

**Manor Minutes
Volume 17 Issue 1
January 2, 2026**

- Dartball – January 6, 7pm @ Bethlehem Lutheran
- Choir Practice – January 8, 6:30pm

Stay up to date at www.fairhillmanorchurch.org/calendar

SUBMIT YOUR REPORTS

Board Reports due January 7

Annual Reports due January 7

Board Meeting
January 14



2026 Offering
Envelopes are
available in the
Narthex.



January 11- 2026 Officer Installation

January 18 – Congregational Meeting
following worship to review the
2025 Annual Report



If you would like to send a card to Carol Daniels:

UPMC Shadyside Hospital
5230 Centre Avenue
Carol Daniels
6 Main, Room 19, Bed 1
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

SouperBowl Lunch & 2-Person Team Cornhole Tournament

**Sunday, February 8, 2026
Large Fellowship Hall
following worship**

Sign up in the Narthex to bring a soup for lunch and to enter your team in the tournament. Donations of canned soup or cash will be accepted and donated to the Community Circle Food Pantry.

Since 1990 this event has been held on the same Sunday as the football Super Bowl to raise awareness about hunger in our community.

You do not have to bring soup OR enter the cornhole tournament to attend. Just come for the fellowship!





Fairhill Manor Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)

351 Montgomery Ave.

724-225-8610

Rev. Chris Stillwell, Senior Minister

Rev. Gena Sheller, Associate Pastor

Elders: Gene Sheller, Bread

Connie Sheller, Cup

January 4, 2026 – 10:15am

Prelude

Sam Johnson, organist

Welcome

Pastor Gena

Blessing Box Update

Connie Sheller

Start the new year by recognizing our many blessings. If you need a blessing box, see Connie Sheller.

Call to Worship

Kevin Puskarich

Leader: This is the day of new beginnings.

People: We give thanks for newness of life.

Leader: Today, God dwells with us.

People: We celebrate that we are God's beloved people.

Leader: Today, all things are made new.

People: Let us worship God, the alpha and omega.

Opening Hymn

"We Three Kings"

Jody Mullis, pianist

We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star. O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Pastor Gena

God of our beginnings and our endings, we pause to thank you for the year that has just ended. We give you thanks for this new person we met last year. We give you thanks for this new thing we tried last year. We give you thanks for the way we were able to help in this situation last year. We lift this regret that we have from last year. And we ask that you lift that disappointment from us and clear a new road for another try this year.

We give you thanks for the promise the New Year brings, another chance to follow your light. Like the Magi, we are seeking, searching for you, our King. So, we lift our eyes to the heavens, asking you to light our way, just as your star guided them.

Lord, we bring our gifts to you this year. May our lives be like gold, dedicated to serving justice and mercy. May our words be like frankincense, offering praise and worship. And may we offer our broken, sinful selves as myrrh, trusting you to transform and redeem them. Receive our gifts, we pray, just as you received the Magi's gifts in the manger.

Show us again, O Lord, that you are found not only in palaces but in the unexpected, the humble, places in our world. Help us to see your presence in the lowly and the overlooked.

We ask your blessing on our church, our families, and our leaders, inspiring wisdom and a desire to seek you above all else.

Guide us into the unknown of this New Year. May we find our way by your Word and your Son, Jesus, the true Light.

And as we leave this place this morning, perhaps we will return to our own homes by a different road, transformed by our encounter with you, bringing the good news of Jesus to everyone we meet.

We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, joining our voices as one in the prayer he taught us, saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Prayer Response:

“Emmanuel, Emmanuel”

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, his name is called Emmanuel.

God with us, revealed in us, his name is called Emmanuel.

First Scripture Lesson

Matthew 2:1-12

Gary Ford

Special Music

“In the Bleak Midwinter”

Jim Cope

Children’s Message

Pastor Gena

I’m guessing there was at least one time when someone told you, “say thank you.” Do they have to remind you that now? Probably sometimes. But it’s probably becoming more and more a habit for you, something you do without being told to, maybe even without thinking about it.

