the HERALD

PEORIA FIRST UMC | NOVEMBER, DECEMBER 2026. JANUARY 2027



Every Season A Story

Abide

by Valeria Rios
Abide Coordinator

Abide is a community for single young adults ages 18–29, created to build genuine friendships, strengthen connections, and grow together in faith. Since the first gathering, we have had 15 young adults become part of this group!

Through our time together, we have enjoyed opportunities for fellowship, conversation, and getting to know one another while beginning to explore meaningful topics through bible study. As we continue this journey, we look forward to diving deeper into subjects such as identity, relationships, responsibility, adapting to life's changes, contribution, and the connection between life and faith. These conversations will give us opportunities to reflect on how God's word applies to our everyday lives and encourages us to grow both individually and as a community.

Our desire is to create a welcoming space where young adults can build lasting friendships, encourage one another, and grow in their understanding of how faith connects to everyday life. We look forward to continuing this journey together as our community grows and we deepen our relationships with one another and with God.

We are grateful for everyone who has been part of Abide so far and look forward to what God has in store for this community!



This exhibition shines a light on the creative gifts within our community and the many ways we connect faith, beauty, and everyday life through art.

VOLUME 93, NUMBER 4
November, December 2026.
January 2027

Publisher
Peoria First UMC

Editor
Julie Bell

Directing Pastor
Tim Ozment

Associate Pastor
Miguel Rios

Copy Editing
Sandi Fell
Janice Setterlund

Other Contributors
Christina Aldroubi
Eugene Maison
Dr. Josh Phelps
Andrew Rininger
Rosy Rios
Valeria Rios

Contact

116 NE Perry Ave.
Peoria, IL 61603
309.673.3641
info@fumcpeoria.org
www.peoria1.com

DISCLAIMER: The information represented here is for the purpose of informing the FUMC-Peoria congregation of the change of events for a quarter. They are however subject to change. For more up-to-date information, refer to us online at www.peoria1.com, via social media platforms (@fumcpeoria), or via our weekly email newsletter, eHighlights.

DEADLINES: Contact Julie Bell at jbell@fumcpeoria.org for information on upcoming deadlines and publication dates. In the subject line of your email submission, type, "HERALD." All submissions are subject to editing and style standards, and their use is solely at the discretion of the editor. Picture submissions are encouraged to accompany your submission. Focus on individuals and smaller numbers of people who help tell the story.

A New Season of Faith and Generosity



PASTOR TIM OZMENT
Directing Pastor
Peoria First United Methodist Church

As we enter the final months of 2026, Peoria First United Methodist Church stands at an important moment in its life and ministry. We have much to be thankful for, and we have reason to look toward the future with hope. This November, our stewardship series will invite us to reflect on God's blessings, our shared mission, and how we can faithfully support the ministry God has entrusted to us.

First, I want to express my gratitude for the generosity, faithfulness, and service of this congregation. Week after week, you give your time, share your gifts, care for one another, and extend the love of Jesus into our community and around the world. Through our worship services, Loaves & Fish, our partnership with Lincoln School, and our many other ministries, we continue to make a difference in people's lives. These ministries are possible because you believe the church has a vital role to play in the world. Thank you.

As part of our stewardship series, we will consider a simple but meaningful step of faith: what would it look like if each of us grew in generosity by 1%? This is not about measuring our faith by the size of our gifts or placing a burden on those who are already struggling. Rather, it is an invitation to prayerfully consider one additional step toward generosity—whether that means increasing our giving by 1%, ½%, or another amount that reflects our commitment to the mission and ministry of Peoria First.



Stewardship is about much more than meeting a church budget. It is about investing in the mission God has given us and ensuring that Peoria First can continue to welcome people, nurture faith, serve our neighbors, and share the hope of Christ with future generations.

We are also looking ahead to what God may have in store for our congregation. A group of our leaders has been participating in the Normalizing Next cohort led by Olu Brown. Together, we have been revisiting our mission and vision, identifying important next steps, and beginning to chart a path forward. This work helps us think prayerfully and creatively about how Peoria First can continue to grow in faithfulness and impact.

I believe we are entering a new season of ministry, one that will require faith, courage, and a willingness to follow where God leads. We do not have every answer, but we can move forward with confidence that God is still at work among us. My hope is that this season will be more than a campaign. May it be an opportunity to deepen our commitment to Jesus, strengthen our shared mission, and take our next faithful steps together.

