First Things

JANUARY 2026

The Newsletter of First Evangelical Lutheran Church
561 Chestnut Street | Taylors Falls, MN 55084-1110
651-465-5265 www.tflutheran.org

It's that time of year again. The calendar flips, the gym ads get loud, and the pressure quietly creeps in: *Time to be better.*

I'll be honest with you, I kind of stink at New Year's resolutions. I've made them. I've meant them. And to be honest usually I do even start them, they just make me feel good in the moments leading up to a New Year, "this years going to be different"

And if I'm honest about the heart behind most resolutions, it usually comes down to one thing: being better.

Maybe you've asked the same question I have: *Am I better than last year?* Maybe… one percent? On a good day?

Our culture is so soaked in "new year, new you" that it's easy, very easy, for Christians to assume that's basically the message of faith too. If we're not careful, the sermon becomes: *Try harder. Do more. Fix yourself. Improve. Be better.* And I'll admit, even pastors can unintentionally echo that message, because we breathe the same cultural air.

But here's the problem: "Be better" isn't the Gospel.

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The Gospel is not self-improvement. It's not spiritual hustle. It's not a divine performance review where God looks us over at the end of January to see if we're trending upward.

The Gospel is grace.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And last time I checked… yep. Still a sinner. Still human. Still a work in progress. Still in need of mercy.

So what if we looked at the New Year through a different lens—not a guilt-filled lens, not a "prove you're worthy" lens—but a grace-filled lens?

Maybe the invitation of the New Year isn't to *fix yourself*, but to receive again the One who already came to save you.

Maybe the faithful question isn't "How will I become better?" but "How will I live as someone already loved?"

Maybe the goal isn't to white-knuckle our way to transformation, but to stay close to Christ—the One who actually changes hearts, heals what's broken, forgives what's real, and gives strength for what's next.

Maybe, in a world addicted to improvement, the most countercultural Christian practice is simply to be.

Be where you are.
Be present.
Be honest.
Be open to God.
Be willing to begin again—not with shame, but with hope.

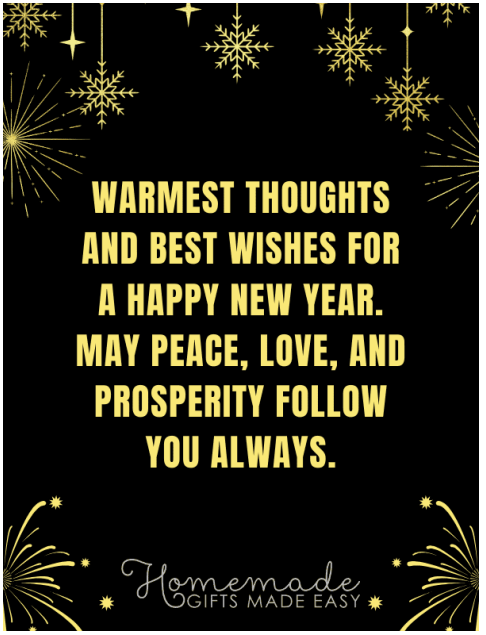
I haven't read it yet, but it's on my New Year reading list: *Stop Fixing Yourself* by Anthony de Mello. The title alone feels like a word many of us need. Because the Good News isn't that we finally get ourselves together. The Good News is that Christ has already come for us, right in the middle of our mess and He isn't letting go.

So as this New Year begins, maybe your "resolution" can be gentler, and truer:

Not because you will be perfect this year, but because Christ is faithful, so maybe I will just start each morning with a hymn "Morning by Morning new mercies I see"

Blessings

Pastor Justin



New Members **Welcome!**

If you are interested in becoming a member, please talk with Pr. Justin or contact the office at 651-465-5265.

SUNDAY WORSHIP

Worship every Sunday at 11am. Recorded services from Sunday morning worship are available Sunday afternoons on our website www.tflutheran.org and can also be found on our YouTube Channel: First Evangelical Lutheran Church of TF - 2nd.