We are going to talk about a habit that goes one step further than saying thank you.

But first, close your eyes and think of something that really upset you recently. Maybe something happened that wasn’t fair, that made you feel really mad. Think about how that made you feel. Now open your eyes. How does your body feel? Your breathing? Your muscles? Your heart?

Now I want you to close your eyes and think of something that you are thankful for. Think about that and how it made you feel. Now open your eyes. How does your body feel?

It turns out that being thankful is really good for us – for our minds, our spirits and our bodies. Taking a moment every day to stop and ask yourself, “what am I thankful for?” seems to make us relax and slow our breathing. When we stop and name the things we are thankful for before we go to bed, sometimes we sleep better. We tend to worry less when we take time to “practice gratitude.” Or, in the church we sometimes say that we are “counting our blessings.”

Just like saying thank you, learning to count our blessings or to stop and say what we are thankful for takes practice. When we do it so much, after a while, we just tend to be more thankful and we start noticing things to be thankful for more quickly.

Some women in our big Disciples church thought that having something they called a “blessing box” might help them to stop and remember to practice being thankful every day. This happened back way in 1953. When they saw their blessing box, they would think about something they were thankful for and put some coins in it. Pretty soon, they would realize that they were thankful for something and go find that box to put coins in it. Then, every once in a while, they would empty their boxes and count their coins. You could say that they were counting their blessings, couldn’t you? And then they would put all

of their blessing box money together and have more money. And they would give it away to help other people. And I'm guessing that those people were very thankful to receive it.

Let's each take a Blessing Box and for each thing we are thankful for, we will put a coin inside. Let's take our Blessing Boxes home with us and put them somewhere we will see them. Maybe they can remind us to stop and name a few things we are thankful for.

Dear God, thank you for all of the things that bring us joy. Help us to stop and to be thankful each day this year as we see our Blessing Box. If we can put a coin in it to bless someone else, help us to do that too. Amen.

Second Scripture Reading

Matthew 2:13-15; 19-23

Rev. Stillwell

Sermon

“Keep Herod in Christmas”

Rev. Chris Stillwell

Is that it? Only one week of peace? Last week we read of the peaceful birth of Christ, and our hearts were filled with joy. Last Sunday we sang that joy out loud at our service of carols and lessons. We have been flush with the excitement, the pleasure, the joy, and the innocence of Christmas. What is more innocent and lovely than two parents with their baby surrounded by pretty, cute animals? What is more innocent than a virgin carrying a child to a small town in the middle of nowhere on a silent night?

And now this. 10 days after Christmas with the tree still up, we're not even bored with all of our presents yet, and we get a scary, awful, story about a King who hates the Christ child so much he murders hundreds or thousands of innocent children in an attempt to kill him.

Herod was the real king of the Jews as far as he was concerned. He was given this title by the Roman emperor and set to overseeing all that happened in the land of Israel. So, you can imagine his surprise and anger when he discovers that, unbeknownst to him, a child had been born and many were already beginning to believe that he was to be king. Not only that Herod finds out about this birth when kings from afar come to worship the new king.

Think of what this means to Herod. We often put the wisemen at the manger and we celebrate their visit on Jan 6, 14 days after the Christmas a festival, but it was likely a year or so later that they came. They saw the star in the east on the night of his birth and they followed it and it took a while for them to get where it was leading.

So, Herod hears that a child was born a year or so ago and so many people believe that he is the messiah and the liking of the Jews that word has reached distant lands and even Gentile kings have come to worship him. This is such a threat to him that Matthew writes, “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” All of Jerusalem was not disturbed with Herod because they share his anger, but because they would feel his wrath.

Herod was never one to be considered easy going. He called himself Herod the Great, but his people thought that he was cruel and nothing more than a Roman puppet. The people did not give him their allegiance and he knew it well. Still, how could he have seen this child as a threat? Herod had magnificence, energy, and power, while Jesus was humble, helpless, and at this moment, powerless.

