



The Messenger

Messiah Lutheran Church

228 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland, NJ 07436

March and April 2026

Our Mission

*A faithful, serving community, joyfully
sharing Christ's love*

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Messiah Staff:

Pastor, Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund

Music Director, Bob Luderer

Office Administrator, Ashley Henion

Council Members: Valerie Nicolosi,

Victoria Boyce, Alex Boyce, Nick

DeRoda, Nancy Krause, Eleanore

Orman, Michele Weintraub, Tom White

Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9am-12pm

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Sunday Worship at 10:00 am et.

on-site, on Zoom and YouTube

From the Pastor

We are two months into this year and it has already been... a lot. It's hard to find words to express the distress and despair coupled with hope that seems to be a daily rollercoaster. War continues to rage both abroad and here at home. The terror, trauma, and racism we are seeing at the hands of the current administration is frightening. I'm constantly trying to cling to the words of Jesus and quotes from those much smarter than I, to keep me going. I want to share with you some of what I've been turning to.

The only thing more powerful than hate is love - Bad Bunny, Super Bowl Halftime Show 2026

Hope has two beautiful daughters: their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see they do not remain the same. - St. Augustine of Hippo

Do not be afraid - said 365 times in scripture, one for every day across the Old Testament and New Testament.

Love one another as I have loved you - John 13:34-35. When it feels impossible to look at another person, I try to remember that Jesus fed Judas knowing he would betray him and Jesus washed Peter knowing he would deny him.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your doing; it is the gift of God - Ephesians 2:8. We are all sinful, we all screw up, but we believe in a God who is beyond comprehension. A God whose grace and forgiveness extend extravagantly. When I know I've messed up or failed to love my neighbor as best I could, I take comfort knowing that God still loves me, forgives me, and asks me to try again.

God's grace is poured out for us in ways we see and don't see. It is abundant and overflowing, connecting us to one another and sustaining us when times get tough. Soak up that grace and let it propel you to keep doing the work of God: loving your neighbor, caring for the stranger, providing for those in need, calling for justice for the oppressed, and proclaiming God's love for all the world.

Peace,

Pastor Courtney

Church Council Highlights

January 2026 Meeting

- ✝ Council reviewed the year-end finances and noted that giving in December was significantly below normal. We are increasingly relying on the investment income from the Perzin bequest – a fund of money that will eventually run out with our current spending trends.
- ✝ Pastor Jonathan took a new position as an Assistant to the Bishop with the Metropolitan New York Synod. As such, the Synod will reimburse us for Pastor's health insurance costs. The council voted to put half of that reimbursement amount into pastor's retirement fund.
- ✝ We ended our contract with CleanNet and welcomed our new cleaner, Esperanza. She is in weekly and has already been doing a phenomenal job.
- ✝ Council received several thank you letters from mission partners, expressing gratitude for the impact Messiah is making in the wider community.
- ✝ Special thanks were offered to Eleanore Orman for her many years of leadership as council president. Thanks were also given to Sue Boyce for her dedicated service as she rotates off council.

February 2026 Meeting

- ✝ The Council received a letter of resignation from Bob Luderer who will be playing his final Sunday on May 24th.
- ✝ The Council spent time visioning and dreaming about the ministry and activities we want to see for the upcoming year. Please consider the ways you can help plan and attend events!
- ✝ All ministry reports for Council should be submitted the week before our meeting. Please send those to Ashley in the office or Nancy as secretary.

2026 Annual Meeting

- ✝ Please review the 2026 Annual Report to learn about all the wonderful ministry events and activities we had this past year.
- ✝ All motions were approved unanimously including: approving minutes, council elections, benevolences of the month, constitution changes, and the 2026 budget.
- ✝ Minutes from the meeting will be available in early March. If you missed the meeting and want to see them, contact Nancy Krause.

2026 Council Officers

Many thanks to those serving on the council and in leadership positions for the coming year. If you have questions about council or want to get involved, please speak to any of us!