COUNCIL MEETING

Council will meet in January 11th at 12:15pm.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

01/02 Sydney Paredes
01/08 Marlys Luehmann
01/12 Isabella Langer
01/12 Zenia Linngren
01/15 Bill Davids
01/18 Attley Loen
01/19 Inez Heggerston
01/19 Dylan Magnuson
01/19 Tim Nelson
01/31 Carli Linngren

Please contact the church office if there are any errors or omissions. Thank you.

MONTHLY GIVING REPORT

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. —2 Cor. 9:7 (NIV)

Budgeted Weekly Expenses: $2771.60

11/30 Giving:	$2,309.00
12/07 Giving:	$1,853.00
12/14 Giving:	$1,960.00
12/21 Giving:	$6,045.43

Thank you for your faithful giving. Please contact FELC Treasurer, Craig Loen with any questions or concerns at: 715-553-0519 or cloen@federatedcoops.com

Shared Ministry

First Lutheran Evangelical Church

Taylors Falls, MN
Fellowship at 10am
followed by Worship at 11am

SundaySCHOOL

Monthly Sunday school class for children elementary age right after children's message.
Next Date: January 18th

Quilting

9:30am - 11:00am
First and Third Wednesdays of the month. No experience needed! New quilters welcome!

CHOIR

Choir will meet for practice every Tuesday at 5pm, rotating locations. No experience is needed to join us!

Prayer Shawl Ministry

If you'd like to be part of this ministry or have any questions, please talk with Becky Hulden.

WISDOM SEEKERS

THURSDAYS AT 9:00AM

First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Youth Room, 1st floor

CRAFTING

CRAFTING ON SATURDAYS

JANUARY 13TH | 9 AM - 2 PM
BRING YOUR CRAFT TO WORK ON, A DISH TO SHARE & COME FOR THE GREAT COMPANY!

More fun happenings in our church on pages 6 - 7

Better Together

Immanuel Lutheran Church

Almelund, MN
Worship at 9am
followed by Fellowship at 10am

FAITH CONVERSATIONS

FOURTH THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH

6:30 PM

Are we living in the last days—or just beginning again? Join us to explore biblical prophecy, popular myths, and hopeful visions of renewal.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH AND FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

NEW WOMEN'S CIRCLE

Wednesday, January 7th at 6PM. at Immanuel Lutheran Church

You are invited to share a meal & work on a craft to start the new year. Please let Amanda Cook, ph #612-978-1204, know if you are interested so we have a head count.

Tune in our Daily Texts with Pastor Justin

Monday - Saturday on our Facebook Page: Immanuel Lutheran Church of Almelund. A daily devotional time based on an Old & New Testament Bible verse based on a Moravian Church tradition and Ground Up Grace Publications Daily Texts 2025 books.

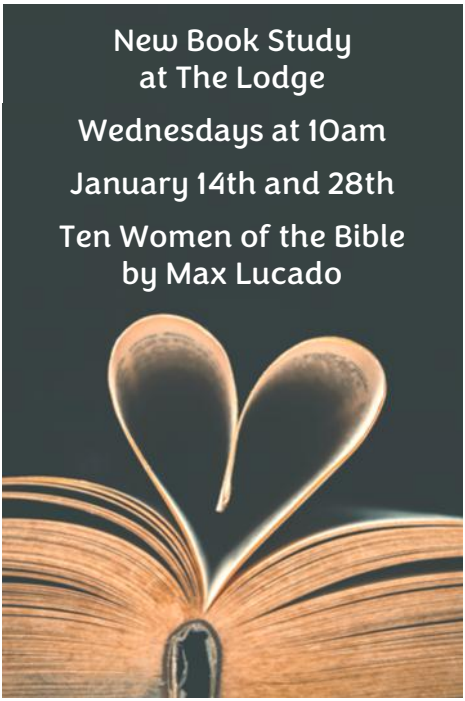
Thursday, January 15th

4:30pm - 6:30pm

Come enjoy a delicious supper and have some fun playing games out of the cold winter!! Bring your favorite or play what is available at the church! There will be coloring pages for children as well!!

Take-down Day

Join us after worship on Sunday, January 4th and help take down the Christmas decorations and help clean up!



