In Office Hours:

Thursdays 9:00-11:30 AM

Other changes to note-

The office email will now be checked and responded to Monday-Friday.

While staff will be in the office on Wednesday mornings for our staff meetings, we ask to not be interrupted. Please do not walk in on our staff meetings. This time is sacred to us and it serves for us to work together as a team and really focus on our work.

Staff and Office Information

Pastor

Pastor Melissa Engel
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revmelissaengel@gmail.com

Drop in hours Tuesdays 8:30-10:00 AM

Or by appointment

Church Office

Mary Toel
(309) 692-0421
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Office Hours Thursday 9:00-11:30 AM

Children & Youth Ministry

Tricia Buck
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Worship Director

Lisa Rogers
(309) 472-4472
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Children's Programming: "Just Imagine"

March 4 at 6pm after Family Table - Kindness Adventure

Ready for a kindness adventure?! Children will practice sharing God's blessings and love in surprising, merciful ways.

March 11 at 6pm after Family Table - Paths of Courage Obstacle Course

Just like the Canaanite Woman who wanted Jesus to heal her daughter, we may face obstacles. Even when she was told no, the woman did not give up and asked Jesus again. Just like the mother who was determined and courageous, we too can face challenges with brave love. Children will be participating in an obstacle course.

March 18 at 6pm after Family Table - A Living Picture of the Good Shepherd

Let's make the picture of the Good Shepherd come to life! We will use props and materials to create a scene with a shepherd, sheep, and challenges they might face.

Wednesday Nights

Gather 'round The Family Table!

During the Family Table, we will share a meal lovingly prepared by the Northwest staff and pastor team, as well as read scripture, pray, and have sacred discussion.

Donations for this meal are greatly appreciated. Monies collected above the cost of the meals will be donated to a ministry chosen at the final Family Table.

- March 4, 5:30pm- Baked Potato Bar and Salad
Come share some good eats and some dreams for building a better world.
- March 11, 5:30pm- Greek Chicken Bowls
Gather 'round The Family Table where there is room for everyone to eat and share.
- March 18, 5:30pm- Spaghetti, Garlic Bread and Salad
Come, eat, and share space in a community where leadership means to serve others and where abundant life is nurtured for all.

5:30pm	The Family Table
6:00-7:00 pm	Bible Study
	Children's Ministry
	SoulFix Rehearsal
7:00pm	Choir Rehearsal

Meal Train & Greeting Cards

Contact Cards for requesting Meal Train meals or greeting cards for members may be picked up from the welcome table.

Please tuck the card in your church directory or another accessible place for easy access in the future.