Valerie Nicolosi, President	Victoria Boyce
Michele Weintraub, Vice President	Tom White
Nancy Krause, Secretary	Eleanore Orman
Alex Boyce, Treasurer	Nick DeRoda

What's Happening at Messiah

Community Table at Ponds
March 2nd and April 6th

Mid-Week Lenten Worship on Zoom
March 4th, 11th, and 18th at 7:30 pm

Bible Study at 12:00 pm
March 5th and 19th
April 16th

Property Work Day
March 7th and April 4th

Executive Committee
March 8th following worship

Mario Celebration Coffee Hour
March 8th following worship

Book Discussion at 7:00 pm on Zoom
March 9th and April 13th

Outreach Meeting
March 15th following worship

Youth and Family Meeting
March 22nd following worship

Council Meeting at 7:00 pm on Zoom
March 24th and April 21st

Thrivent Financial Dinner
March 25th at 6:00 pm

Palm Sunday Worship
March 29th at 10:00 am

Maundy Thursday Worship
April 2nd at 7:30 pm

Good Friday Worship
April 3rd at 7:30 pm

Easter Sunday Worship
April 5th at 10:00 am

Office Closed Easter Monday
April 6th

Worship

Every Sunday at 10:00 am et. on-site, on Zoom & YouTube

Mid-Week Lenten Worship

Join us on Zoom at 7:30 pm for Mid-Week Lenten worship. We will gather for a time of prayer, devotion, and reflection using our theme, Grace Poured Out. Each week we will look at different places in the Holy Land related to water, wine, and oil. We will also have a time of prayer with candles and embodiment practices. Please join us either on Zoom or on YouTube.

Holy Week Schedule

Palm Sunday: March 29th

Worship at 10:00 am et. on-site and online

We need readers for the Passion! If you're interested, please talk to Pastor Courtney

Maundy Thursday: April 2nd

Worship at 7:30 pm et. on-site and online

All are welcome to help with the stripping of the altar at the end of the service

Good Friday: April 3rd

Worship at 7:30 pm et. on-site and online

Join us for a time of reflection and remembrance as we pray around the cross

Easter Sunday: April 5th

Worship at 10:00 am et. on-site and online

Join us for a festive worship service, Easter breakfast, and egg hunt

Easter Songs and Scripture: April 12th

Worship at 10:00 am et. on-site and online

Journey through all four Gospel accounts of the resurrection and sing favorite Easter hymns

Worship Your Way Station

To be more inclusive and accessible to the different needs of those who attend worship, we have created a "Worship Your Way Station" at the back of the sanctuary next to the camera and prayer wall. You will find coloring pages, fidgets, and other items to help you focus on worship and center on your relationship with God. Feel free to borrow items for worship and return them when you are done!

If you identify an item that would be helpful for us to add to the table, please let Pastor Courtney or Sue Boyce know. This could be anything from an assistive listening device to a specific type of fidget. We want to provide what is most helpful for you to make worship meaningful.

Lent Theme: Grace Poured Out

Do you enter Lent longing for renewal but end up feeling drained instead? Grace Poured Out invites you to reconnect with God through the ordinary elements that sustain life—water, wine, and oil. Join us this Lent as we use the theme Grace Poured Out to guide our study and devotion.

Be sure to pick up a copy of the devotional and fill your Lent in a Bag in the Narthex. Many of the items follow the Grace Poured Out theme:

- Pour out grace on a new plant
- Blow grace for all to see with bubbles
- Stir up grace with a reusable straw
- Sip on grace with a cup of tea
- There are also candles, crafts, bags, bookmarks, and more!

Worship: Each week in worship our liturgy will utilize the themes and stories from the Lenten devotional Grace Poured Out.

Thursday Noontime Bible Study: We will gather on February 19th and March 5th and 19th to focus on Water, Wine, and Oil in relation to our Lenten Theme.