Women's Retreat

February 13th - 15th
Luther Point Bible Camp

Enjoy a beautiful weekend while working on your favorite craft projects. Whether you are a quilter, scrapbooker, card maker, make diamond art, embroiderer, jewelry maker, or another kind of crafter and enjoy good conversation, laughter and new and existing friends, this weekend is for you! Crafting not your thing? Puzzles, cozy reading areas, snow tubing and outdoor grounds to explore!

When: Friday, February 13, 2026 5:30pm to
Sunday, February 15, 2026 10:30am

Where: Luther Point Bible Camp, Grantsburg, WI

Cost: $50 - Friday through Sunday

Includes table, two nights of lodging, 2 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners, snacks, coffee and hot cocoa

$35 - Saturday only

Includes table, 1 breakfast, 1 lunch, 1 dinner, snacks, coffee and hot cocoa. No Lodging

**Saturday bonus craft: Create your own Bible/Church Bag. Additional $20 for supplies (High quality zipper bag & goodies)

For more information or for questions, please email Angie Linngren at felctf@gmail.com.

*Financial help is available!

Registration Deadline: January 29th

Thank you for your generous purchase of a poinsettia to decorate our worship space throughout Christmas.

Given by	In Memory of or In Honor of
Rose Anderson	In Memory of Agnes, William & Joe Mallery
Roger & Joan Boleman	In Memory of Our Parents
Eleanore Collins	In Memory of Larry Collins
Miriam Flysjo	In Memory of My Parents: Oke & Grace Flysjo
Verna Grover	In Memory of Don Grover, Kami Grover & David Gray
Arne & Miriam Lagus	In Honor of Our Grandsons & Family
Janna & Craig Loen	In Memory of Loved Ones & In Honor of Friends & Family
Carol Nelson	In Memory of Leo Nelson & Ed Bonderson

Who doesn't love to get happy mail? Send a church member a letter or card to our shut in or folks who can't leave home easily church members.

Ask Angie for a list!!!

Thank you!

FAMILY PATHWAYS

A big thank you to all who donated food for the Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets given to families in the Chisago Community!

Thank you to everyone who donated to the T.F. Elementary School Giving Tree.

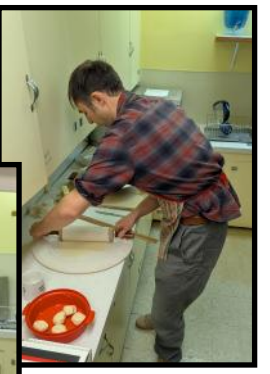
The quilting ladies brought layettes to the Fairview Hospital in Wyoming. Thank you!

Lighting Festival Pancake Breakfast

Making Advent Wreaths

Lefse Day

at The Lodge



Lefse Day

at FELC

Christmas
in our Church

Children's Program

The Sunday School kids did a great job telling the story of Jesus' birth. Thank you to Miriam Flysjo, Khrissy Linnerooth, Megan Lappe and Angie Dahlstrom for all your help!

Joint Choir Christmas Cantata

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

JANUARY

Sun	Mon	Tue
4 9am Worship at Immanuel 10am Fellowship at FELC 11am Worship at FELC 12:15pm Christmas Décor Take Down	5 8:30am Counters Meet	6 5:30pm Choir Practice-TF
11 9am Worship at Immanuel 10am Fellowship at FELC 11am Worship at FELC 12:15pm Council Meeting	12 8:30am Counters Meet	13 5:30pm Choir Practice
18 9am Worship at Immanuel 10am Fellowship at FELC 11am Worship at FELC w/ Sunday School	19 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY	20 8:30am Counters Meet 5:30pm Choir Practice
25 9am Worship at Immanuel 10am Fellowship at FELC 11am Worship at FELC	26 8:30am Counters Meet	27 5:30pm Choir Practice

Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 	2	3
7 9:30am Quilting	8 9am Wisdom Seekers 2:30pm Community Coffee at The Lodge	9 4:30pm Community Meal at Immanuel Luth.	10 9am-2pm Crafting Saturday
14 10am Book Study at The Lodge	15 9am Wisdom Seekers 10am Staff Meeting 2:30pm Community Coffee at The Lodge 4:30pm Supper & Game Night at FELC	16	17
21 9:30am Quilting 1:30pm Worship The Lodge	22 9am Wisdom Seekers 2:30pm Community Coffee at The Lodge	23	24
28 10am Book Study at The Lodge	29 9am Wisdom Seekers 2:30pm Community Coffee at The Lodge	30	31