Thank you for being part of Peoria First and for the many ways you make our ministry possible. I am grateful for what God is doing among us and excited about what lies ahead.



Faith Behind the Badge

by Andrew Rininger
Director Community Ministries

The Worship Center was filled with warm conversations, good food, and a sense of unity as our congregation came together to host a special appreciation dinner to honor the men and women of the Peoria Police Department. The evening was also to celebrate the ongoing work of our Police Prayer Ministry, a dedicated group in our church committed to covering our local law enforcement officers in monthly prayer.

One of the most moving parts of the night came during the officer testimonies. Several officers got up to share personal stories about what it means to serve on the front lines while holding fast to their faith.

Sergeant Denise White, who is the head of our security team, spoke about her time as a teenager when she served at Loves and Fish and then how she brought her child to serve alongside her. She said that Peoria First UMC is a place she comes to and knows she is being prayed for. She talked about the impact the cards she received through our prayer ministry had on her and how she has held onto every single one. She then thanked the church and asked us to continue the ministry for as long as we can.

We also heard from Jennifer Metcalf, another one of our security officers who has retired from the department. She told how she came into police work and believed that she was standing there that day because of the prayer she received from our church and others in her life. She asked us to continue to pray and said, "Prayer does work." She thanked us and told us that the cards our ministry writes mean more to our officers then we know.

Our keynote speaker was the Chief of the Peoria Police Department, Brad Dixon. In a compelling address to the congregation, officers, and family members present, the Chief emphasized the essential bridge between faith communities and law enforcement.

He shared how community partnership, grounded in mutual trust and prayerful support, strengthens the entire city. He spoke of his experience with our church and ministry and told the congregation that he has a drawer full of cards he has received over the years. He said on some of the darkest days, those cards were what got him through. After he finished speaking, he was given a thank you card from the kids who were there that night. The kids made the cards to thank him for his years of service and for protecting our community.

The success of our dinner was a testament to the hard work and heart of our team and ministry leaders who poured so much love into honoring every guest. As we look ahead, we're eager to expand our Police Prayer Ministry with a goal that every single officer in Peoria is prayed for by name. We would love for you to be a part of this! If you feel called to join the team and make a meaningful difference, please reach out to Andrew Rininger to get connected.









What does it really mean to worship God? For many of us, worship is associated with singing, music, and the time we spend together at church each Sunday. And certainly, these are beautiful expressions of worship. However, the Bible invites us to discover something much deeper: worship is not simply something we do; it is the response of our whole lives to who God is.

In John 4:23–24, Jesus teaches that the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Worship begins when we recognize who God is, understand His character, and respond to His love. We do not worship only because of what God does for us, but because He is worthy of our worship.

Yet worship does not end when we leave the sanctuary. In Romans 12:1–2, the apostle Paul encourages us to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God. Our work, our relationships, the way we treat others, and the decisions we make each day can all become expressions of worship. Sunday should not be the only time we worship; worship should be an expression of the relationship we cultivate with God throughout the week.

Of course, we do not come before God feeling the same way every day. There are seasons of exhaustion, worry, pain, and unanswered questions. In Habakkuk 3:17–19, we find a prophet who, even in the face of difficult circumstances, chooses to trust and rejoice in the Lord. This does not mean ignoring our pain or pretending everything is fine. It means remembering that God remains worthy of our trust, even when our circumstances are not what we hoped they would be. Sometimes worship flows from joy; other times, it becomes a decision of faith.

Finally, worship is also expressed through our willingness to offer God who we are and what we have. In 1 Chronicles 29:9–14, 16–17, David recognizes that everything comes from God and that we give back to Him only what we have received from His hand. Our generosity, time, gifts, and resources can all become expressions of gratitude and trust. We do not give to earn God's favor; we give because we recognize His faithfulness and understand that we are stewards of what He has placed in our hands.

My prayer is that, as a church, we will continue growing in a kind of worship that goes beyond our songs and personal preferences—a worship that transforms our lives, sustains our faith during difficult days, and moves us to serve and give with grateful hearts.

May worship be more than something we do on Sundays.

May it become the way we live every day for the glory of God.