This theme comes to us from Young Clergy Women International (YCWI) who put together the devotional with Chalice Press and collaborated with Barn Geese Worship for the liturgy. YCWI is a global ecumenical network of ordained women under 40 who nurture, and equip one another for faithful, inclusive, and transformative ministry in the church and the world.

From the Office

Nametags!

At the request of some members, we now have nametags for you to wear on Sunday morning. You'll see the photo wall in the entrance has now been updated to include a spot for names and photos of all our members. Please check the wall to see if you like the photo we have of you. If you don't like it, or if you don't have a photo, please either print or send us a 4x6 photo to print for you and hang up. Your nametags are in a basket but can be clipped to your photo or name spot on the wall.

If you don't have a nametag and want one or if you want us to use a different name, please let the office know and we can take care of that. You are welcome to decorate your nametag however you see fit. Put your pronouns on, let your kids or grandkids color it, include the ministries you are part of. This is intended to help us get to know one another better and be more welcoming of visitors!

Church Keys

We are working on creating a list of church keys. Please contact the office to let Ashley know if you have any church keys. If you have a key you'd like to return or if you need a key, please talk to Ashley in the office.

Church Library

The church library is a great resource for religious and non-religious books for all ages. Be sure to check out the newest additions including new Study Bibles and kid's books! You are welcome to borrow these books and bring them back when you're finished.

Check out these great titles:

A Very Happy Easter by Tim Thornborough
When I Pray for You by Matthew Paul Turner
Flip It Like This! by David Hayward
Consider the Birds by Debbie Blue
Inspired by Rachel Held Evans
**The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
Lutheran Study Bible**

If there are books you want to see in the library, talk to Pastor Courtney or consider getting a Thrivent Action Team to purchase them!

Worship Assistants Needed!

Please consider if you might be interested in helping with worship by serving as a lector or Communion Assistant. Training is available if you need, but both responsibilities are easy to pick up and learn. Please talk to Pastor Courtney, Ashley, or sign up on the serving schedule.

Benevolences of the Month

March: ELCA World Hunger

ELCA World Hunger works to provide immediate relief to those who are hungry, as well as work to meet basic needs and recognize universal human rights to food. They seek to connect people with the resources they need to produce food and grain, access to clean water, education, health care, and sources of income, to create long-term sustainable change.

April: His Helping Hands

His Helping Hands serves weekly hot food and provides clothing to people experiencing homelessness and those who are less fortunate. Their motto is "Bringing God's hope and love to [God's] children one meal at a time in Paterson, NJ."

Outreach

ELCA World Hunger Collection

Part of ELCA World Hunger is the program Good Gifts where you can donate animals and tools that will directly benefit families in need around the world. An animal can make a world of difference for a family in need. Animals provide food to eat, fertilizer to grow crops and offspring to sell at the market. This year we are asking that you prayerfully consider making a commitment or donation. Please look for more information in the coming weeks. All donations will be blessed at the Easter service.

Souper Bowl Sunday

Messiah once again participated in our annual Souper Bowl Sunday food and dollars collection for the Center for Food Action (CFA) on February 8th at the ShopRite in Oakland. Despite the extremely cold weather, we had a very successful fund and food raising day. Members of Messiah collected 68 large cartons of food items. The 68 cartons were delivered to the CFA collection center in Mahwah. Members also collected \$1,185.35 which was the highest monies collected in the past several years. Thank you to everyone who volunteered! - Marilyn & Ron

Youth and Family Ministry

The Extravaganza!

I had the opportunity to attend a conference for youth and family ministry called Extravaganza in St. Louis at the end of January. I attended seven workshops focusing on different areas and five general sessions. They were all extremely informative and I look forward to developing them over the next year in an effort to making our congregation more welcoming to families of all kinds. Please keep an eye out in each newsletter as God guides us through this ministry. Don't hesitate to talk to me if you have questions or suggestions or would like to be involved in this important ministry.