So, Herod sees that his time to strike is now before the child can grow into his power, and then it would be too late to stop him. Herod does not know who the child is or where he can be found, so he makes sure to get him by ordering his soldiers to kill all male children under the age of two, for this story takes place about two years after Christ's birth.

Just ten days ago we were being told about Christ's wonderful birth and all the hope that it brought into the world. We lit candles to overcome the dark, and now, the dark has struck back with a vengeance. If you are bothered by this violent turn in the story of the Christ child you are not alone.

There is a growing trend of people who are concerned with dark material in children's books. Popular children's books such as Harry Potter, R. L. Stine's Goosebumps series, and Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events have all hit the shelves describing situations in which children must band together to get through a scary, goosebump raising, unfortunate event.

These are popular well written and exciting stories that celebrate the magic and innocence of children even as they fail to ignore the sometimes harsh and violent world in which all children grow up. Some people are upset because they don't think their children should have to face any hint of the world's dark side until they absolutely have to. It is an understandable feeling. We all wish our children didn't grow up so fast. We all wish we could preserve their innocence for as long as possible, but if we spend too much time denying them the realities of the world, they may not be able to cope with them when darkness falls.

What people often forget is that children's stories have always had dark aspects to them. Grimm's fairy tales aren't just grim in name only.

Classics like Cinderella, Roald Dahl, and Charles Dickens all had their share of ghosts, darkness, and cruelty in the world. What people forget is that even the story of Jesus has dark aspects to it . . . especially the story of Jesus. Many children's Bibles will tell the story of how Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem on the donkey, and there was no room in the inn. But there was a stable, and, "the stable was warm and clean!"

I doubt very much that this was the case. Matthew and Luke certainly do not say so, but this sanitization of the Christmas story is a relatively recent development. Before the Victorian era, Christmas songs were much more likely to reflect the reality of Jesus' entry into our world. Carols would not hesitate to refer to the blood and sacrifice of Jesus or the story about Herod slaughtering the innocent children. This isn't at all like "Away in a Manger", for instance, where Jesus is the perfect baby, and "No crying he makes...." I bet Jesus cried a lot.

As Joy Carol Wallis, a writer for Sojourner's magazine says:

We know from the gospels that the more Jesus saw of the world in which he lived, the more he mourned and wept regularly. A Jesus who doesn't weep with those who weep, a Jesus who's just a sentimental myth, may be the one that our culture prefers, but that Jesus can do nothing for us.

Another danger of sentimentality is that we tend to lose interest in the parts of the story that are not so comfortable. We smile at the warm cozy nativity scene, but have you ever spent a night in a barn? Or given birth in a barn? The reality is very different. Some scholars suggest that in Luke's account it's not just that the inns were full, but that Mary and Joseph were forced to take the barn because their family had rejected them. Joseph has relatives or friends of relatives in Bethlehem. So rather than being received hospitably by family or friends, Joseph and Mary have been shunned. Family and neighbors are declaring their moral outrage at the fact that Joseph would show up on their doorsteps with his pregnant girlfriend.

When the wise men arrived Mary and Joseph are still in Bethlehem but Matthew says they are in a house, another sing that some time has passed. No sooner have the wise men left after having paid their homage and given their gifts, then King Herod plots to kill Jesus. He is so determined that he is willing to sacrifice many innocent lives in order to get to this one baby. Herod recognizes something about Jesus that in our sentiment we fail to see: that the birth of this child is a threat to his kingdom, a threat to that kind of domination and rule. Jesus challenges the very power structures of this evil age. Herod has all the male infants in Bethlehem murdered. Not so cozy. This is the Jesus who entered the bloody history of Israel, and the human race.

We love to think about Jesus, but we hate to think about Herod. Herod represents the dark side of the gospel. He reminds us that Jesus didn't enter a world of sparkly Christmas cards or a world of warm

spiritual sentiment. Jesus enters a world of real pain, a world of serious dysfunction, a world of brokenness and political oppression. Jesus was born an outcast, a homeless person, became a refugee when his family took him to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, and finally he becomes a victim to the powers that be. This makes Jesus the perfect savior for outcasts, refugees, and nobodies. That's how the church is described in scripture time and time again - not as the best and the brightest - but those who in their weakness become a sign for the world of the wisdom and power of God.