REV. MIGUEL RIOS
Associate Pastor & Director of Contemporary Music
Peoria First United Methodist Church

Back to School with a Heart Full of Joy!



by Rosy Rios
Director of Children Ministry and Childcare

The start of a new school year always brings expectations, new backpacks, and, above all, the opportunity to remind our little ones that they do not walk alone. We celebrated our special Back to School event on August 20th, a time designed to bless the children of our congregation before they return to the classrooms.

We decided to step outside the church walls to enjoy a day full of recreation, fellowship, and lots of fun. Our first stop was the bowling alley, where laughter, cheering, and strikes quickly filled the air. Seeing the children interact and support one another was a true blessing.

To recharge our energy, we enjoyed a delicious time-sharing exquisite crepes that sweetened everyone's afternoon.

But the most special moment came when we paused to feed the heart. We had a very meaningful devotional time, where we remembered the importance of carrying the light of Jesus into their schools. As part of the activity, the children enthusiastically colored beautiful crowns that read "Jesus loves me." It was a tangible reminder of their identity in God: they are children of the King of kings!

These activities outside the church are vital to us. They allow us to create healthy recreational spaces where children strengthen their bonds of friendship, share their faith naturally, and begin their school year with the certainty of the biblical promise:

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it." — Proverbs 22:6

A very special thank you to the parents who accompanied and supported us throughout the entire event. Your presence, dedication, and love not only made this day possible but also demonstrates a beautiful commitment to guiding this generation together in the ways of the Lord.

We continue to pray for a blessed, wisdom-filled, and protected school year for each of our children. Happy back to school!





Waves of Grief

by Liz Pollack
Director of Congregational Care

I love the ocean! On a recent vacation I sat on my ocean front balcony, watching and listening to waves break. Over the course of the day, they ranged from small and quiet to large and chaotic. As I noticed the tide going in and out and watched the waves crashing, I thought about ships at sea riding out those waves. How they rise and fall on the swells and how some of them even wreck! Suddenly, it dawned on me that grief is just like the ocean and those ships.

Those who have experienced grief know what I'm talking about. We, like those ships, are floating along, riding the waves of life. Sometimes they're large, rising tall and then dipping into a trough. Other times it's smooth sailing. In other words, we are going through life, suffering some problems, and having joy as well. Then a huge storm comes. We lose a loved one and suddenly we're just like that ship in a storm. Tossed around; broken apart. First, we just worry about surviving. We struggle to stay above water; we can barely breathe and those waves keep coming. Eventually, they get a little less powerful and we try to find something to hold on to that will keep us afloat. Maybe we jump back into work or volunteering or go to a support group. Just as we find that "life raft," another huge wave comes along washing over us. This wave is not quite as large, but it still sends us reeling. Maybe we look across the room at an empty chair or stare at a name on a letter and suddenly we're reminded of the loss, and tears come to our eyes.



After some time, when the storm has subsided and the waves have continued to shrink, we notice something amazing! Those waves aren't dragging us under! Oh sure, they still hit but they aren't scary or as frequent. We can see them coming and even prepare for them and we begin to realize that life has continued between those waves. Maybe we see photographs of past vacations or notice how much our grandchild looks like our loved one or we hear their favorite song. Along with the sadness is a little happiness from the memory. And suddenly we realize that there's more living going on as the frequency of the waves continues to diminish.

I wish I could say that we get used to suffering losses, but we don't. The waves will still come because we love. But it is love that will see us through the storm and all the waves to follow. How blessed we are that God loves us so completely and perfectly that we can rest in His love and know that He will hold us safe in the palm of His hand.

A Gallery for All Seasons

Connecting Art, Faith, and Community at Foster Gallery

by Eugene Maison
Director of Fine Arts

By the end of this year, Foster Gallery for Christianity and the Fine Arts will have presented 15 exhibitions in the main gallery upstairs on the second floor, featured six additional artists in the Gathering Area, welcomed two dance groups, and hosted live music by 11 musicians and groups at exhibition receptions.

These activities reflect the gallery's mission: to nurture mutual understanding and appreciation of the connection between art and faith, and to develop and strengthen relationships between artists, the community, and the church. Each exhibition, performance, and reception offers an opportunity to experience creativity, share perspectives, and build connections that extend beyond church walls.