- Sue Boyce

Event Planning

On March 22nd during Sunday School and coffee hour we will be brainstorming activities and events to plan for youth and family ministry. Please talk to Sue Boyce if you have ideas or are interested in getting involved.

Fellowship

Book Club

Join us for a lively discussion of **The Book of Longings** by Sue Monk Kidd on Monday, March 9th via Zoom. We will delve into **The Correspondent** by Virginia Evans on April 13th. Please check your local libraries to borrow the books or purchase the books for your home bookshelf. If you have any suggestions for books or questions at all, speak with Valerie.

Coffee Hour

Linda Axtell and the Sunday school kids have coffee hours scheduled for the entire month of March!! We look forward to many delicious Sundays prepared by the children under her supervision. Please speak to Linda to see if she needs assistance! Many hands make light work!!

Easter Breakfast

On Sunday, April 5th, we will once again celebrate Easter with a continental breakfast prior to services. Look for a sign-up sheet in the narthex as the event gets closer. Our members and guests enjoy gathering before services.

Holy Huddle Sunday

Sunday, February 1st, was a very busy day with the Annual Meeting having been moved to this date due to weather issues. The Soups & Breads luncheon was postponed and will be held on another future Sunday date. Valerie and Len Nicolosi hosted a "tailgating" coffee hour after church services. This was the week before the Super Bowl. We enjoyed hot dogs, beans, chips, dips and lots of other fantastic tailgating grub!! Lots of people wore team gear and enjoyed an afternoon of fellowship.

Ponds Community Table

March 2nd and April 6th

6-8 pm at Ponds Reformed Church

For more information talk to Michele Weintraub and follow the pantry on Instagram:

@ponds_pantry_communitytable

Faith Formation

Noontime Bible Study

Join the Thursday Adult Bible Study group on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month at 12:00 p.m. either on-site or on Zoom. The group is currently diving deeper into our Lenten theme with a focus on the ways God's grace pours into our lives through Water, Wine, and Oil.

March 5th: Oil

March 19th: Wine

After Easter we will be returning to the book **A is for Alabaster**. If you need a copy, check the church library or let Pastor, Joan, or Eleanore know.

April 16th: M is for Mary Magdalene

Thrivent Financial

Thrivent Action Teams

Thank you to the Axtell Family, Boyce Family, Rubner Family, Ludke Family, and Susanne Herbst for applying for Thrivent Cards to help with programming this year. So far, we have used \$1500 in Thrivent Cards to supplement and support Ministry at Messiah. If you have an idea for a Thrivent Card or need help applying for one, please let Pastor Courtney know!

Tax Saving Strategies Workshop

Wednesday, March 25th at 6:00 pm
Dinner and refreshments provided.

Join Thrivent Representative Peter Manke to learn how to avoid common mistakes when it comes to your investment portfolio, health care, and estate strategies, as well as how to maximize your generosity and giving. The Savvy Tax Strategies workshop provides answers to critical tax questions you must answer before retirement.

Please RSVP on the sign-up sheet at church or by calling the office.

Shrove Monday

On Monday, February 16th, Messiah had a Shrove Pancake Dinner. Shrove Tuesday, also known as Pancake Day, is the final day before the Christian season of Lent begins, a time for feasting and confession before a period of fasting and reflection. Its meaning comes from the word "shrive," meaning to confess sins and be absolved so it was a last chance for people to repent before Ash Wednesday. Pancakes became a traditional food as a way to use up rich ingredients like eggs, butter, and sugar before the Lenten fast.

Additionally, although Shrove Tuesday isn't mentioned in the Bible, it's the day before Lent, which is a 40 day period of fasting. Lent is said to mark the time Jesus fasted in the desert. The number '40' is significant and appears often in the Bible: Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert.

