



*"I am the vine, you are the branches.  
He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;  
for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5*

*you  
are  
loved*

**Newsletter • February 2026**



### **As I see it...**

Lent season is going to arrive this quietly this year. I was surprised when I noticed that Ash Wednesday is February 18. We will kick off the Lenten season with outdoor imposition of ashes at the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Grove streets from 7 am to 9am. Later in the evening, at 7 p.m., we will have Ash Wednesday worship service in the Sanctuary.

### **WHAT IS LENT?**

Lent is often described as a "A Grace-Filled Journey of Renewal." Each year, the church calls us into these forty days not to burden us, but to renew us—to help us open our lives more fully to the transforming grace of God.

In the Christian story, forty days often mark a time of preparation and change. Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness before beginning his ministry. In that time of prayer and fasting, he listens deeply for God's direction and emerges ready to serve. Lent invites us into that same pattern: pausing, listening, and allowing God to shape us again.

In The United Methodist Church, we understand repentance not as shame or fear, but as a loving turning of the heart—turning away from whatever separates us from God and one another, and turning toward the abundant life God desires for us.

#### *Lent gives us space to ask honest questions:*

- Where do I need God's healing?
- Where have I grown distracted, weary, or complacent?
- How is God calling me to grow in love?

These questions are not meant to condemn us. They are an expression of God's grace already at work, gently drawing us toward wholeness.

John Wesley often spoke of the means of grace—the practices through which God works in our lives. Lent encourages us to return to these practices with intention:

- Prayer, which deepens our relationship with God
- Fasting or self-denial, which helps us rely less on ourselves and more on God
- Works of mercy, which express our faith through love, justice, and compassion

These practices do not earn God’s love. They help us stay open to it. As we grow in personal holiness, we are also called to social holiness—loving our neighbors, caring for the poor, and seeking justice in a broken world.

Wherever you find yourself this Lent—strong in faith or full of questions—know that God’s grace meets you exactly where you are. You do not need to have everything figured out. You only need to be willing to take the next faithful step.

May this Lenten season draw us closer to God, deepen our love for one another, and renew us for lives of joyful service, as we follow Jesus together.

Shalom!

Pastor Ezekiel

## 2026 Leadership Board

The 2026 Leadership Board had its first meeting on Sunday, February 1.

Members of the 2026 board are:

Rev. Ezekiel Koech, Pastor • Jeanne Stanley, Chairperson  
Ryan Berg • Susan Butell • Mike Curran • Christi Darnell  
Martha Harris • Marcia O’Neil • Frank Perez • Glen Sharp  
Coleen Burgess, Treasurer • Katherine Cook, Secretary

Jeanne Stanley will be serving as the new chair of the board. Jeanne has been a member of Baldwin First for three years.

Jeanne is a retired theatre professor with an MFA. She has taught and practiced presentation skills when filling the pulpit and serving as liturgist. She strives to listen in order to meet the needs of God’s children, using divine guidance as the focus of public prayer and preaching. Over the past year, Jeanne says her call to serve has grown stronger, assuring her that she is on the right path as she seeks to fulfill God’s plan for her.

Outgoing board members are Doug Cheek, Nancy Arnold, and Carolyn Groves.

Outgoing chair, Doug and his wife Samantha Cheek joined Baldwin First the summer of 2006.

In 2007, Doug was asked to join SPPRC and became the chair in 2008. Since then, Doug chaired SPPRC and Finance before becoming Chair of Administrative Council and transitioning to Lay Leader.

## SUNDAY WORSHIP

Worship	9:30 am
Sunday School	10:45 am
BLAST JH/HS Group	
Adult Bible Studies	10:45 am
Young Adult Bible Study	10:45 am

Childcare service for Pre-K and under is available in the lower level across from Fellowship Hall.

Children's bags can be borrowed during service. They may be found in the narthex.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### February 8

Baptism, Confirmation, New  
Member Recognition  
Bishop David Wilson Presiding  
Lunch Following Service

### February 14 & 28

Food Pantry, 9-10:30 a.m.

### February 17

Fat Tuesday Pancake Supper  
5-7 p.m.

### February 18 - Ash Wednesday

Wednesday Morning Ashes  
Front Lawn 7 - 9 a.m.  
Service 7 p.m. in Sanctuary

### March 10

Tenebrae Choral Service 7:30 p.m.  
Baker University Choir  
Sanctuary

### March 29 - Palm Sunday

Easter Egg Hunt & Brunch  
after service

### April 2 - Maundy Thursday

### April 3 - Good Friday

### April 5 - Easter

"I am most proud of the transition to the one leadership board. Moving to that structure has made us more efficient and more capable of meeting our goals."

Doug will, of course, still be involved with the church by ushering, serving as liturgist, giving children's messages, offering VBS support, and washing dishes!

"Thank you, congregation, for the support you have given me over the years."

Blessings,

Doug

Former board member, Nancy Arnold served on the board for five years. She started as chair of the Administrative Council prior to serving on the current board.

"During my tenure, I'm most proud of replacing and making repairs to the boiler system and updating the AV and Tech equipment.

"I would ask the new board members to explore all of the options available for the situation to make an educated decision."