We live in a world that experiences much pain. From increasing poverty, to diseases new and old, to war and terror. This is not often the stuff of our Christmas carols. In fact, the greatest Christmas song is that of Mary's, found in the second chapter of Luke:

*He has shown strength with his arm;
He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
And lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things,
And sent the rich away empty.*

Mary's "Magnificat", as it is called, tells us that this new king is likely to turn the world upside-down. Mary's declaration about the high and mighty being brought low and the lowly exalted is at the heart of the Christmas story. The son of God is born in an animal stall. Mary herself is a poor young woman, part of an oppressed race, and living in an occupied country. Her prayer is the hope of the downtrodden everywhere, a prophecy that those who rule by wealth and domination, rather than serving the common good, will be overturned because of what has just happened in the little town of Bethlehem.

This story that begins in a smelly manger finally ends on a cross. By human standards it is a message of weakness, but Christmas reminds us that our God has come into our broken world, and that human judgments are not the last judgment, human justice is not the last justice. That is the important lesson of the story of Herod. Humans can be terrible and cruel to one another and juts like that time there are many Herods in our world today, but in the end their strength cannot defeat God's purposes.

If we did not know that we might despair when we encounter our own Herods. Better that we know that there will always be Herods in the world, and better that we know that there will always be God in the world to help us deal with them. Let's remember to keep Herod in Christmas so that we will always remember why Christ had to come. Amen.

Communion Hymn

"As with Gladness"

Sam Johnson, organist

As with gladness sages bold did the guiding star behold; as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright; so, true Morning Star, may we evermore your splendor see.

Invitation to Communion

Rev. Stillwell

Many Christmases ago I remember it being unseasonably warm. While that lessened the Christmas atmosphere a bit, I was relieved to think that I wouldn't have to worry about any travel problems caused by the weather on the way to and from Christmas Eve service. It wasn't a white Christmas for sure, but I didn't count on the warmth combining with the moisture in the air to provide the foggiest drive I ever experienced.

We could have used Rudolph that night for as we drove home, we used the lines of the side of the road to keep us on course. Then when we followed the bright red tail lights of the cars in front of us, trusting that if we followed them, we would stay on the road. Finally, there came a time when no car was in front of us, and all we could do was follow our lights. It was Christmas Eve, but I tell you felt like Epiphany.

I say that because Epiphany is the day that we celebrate the wise men arriving in Bethlehem to see the Christ child, and the only way they got there was by following the light. All they saw was an extraordinary star, but the men from the east were true seekers. Despite the uncertainties, they had a

hunger in their heart that spurred them on. They knew that there was truth beyond the obvious. They had faith that signs in the natural world pointed them to the supernatural one. They knew, before Jesus said it, that those who seek will find.

So often in life we feel lost and without direction, or we are overwhelmed by the distances we must travel to get from where we are to where we want to be. It is important in those moments to remember that we too would be wise to simply follow the light. For Jesus is the light of the world. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

That light leads us to this table where we come to have that light renewed within us and where we see that when we share the light that we have found with others the world indeed becomes a much brighter place. As we share in this meal let us let our light, which is His light, shine in our life and let us continue to follow the light until we, like the Magi before us, meet Jesus face to face.

Prayer for the Bread & Cup

Gene Sheller

Dear God, please help each one of us to keep increasing our understanding of Christianity. We come to this communion service to remember your Son who escaped danger until He had to be obedient to You and become the sacrifice for all who accept Him as their personal Savior. Please bless us and these emblems of His sacrifice; the bread representing his body and the cup representing his blood. We honor You, your Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Words of Institution

Rev. Stillwell

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Sharing Holy Communion

All are invited to share in this meal. Please come forward down the center aisle, as you are able, take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and partake. Place your offering in the trays as you return to your seats by the outside aisles. If you are unable to come forward, the meal will be brought to you. Gluten-free wafers & individual servings are available in the Narthex.