Special thanks to Nancy Krause, head pancake flipper, and Don Brown, overseer of the sausage and event runner. And thank you to everyone who came and signed up to bring syrup, butter, juices, iced tea, whipped crème, chocolate chips, blueberries, strawberries and delicious desserts. Due to several weeks of no in-person church due to the weather, on the Sunday before there were only 13-14 people had signed up but we had a whopping 40 people enjoying plain, blueberry and chocolate chip pancakes, and let's not forget the sausage!! Winner of the sausage eating contest was Roen!! He devoured 3 during the evening!! And didn't we all love watching Oliver devour his pancakes, yes plural, pancakes!! This was a wonderful fellowship event we are hopeful to have year after year.

Thrivent Water Filters

Our congregation again rallied around this wonderful project. We had our "Putting It Together" coffee hour assembling our Thrivent water kits on Sunday, February 15th. Our church Thrivent members all ordered these kits as part of the service project. We beat last year's number of 50 kits, with a whopping 53 water filters put together...the count would have been 54; however, pieces were missing to complete the last filter. Encouraging notes were included with each filter. I'm not sure everyone understands how important this program is to people who receive the water filters back. Thrivent pairs with Wine to Water, a global organization, bringing clean water to those in need by providing water access, filtration, sanitation and hygiene education. One filter can provide clean water for 12 people for 10 years. Just remarkable!! Thanks to all who ordered kits and participated in "Putting It Together".

Baptism Anniversary Corner

We don't always take time to remember, reflect, or celebrate the anniversary of our baptism so we are going to start including them in our newsletter. The promises made at baptism are a lifelong commitment to helping one another grow in the Christian faith and life – not just those baptized, but all those who are part of Christian community. Take time this day, week, or month to say a prayer or give thanks for your baptism.

*Over the years many baptism dates have not been recorded or were lost in records. If your baptism date is wrong in the newsletter, it's wrong in our records! Please let us know and we will update it. If you don't know your date, we will celebrate you on either January 1st or June 1st.

March Baptism Anniversaries

8- Alex B.
9- Dominick R.
9- Sofia R.
14- Scott A.

April Baptism Anniversaries

25- Tony B.

Budget Report

From the Treasurer

The year is not off to a great start with our January income being significantly lower than budgeted. Regular offerings came in for the month at \$1,920. Please consider the ways you are able to give by mailing in your contribution or giving online through Tithely.

Over the past 3 years there has been a downward trend in giving. We are starting 2026 with a deficit of \$12,000 which is the worst start to a year we've had in many, many years.

If not for the interest from the investment account, we would be in serious trouble, but we cannot count on that forever. I would caution everyone against thinking that since we got all this money from the Perzin house, we can decrease our normal giving. We need continuous income, not a one-time influx of cash. The Perzin gift is a way for us to do large costly projects that we would not be able to otherwise; we should not be depending on it for our day-to-day expenses since it will eventually run out.

Regards,
Alex Boyce

January 2026 Finance Report				
	Monthly		Year to Date	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
Income	\$18,479.49	\$7,946.10	\$18,479.49	\$7,946.10
Expenses	\$19,847.67	\$20,101.02	\$19,847.67	\$20,101.02
Total	(\$1,368.18)	(\$12,154.92)	(\$1,368.18)	(\$12,154.92)

Offering Envelopes

What are all those envelopes in my offering envelope box? That's a question we hear from time to time. Here's the rundown of what you will find.

Every week: An envelope with a place to designate offerings for:

- ✝ Ministry at Messiah – funds to support the work of our congregation, from salaries to electric bills to Sunday School material. This is our area of biggest need.
- ✝ Mission Support – gifts to support the work of the New Jersey Synod and the ELCA
- ✝ Property Maintenance – large projects and repairs, such as the skylight

Every month: An envelope for the following:

- ✝ Missionary Support – the money we pledge to our designated missionary in Africa, Pastor Kristin Engstrom
- ✝ Benevolence of the Month – gifts to the organization we highlight for the month, information to be found in the Messenger

Holidays (Holy Days) and Seasons:

- ✝ Ash Wednesday, Lenten Offering (5), Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas

Special Purposes:

- ✝ Initial (to help defray the cost of the envelopes), Easter Flowers, Christmas Flowers

If you do not currently receive envelopes and would like to or if you need your envelopes mailed to you, please talk to Eleanore Orman. Envelopes are available for pickup in the narthex and church office.