Carolyn Groves finished the term of departing member Joanne Kite. Carolyn acknowledges that she served on the board for at least 20 years.

The one board model has helped members by reducing the number of meetings each month. "When we meet for our monthly session, everyone is very aware of our responsibility to the congregation, and we strive to be good stewards of God's blessings to this congregation."

*Thank you*

*To all who have served and who have  
chosen to be a part  
of the leadership team!*

## Leadership Team

Jeanne Stanley, Chair

Ryan Berg

Susan Butell

Mike Curran

Christi Darnell

Martha Harris

Marcial O'Neil

Frank Perez

Glen Sharp

Katherine Cook, Secretary

Coleen Burgess, Finances

## CONTACT US

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### Church Office

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[office@baldwinfirst.org](mailto:office@baldwinfirst.org)

### Office Hours

Tuesday - Thursday

10 am - 2 pm

### Website

[baldwinfirst.org](http://baldwinfirst.org)

### Social Media

[@baldwinfirstumc](https://www.instagram.com/baldwinfirstumc)



**BALDWIN FIRST**



# February Lenten Events at Baldwin First

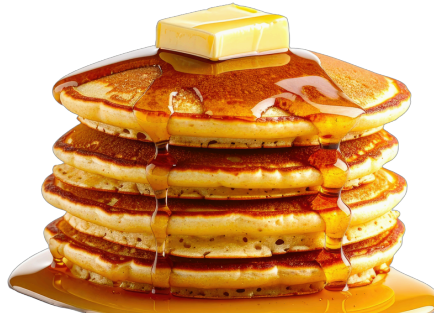
## ***Fat Tuesday Pancake Feed!***

Hosted by UMW

**February 17, 2026**

5 - 7 p.m.

Fellowship Hall



*All you can eat!!!!*

*Free Will Donations Accepted*

## **"Wednesday Morning Ashes Outside"**

7 - 9 a.m., Front Lawn

## **Evening Service**

7:00 p.m., Sanctuary

*All are welcome!*



## **Lent 101**

by Rev. Penny Ford, *ResourceUMC*, January 29, 2026,  
<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/lent-101>.



## **MARDI GRAS? WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH JESUS?**

Mardi Gras means "Fat Tuesday." It refers to the day before Lent starts. It's called "Fat" or "Great" because it's associated with great food and parties. In earlier times, people used Lent as a time of fasting and repentance. Since they didn't want to be tempted by sweets, meat and other distractions in the house, they cleaned out their cabinets. They used up all the sugar and yeast in sweet breads before the Lent season started, and fixed meals with all the meat available. It was a great feast!

## **UWF/UMW**

Barbara Bailey  
Heather Ballinger  
Linda Ballinger  
Amy Berg  
Kelley Bethell-Smith  
Jan Boyd  
Coleen Burgess  
Susan Butell  
Samantha Cheek  
Sheryl Cleverley  
Katherine Cook  
Marlene Courtney  
Sharilyn Cromer  
Donna Curran, Chair  
Kayla Curry  
Carolyn Groves  
Martha Harris  
Kay Kuhlmann  
Peggy McMillon  
Kelsey Nolte  
Michelle Patterson  
Cynthia Perez  
Barbara Pressgrove  
Effie Rinke  
Jeanne Stanley  
Kathleen Thomas  
Tara Welch  
Cindy White  
Letha Williamson  
Virginia Wilson

# Mission Team

Thank you to the Baldwin City community and businesses for your tremendous support during the Baldwin City Chamber of Commerce 2025 food drive!

A special thank you to Baldwin City Market for sharing some of their shopping carts to use as collection bins.

There were 27 businesses, organizations, and churches that hosted a collection bin. Over 1,066 items and \$300 were collected.

The Baldwin State Bank Food Drive also donated over 300 items to the pantry! Thank you to all of the bank customers and community for your donations!



# Baker Student Visit



Dr. Nicholas Pumphrey, associate professor of religious studies and Quayle Bible Collection Curator, brought the students in his Interterm course, "An Examination of Sacred Space" to visit Baldwin First and Ives Chapel on January 6.

Dr. Roger Boyd assisted Dr. Pumphrey in a discussion of the history and unique aspects of the architecture of the church. Students examined the altar area, symbols of the stained glass, the significance of the ceiling, and the structure of the external spires.

## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Jilly Dodge, Marcia O'Neil,  
Amy Berg, Cynthia Perez  
Barbara Pressgrove, Nursery  
Angela Murry, BLAST Leader

## TECHNOLOGY TEAM

Dr. Frank Perez, Mixer/Editor  
Ryan Berg, Worship Technology

## WORSHIP TEAM

Pam Sharp  
Cynthia Perez  
Donna Curran  
Kathleen Thomas

## MISSIONS TEAM

Susan Butell  
Nancy Arnold  
Marilee Beins  
John Beins  
Coleen Burgess  
Kelley Bethell-Smith  
Martha Harris  
Robin Schrack  
Corey Schrack



# Paws to Serve



Dear BFUMC,

I just wanted to follow up with an additional thank you for your support of this event! Thanks to the support of BFUMC as the host site, the following projects were achieved:

- Treat bags for local first responders
- Letters and coloring sheets for deployed troops
- Valentines for senior citizens
- Kindness kits for patients at LMH
- Food pantry assistance and clean up
- Garden bed assembly for the school
- Clean-up at Companion Animal Hospital
- Various projects for the Rec & Community Center
- Brick clean-up and storage moving for LAC

Multi-generational connections were made!