Call to Discipleship

Rev. Stillwell

This is the promise of the gospel: God already knows you. God already loves you. God has already gifted you. God has already called you. You are invited—to deepen this knowledge, to feast in this love, to cultivate these gifts, and to follow this calling. There is a place for you among the people of God in this community of faith.

If you have come to know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and you would like to profess that you intend to begin a life of faith, learning to walk in his way of Love, you are welcome to contact one of the Pastors to take this step. If you would like to join this part of the Body of Christ at Fairhill Manor Christian Church, to covenant to journey together in this life of faith, please reach out to one of the Pastors to learn more. We all take these moments to rededicate our lives to following Jesus.

Closing Hymn

"God's Love Made Visible!"

Sam Johnson, organist

God's love made visible! Incomprehensible! Christ is invincible! His love shall reign!
From love so bountiful, blessings uncountable make death surmountable! His love shall reign!
Joyfully pray for peace and good will! All of our yearning he will fulfill. Live in a loving way!
Praise him for every day! Open your hearts and pray. His love shall reign!

Benediction

Rev. Stillwell

May the strength of God sustain us; may the power of God preserve us; may the hands of God protect us; may the love of God go with us this day and all days. Amen.



Homebound Members

Mrs. Mary Lou McDonough
949 Bruce Street
Washington PA 15301

Alice Cokeley
900 N Cass Lake Rd, Apt 324
Waterford MI 48328

Barb Bailey
Terry Bailey
Donna Bakaitis
Todd Barnhart
Vanessa & John Bereznay
Jeff Caldwell
Bryan Carter
Maci Caster
Wanda Chicone
Angel Corbett
Ruth Cox
Carol Daniels
Dave Davis
Sue Donaldson
Craig Dotson
Benjamin Dube
Connie Faust
Kathy Moninger-Ford
Terry Gahagen
Barb Graff
Irma Harper
Sheila Harris
Aryn Hess
Danni Iams
Kari Johnson
Shelly Kubincanek
Marylee Lawrence

Do you have a prayer request or need help? Please feel free to contact Rev. Chris (412-956-6590) or Pastor Gena (724) 263-0033 directly and confidentially. Or scroll down on the opening page of our website (www.fairhillmanorchurch.org) to "Requests for Prayer or Help." There you can send an email which will go directly to Rev. Chris. We are One Body in Christ!

Southminster Residents

880 S Main St
Washington PA 15301

Bo & Patty Pryor, Apt 102
Chuck Wiseman, Apt 214

Southmont Resident

835 S Main Street
Washington PA 15301

Doris Sorice, Rm 554

Premier Resident

36 Old Hickory Ridge Rd
Washington PA 15301

Carol Brown, Rm 213

Transitions Healthcare Resident

90 Humbert Lane
Washington PA 15301

Doris Haniford, Rm 121

David Leonard
Charlie McConnell
Pam McCord
Norm McDonough
Dick Moninger
Joe Neckerman
Carmen Oliverio
Peggy Oliverio
Michelle Oneal
Sandy Petry
Dick Pilgun
Betty Riecks
Jeannie Riffle
Joan Riffle
Lori Riffle
Mike Ryan
John Samida
Valerie Shetler
Doug Smith
Darci Sprowls
Wayne Starnes
Cathy Stewart
Jan Stillwell
Beth Teagarden
Ginger Throckmorton
Cece Watson

In the Military

Lance Dague	Andrew Gregg
Terrell McClain	Zachary Keene
Brandon Lipscomb	Sarah Lipscomb
Travis Ringer	Emily Chase
Dylan Demain	Noah Rudolph

The brave men and women who serve our country make incredible sacrifices every day. We are forever grateful for their service and dedication. Please remember the military members that are deployed and away from their family that they may return to their homes safely.