March



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mar 1 Second Sunday in Lent 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	2 6:00pm Community Table: Ponds Reformed Church, 341 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland NJ 07436	3 6:30pm AA Meeting	4 7:30pm Mid-Week Lenten Worship on Zoom	5 12:00pm Bible Study 7:30pm Band Practice	6	7 Property Work Day Set your clocks ahead!
8 Third Sunday in Lent Messiah's Anniversary 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship 11:15am Exec	9 7:00pm Book Club on Zoom	10 6:30pm AA Meeting	11 7:30pm Mid-Week Lenten Worship on Zoom	12 7:30pm Band Practice	13	14 District Meeting
15 Fourth Sunday in Lent 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship 11:15am Outreach Meeting	16	17 6:30pm AA Meeting	18 7:30pm Mid-Week Lenten Worship on Zoom	19 12:00pm Bible Study 7:30pm Band Practice	20	21
22 Fifth Sunday in Lent 10:00am Worship 11:15am Youth & Family Meeting	23	24 6:30pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Council Meeting on Zoom	25 6:30pm Thrivent Dinner Event	26 11:15am Folding and Fellowship 7:30pm Band Practice	27	28
29 Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	30 Monday in Holy Week	31 Tuesday in Holy Week 6:30pm AA Meeting	Apr 1 Wednesday in Holy Week	2 Maundy Thursday 7:30pm Maundy Thursday Worship	3 Good Friday 7:30pm Good Friday Worship	4 Resurrection of Our Lord: Vigil of Easter Property Work Day



April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mar 29 Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	30 Monday in Holy Week 6:00pm Community Table: Ponds Reformed Church, 341 Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland NJ 07436	31 Tuesday in Holy Week 6:30pm AA Meeting	Apr 1 Wednesday in Holy Week	2 Maundy Thursday 7:30pm Maundy Thursday Worship	3 Good Friday 7:30pm Good Friday Worship	4 Resurrection of Our Lord: Vigil of Easter Property Work Day
5 Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Day 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	6 Easter Monday/ Office Closed	7 6:30pm AA Meeting	8	9 7:30pm Band Practice	10	11
12 Second Sunday of Easter 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	13 7:00pm Book Club on Zoom	14 6:30pm AA Meeting	15	16 12:00pm Bible Study 7:30pm Band Practice	17	18
19 Third Sunday of Easter 9:00am Choir Practice 10:00am Worship	20	21 6:30pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Council Meeting on Zoom	22	23 7:30pm Band Practice	24	25
26 Fourth Sunday of Easter 10:00am Worship	27	28 6:30pm AA Meeting	29	30 7:30pm Band Practice	May 1	2 Property Work Day

Reprinted from the NEWSLETTER Newsletter

"Why are you anxious?" asked our Lord. Then He said, "*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*" (Matthew 6:28–29, NIV. Jesus' words remind us that just as God clothes the lilies of the field in beauty and splendor, he also provides faithfully for his people. The same Creator who tends to the flowers of spring cares for every detail of our lives. People of faith come to see that truth unfold year after year — in the budding trees, the soft blossoms, and the steady return of color after winter's gray. God's reliability is woven into creation itself. As poet Adeline Whitney once wrote:

*God does not send strange flowers every year,
When the Spring wind blows o'er the pleasant places,
The same dear things lift up the same fair faces,
The violet is here.*

Each spring, those familiar blooms whisper the same promise: God is faithful still.

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

*A faithful, serving community
joyfully sharing Christ's love.*

228 Ramapo Valley Road
Oakland, New Jersey 07436

SUNDAY WORSHIP

10:00 am Worship Service

Maundy Thursday

7:30 pm Worship Service

Good Friday

7:30 pm Worship Service

In-person, live-streamed and
posted on YouTube