Behind these exhibitions is a community of people who generously share their time, talents, and creativity. Jackie Surratt designs postcards that introduce our monthly exhibitions to the community. Pam Mormann manages the gallery's social media posts, while Julie Bell shares exhibition news through the church's internal media and general church social media. Together, their efforts help tell each artist's story, invite visitors to experience the gallery, and extend the reach of its mission.

Hospitality is central to the gallery's work. Exhibition reception door greeters Marilyn and Wendell Cox, Walt Ely, and Sue and Roland Koeppel, along with exhibition reception hosts Sandy Mitchell and Debbie Helmick (Pekin First UMC), represent the church through their warm welcome and hospitality. Sherry Hayes also helps make each reception welcoming by shopping for refreshments and setting up the snack table. Together, they help visitors feel comfortable, encourage conversation, and create opportunities for meaningful connections.

The gallery also relies on its dedicated hanging crew: Max Chapman, Dave Giffin, Jeanette Kosier, Carol Quell, and Larry Trollope, who help transform the gallery with each new exhibition. Along with the artists, musicians, volunteers, and supporters who share their time and talents throughout the year, they play a key role in bringing the gallery's mission to life.

Through art, music, dance, and personal relationships, Foster Gallery creates opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to encounter one another, fostering empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging. By bringing artists, church members, and the broader community together, the gallery strengthens these relationships while reflecting Christ's hospitality and care.

Peoria First members are invited to join us for exhibition receptions on the first Friday of each month, 5-8pm. Come meet the featured artists, enjoy live music, experience the artwork, and connect with fellow church members and visitors from the community. Your presence helps make the gallery a welcoming place where art, faith, and fellowship come together. We hope to see you soon.

Every exhibition is more than a display of artwork; it is an invitation to connect, to see through another person's eyes, explore the relationship between art and faith, and discover the common ground that brings us together.

We are grateful to ALL for their contributions to the Fine Arts Ministry.

The Fine Arts Ministry is made possible by the generous support of the First United Methodist Church Foundation through the Foster Endowment.

FINE ARTS MINISTRY
PEORIA FIRST











A New Song

by Josh Phelps
Director of Traditional Worship and Music

Greetings, FUMC Family!

Thank you for the warm welcome that you have extended to Lacey and me as we have relocated to Peoria and begun our work and ministry here! It has been a joy to get to know the clergy, staff, and congregation, and I am pleased to report that things are going well! This is an exciting time of year for our music ministry as we prepare for our upcoming observances of Reformation Sunday, All Saints Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, Advent, and Christmas.

Our annual Lessons and Carols service will be presented on Sunday, December 13, at 9AM in our Sanctuary. The musical centerpiece of this service is a work entitled A Festival of Lessons and Carols by the well-known American sacred music composer, John Leavitt. This work is a complete Lessons and Carols liturgy that includes prayers, scripture readings, choir anthems, and YES, congregational singing. The musical settings are familiar and accessible, and you are sure to enjoy them all. I am very pleased to announce to you that this year's Lessons and Carols service will be presented by our Sanctuary Choir and Bells in cooperation with the Peoria Symphony Orchestra, with whom I hope will collaborate regularly in the future!

As you know, our church has a long tradition of excellence in music ministry. The excellence to which you are well-accustomed requires a faithful commitment to rehearsals by your fellow congregants who participate in our ensembles. We are doing great work, but we could use your help. Here is what we need from you at this time:

- Pray that we continue to find joy and inspiration as we work to present our first fruits in our offerings over the next few weeks.
- If you have previously participated in our Sanctuary Choir ministry, or have ever given it consideration, NOW would be a great time to join us. Please reach out to us for more information.
- We would love to have our full congregation, as well as the greater Peoria community, engaged in our Lessons and Carols service this year. Please mark that service in your calendars now and begin inviting those whom you believe would be blessed by the experience. It would bring us great joy to meet the challenge of finding places for congregants to be seated that day.

As we head into what popular culture calls "the most wonderful time of the year," I encourage you to watch, look, and listen for new encounters with our faith narrative. In my own journey, All Saints Sunday will be a new experience, as this will be the first observance of this day for my family since the unexpected passing of my mother in April of this year. This has caused me to plan differently for that day, which has reminded me of our completely understandable tendency as disciples of Christ to get so comfortable in the story that we forget how truly significant and impactful it is, and what it ultimately means for all of us. For lack of a better way to say: let's get "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Welcoming a New Season of Connection



by Julie Bell
Director of Communications

As the holiday season approaches, our church enters a time filled with opportunities to come together, serve others, and share the love of Christ. From Thanksgiving gatherings to Christmas worship, from mission projects to special programs, this time of year reminds us of the joy found in being part of a church family.