Below is a nice article describing our event in our local paper, along with a video capturing the morning.

Thank you again for partnering with BEF and helping to make this happen!

Kelley J. Bethell-Smith  
BEF Executive Director



## CATS & DOGS "PAWS TO SERVE" BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER FOR DAY OF SERVICE

"Cats & Dogs "Paws to Serve" brings Community Together for Day of Service." *The Maple Weekly*, January 26, <https://baldwinmaple.com/the-maple-weekly/>.

On Monday, January 19, Baldwin City once again saw "cats and dogs living together"--this time in the best possible way.

The Baldwin Education Foundation hosted its Second Annual "Paws to Serve" Day of Service, bringing together Baker University "Cats" and Baldwin "Dogs" of all ages to serve the community side by side.

Held on a national day of service, Paws to Serve welcomed students, families, and community members for a morning focused on generosity, collaboration, and connection. While students had the opportunity to

## FELLOWSHIP / HOSPITALITY

Linda Ballinger  
Tricia Batchelder, Co-Chair  
Coleen Burgess  
Samantha Cheek  
Sheryl Cleverley  
Katherine Cook, Co-Chair  
Christi Darnell  
Jill Dodge  
Jennifer Fulton  
Lori George  
Carolyn Groves  
Kay Kuhlmann  
Peggy McMillon  
Marcia O'Neil  
Jeanne Stanley  
Kathleen Thomas  
Janet Venable  
Tara Welch, Co-Chair  
Letha Williamson

earn volunteer hours, organizers emphasized that the heart of the event was community impact.

“This was really about connection,” said Kelley Bethell-Smith Executive Director of the Baldwin Education Foundation. “It was about neighbors coming together and doing some good.” Volunteers worked on a wide range of service projects identified through outreach to local organizations and knowledge of ongoing community needs.

A defining feature of Paws to Serve was its multigenerational nature. Participants ranged from young children to college students to longtime community members, all working together throughout the morning.

“Creating a sense of belonging is central to BEF’s mission,” Bethell-Smith said. “When people from different schools, organizations, and age groups serve together, it helps build understanding and strengthens our community.”

### Community Support Made It Possible

Light refreshments were provided during the event, along with a T-shirt giveaway sponsored by Baldwin City Made, Prairie Psychiatric Care, and the Brenda Shawley Memorial Fund. Sponsorships helped cover project supplies and reinforced the message that “Cats and Dogs” of all ages can work together to serve Baldwin City.



# 5 Ways to Practice a Holy Lent

Rebekah Simon-Peter. "5 Ways to Practice a Holy Lent," *United Methodist Insight*, (2023 [rebekahsimonpeter.com](https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/practicing-faith/5-ways-to-practice-a-holy-lent/)), <https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/practicing-faith/5-ways-to-practice-a-holy-lent/>.

## #1: **COURAGEOUS**

It takes courage to live authentically in today's world. Yet, to emulate Jesus is to practice courage. At the height of temptation, surely Jesus felt twinges of angst, nevertheless, he refused to give in. At the height of persecution, when Jesus could easily have been afraid, he chose to love unconditionally. In this season of hateful rhetoric and us v. them conflicts, it requires courage to open one's heart to another. And to listen well. Even in the face of fear. Courage doesn't have to be dramatic or grandiose. It can be shown through small acts of compassion, gentleness, or generosity. For instance, showing kindness in the face of criticism or demonstrating humility in the face of outrage.

## #2: Take on Something **new!**

To prepare for the new life that resurrection brings, take on something new this Lent. This could be a new spiritual discipline, or even a practice of saying yes to something new each day. Examples of this include morning prayer walks or making new cross-generational connections in the congregation. Or looking for ways to practice a random act of kindness each day.

## #3: Create More **joy** in the World

In the face of violence and suffering, the world needs more joy. One way to create more joy is to become a better version of yourself. This kind of joyful purpose ripples out to others and gives them permission to be more joyful versions of themselves. Imagine the positive impact of people who have more joy to share with others. Uplifted spirits are good preparation for resurrection.

## #4: **Focus** on Others

It's easy to get wrapped up in our own individual journeys of repentance and renewal in Lent. However, it's important to remember the importance of focusing on others during this time. Can you use this season as an opportunity for self-reflection as well as service? Perhaps you can reach out to someone who needs help or volunteer with an organization in your area—these small acts of self-giving go a long way toward making a difference in others' lives.

## #5: Practice **Gratitude**

The Lenten season is an ideal opportunity for practicing gratitude. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of your life or what you have given up, focus instead on all that you have been blessed with—your health, your family and friends, your job or career, your faith, etc. Practicing gratitude each day—even for the hard stuff—will allow you to appreciate all that life has offered you while also developing greater awareness and appreciation for yourself and others.