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITY

FIRST DAY HIKE

Interstate Park, St Croix Falls
Thurs, January 1, 2026 ~ 1-3pm

Join Naturalist Maia Lieske on a mile-long winter hike along the Ojibwa Trail. As a group, hike through pine and hardwood forest. A warming fire will be behind the Ice Age Interpretive Center. Snacks and refreshments provided by the Friends of Interstate and Straight Lake State Parks will be available within the Ice Age Interpretive Center. Be sure to dress for cold weather, including hats, gloves, and warm jackets. Visitors are welcome to bring snowshoes if there is enough snow. Pets are welcome on the hike but must be under control and on a physical leash no longer than 8 feet at all times. Pets are not allowed within the Ice Age Interpretive Center.

Things to do in January

- Begin a new devotional
- Celebrate Epiphany (Jan. 6)
- Bubble bath day (Jan. 8)
- Make soup in a crockpot
- Enjoy popcorn day (Jan. 19)
- Bake snowflake cookies
- Handwriting day (Jan. 23)
- Go on a winter adventure

Coffee DTIme

Join the residents at The Lodge in Taylors Falls every Thurs at 2:30pm for their free Community Coffee Hour!

Winter Storytime
Every Wednesday
Jan. 7th - Mar. 11th
10:15am - 11:15am
St Croix Falls Library

Taylors Falls

Farmers & Crafters Indoor Market

Saturday, January 17th
11am - 3pm

Taylors Falls Community Center

Variety of vendors, food and music from your local vendors!

Chisago Lakes
COMMUNITY MEAL

Monday Evenings
4pm - 6pm
Zion Lutheran Church in Chisago City. All are welcome!

Luther Point BIBLE CAMP

Winter Camp

February 6 – 8, 2026
6th – 12th Grade
$95/camper

Theme
Building Community
How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
–Psalm 133:1

www.lutherpoint.org

Minutes of the Church Council of
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Sunday, December 14, 2025, 12:15pm
Next meeting: January 11, 2026, 12:15pm

Council Members Present: Rose Anderson, Kathy Carlsted, Angie Dahlstrom, Don Hansen, Becky Hulden, Riley Linngren, Craig Loen, Julie Valez, Pastor Justin Fenger

A. Opening Devotions – Julie
January-Don

B. Sharing Stories of God's Love in our Lives – Christmas program exemplified Gods love in our community of faith.

C. Pastor Justin's Report –

1. Technology upgrades and changes-Matt Mitchell will provide a list of items to purchase for the sanctuary.
2. Joint Council -Meeting time / day – Thursday, January 15 @ 8 am.
3. Community Meals-Planning a meal at FELC-Pastor will call Kevin Schuman to coordinate if the Baptist Church currently has one. The purpose of Community Meals would be to address food insecurity and social connections in our communities.

D. Treasurer's Report – Craig

1. Audit planning – Clergy Financial Resources Engagement letter signed 11/6/25. Cost $250/ hour, up to 10 hours work. See Engagement Letter-Craig and Becky will meet with Jerry Rhoads to complete the 7 page Financial Process questionnaire from Clergy Financial.
2. November giving total was $15,221.02 which is about $5,000 above budget
3. Received $61,693 from the estate of Maynard and Helen Sellman to a special memorial -fund.
4. Don moved to move funds from Account 3036 and 3038 which were 2020 unused youth group, maple syrup funds to account 3035, which is the main maple syrup account. Kathy seconded motion carried
5. Motion to accept financial report: Rose moved and Kathy seconded. Motion carried

E. Building and Grounds Committee Projects – Don

1. Technology installation-Don set up and installed the new laptop, connected new monitor and keyboard for use in office by financial secretary.
2. Bathroom remodeling almost done – painting needed – Angie and Carli may need help
3. Bruce installed new door in from kitchen to exterior stairwell.