But what if this season could be about more than the activities on our calendars? What if it became an opportunity to strengthen our connections with one another, discover new ways to serve, and grow together in faith?

A new season invites us to look at communication in a new way—not simply as a way to share information, but as a way to build relationships.

We all receive plenty of messages throughout the day. Emails, texts, social media posts, and announcements compete for our attention. Yet the most meaningful communication does more than tell us what is happening. It helps us understand why it matters and how we can be part of it.

When we hear about a ministry serving our neighbors, we have an opportunity to join in. When we learn about an upcoming worship service, we can invite someone to come with us. When we celebrate the work of a fellow church member, we are reminded that each of us has something valuable to contribute. Communication becomes the bridge between knowing what is happening and finding our place in it.

The holiday season offers countless opportunities to build those bridges. A simple invitation to a Christmas service may open the door for someone seeking a church home. A story about a mission project may inspire someone to volunteer. A personal note or phone call may remind someone who feels disconnected that they are remembered and valued.

These connections do not happen through church communications alone. They happen when we take the next step—when we reach out, show up, lend a hand, or make room for someone new. Each of us has a role in creating a church where people feel welcomed, relationships grow, and faith is strengthened.

As we look toward the coming year, we have an opportunity to consider how we can communicate in ways that bring us closer together. That may mean embracing new tools and methods, sharing more stories about our ministries, or simply being more intentional about keeping one another informed and involved. Whatever the method, the purpose is the same: to help us live out our mission together.

A connected church is not one where everyone participates in every activity or receives every message. It is a church where people understand that they belong, recognize opportunities to make a difference, and see how their individual contributions become part of something greater.

This holiday season, as we celebrate the gift of Christ and the hope He brings, may we also celebrate the gift of community. May we look beyond our usual circles, welcome new faces, encourage one another in service, and discover fresh ways to grow in faith together.

May this new season bring not only new ways to communicate, but new opportunities to connect, serve, and grow together as a church.

I LOVE it when the weather changes and I can pull out sweatshirts. There is something about putting on that warm layer that makes the cold easier to bear.

For several of us in the church, the past few years, and really the last year, have been challenging. We have experienced loss, pain, sickness, burnout, grief, depression, and so much more. It has been tough. After all the tears have been shed, the stages have been traversed, and the need for hope has never been stronger, our faith in Christ is the sweatshirt that makes everything easier to bear.

Something I like to remind myself and those in the Renew service is that God is not a mysterious faraway god, but our God is with us through every high and every low. He is a God that is close. He comforts us through our grief and celebrates with us in our glee.



Sweater Weather

by Christina Aldroubi
Director of Youth and AV Ministries

Our role as followers, as people of faith, is to honor Him in all we do. Our worship and offering to Him is every step, every thought, every prayer, every action in which our heart is bowed to Him. Colossians 3:23-24 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

As we move into a time in the year in which our souls need the warmth of God, I encourage you to keep the faith and hope in Jesus. Keep your eyes to the one who carries you forth, not the adversary who keeps you down. With everything you do, do it as onto the Lord.

How has God carried you through your ups and downs this year? How has this family of faith stood by you during the rough times? How can you stand by others? How are you honoring the Lord with your prayers, your words, your actions, your thoughts, and with your presence?

I encourage you to memorize Colossians 3:23-24. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

peoria1.com

Holiday Highlights

La Posada
December 6 • 4PM • Worship Center

Lessons and Carols
December 13 • 9AM • Sanctuary

Children's Program
December 13 • 10:30AM • Worship Center

Christmas Eve Worship
December 24 • 4 and 7PM • Traditional
December 24 • 7PM • Bilingual

GIVING @ First

Your tithes and offerings are very important to the future of our ministry work.

3 Ways to Give:

peoria1.com

peoria1 App

Text

1.888.364.GIVE (4483)

Type '1' in message block

Scan below for online giving

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of Peoria and the World.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
PEORIA • ILLINOIS