F. Library Report – Julie

1. Becky and Julie will apply for Little Free Library status – meet with Angie in January, cost for application is $50.00

G. Sunday School – Christmas Program – Was wonderful and everyone enjoyed the choir- Choir suggested singing from the balcony or the back of the church next year.

H. Vision Group -> Mission and Outreach Committee

1. Leadership will be Rita and Wendy. The hope is to evolve into the Mission and Outreach committee. May help lead Community Meals

I. Shared Ministry – Better Together with Immanuel

1. A combined council made up of a few members from each congregation will meet quarterly to monitor the ongoing relationship – Craig, Don, Kathy, and Becky have volunteered to serve on this group.
2. Music and Worship Coordination – FELC coordination is happening at the monthly staff meeting.

J. Personnel

a. Momoh Freeman has been getting paid.

b. Extra hours for Carli to create screen presentation weekly (up to 3 hrs/wk) This cost will be shared with Immanuel. Immanuel will reimburse FELC for Carli's hours quarterly.

K. Sunday Morning - Council Person on Duty (CPOD)

a. Check all doors before leaving.

b. Security Training with CCSD – Angie and Becky attended and gave summary

c. Action items from training-number doors and lock doors during service, purchase a first aid kit and AED. Set up training for ushers and council members when this equipment is in place.

L. Caring Ministry

a. Monthly meeting of visitors – We will begin meeting at least monthly in November.

M. Report on Events

a. Lighting Festival Weekend – Pancake Breakfast-Went well, served 115

b. Wreath – making -went well

c. Lefsa Making – 4 griddles going. All lefsa taken home. 4 crafters working, too.

d. Immanuel Community Dinner-went well

N. Upcoming Events: - leadership?

a. Christmas Eve Services-4:00 pm and 9:00 pm at FELC

b. 12/21 Choir Cantata

O. Motion to Adjourn-Kathy and Rose

The Epiphany, also known as Three Kings' Day or the Feast of the Epiphany, is a Christian holiday that commemorates the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God to the Magi, or wise men. It is traditionally celebrated on January 6th. Here are several Epiphany activities for kids and for the family to participate in!

Paper crowns: These are fun no matter what your age. You can only make one really fancy to go with the winner of the King's Cake, or everyone can sport a crown! Decorate with glitter, jewels, feathers…. whatever makes your heart happy!

Wise Men: Create the three wise men out of toilet paper rolls. So many choices! Cover in paper, color with crayons or markers, or paint them.

Bless Your Home with the Epiphany Home Blessing: This special blessing is a way of marking our homes, usually at the front or main entrance, as we ask God's blessing upon those who live, work, or visit throughout the coming year.

We will have small kits available at the church to take home!

Bake a king cake: One of the most well-known traditions associated with the Epiphany is the baking of a special cake called a "king cake." If you enjoy baking, consider trying your hand at making a king cake at home. You can find recipes online or ask a friend or family member for their favorite recipe.

Throw a party! Plan a fun menu, bake a kings cake and decorate! Encourage conversations about Epiphany!

First Evangelical
LUTHERAN CHURCH of TAYLORS FALLS

Church Office
651-465-5265
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Pastor Justin Fenger
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pastor@immanuelalmelund.com

Angie Linngren
Ministry Coordinator
felctf@gmail.com

2025-2026 Council/Officers:

Becky Hulden—President
Kathy Carlsted—Vice President
Craig Loen—Treasurer
Don Hansen—Secretary
Julie Valez
Rose Anderson
Angela Dahlstrom
Riley Linngren

Financial Secretary
Jerry Rhoads

Please hold the ministers and council members in your prayers that God would give them the wisdom, strength, courage, patience and perseverance to serve this community of faith as they lead us in our mission for the sake of the world and the glory of God.

Next council meeting will be held on Sunday, January 11, 2026 at 12:15pm

Mission Statement

Proclaim the Gospel and Serve our Neighbors.

(Mission Statement approved 2023)

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." Psalm 90:1

Please send submissions to: felctf@gmail.com
Articles due the 12th of each month.

First Evangelical
LUTHERAN CHURCH

561 Chestnut Street, Taylors Falls, MN 55084-1110

NOT FOR PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US
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