December 2025

The Salt Shaker

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NEAR ELY
11100 Spanish Road, Ely, Iowa 52227
www.elypres.org and on Facebook
319-848-4624 office@elypres.org

FROM THE PASTOR

How do we see Christmas?
Through the eyes of a child?
Through the eyes of a sage?
Through the carols and choruses?
Through the fragrant spices baking in the kitchen?
Through the voices of the stories passed down in the family?

When I was a young child, Grandpa Billy read the Luke account of the Christmas story in the old King James Version while sitting on his rocking chair with a living room full of family. Everyone waited patiently or impatiently for the serving of the traditional Christmas meal and later presents. Even Grandma stepped out of her kitchen to stop and listen.

In that moment we fit into three categories:
Too much waiting for those of my generation.
Too hurried for those of the oldest generation.
Too tired for the generation in between.

But the story was as long as it was, no way or desire to cut it down. No skipping ahead.

The young pregnant woman. The nervous dad-to-be. The magnificent angels. The dirty shepherds. The overwhelmed innkeeper.

Each had their own story, and we were invited to pause from our stories and be in theirs.

And then, finally, Grandma pulled out from the oven wrapped in tin foil ham and cheese melty sandwiches with a special secret sauce that to this day, no one has the exact recipe for. Ladled the chili or the oyster stew.

Those years seem to have hastily passed by, and now new memories call us to speak to our days and times treasuring the past, but not so much that there is no room for anything else.

No room in the heart.
No room in the inn.
No room for Jesus to be new at Christmastime.

I encourage you to prioritize this year the stories of Jesus, the songs of Jesus, and find ways to share your gifs beyond the shopping list. To consider and choose to create new memories this Advent by a unique charity or project of Christmas love. A gift to Jesus who does have everything and is impossible to buy for, but who may appreciate your gift more than you know.

Merry Christmas!
Pastor Julie

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday Morning Bible Study is working on First and Second Peter, 9:30 a.m. December 3 and 10. Then, on December 17 having a Christmas tea.

The Christmas Tea will include a cookie exchange (bring one dozen to exchange) and all are invited to attend.

WORSHIP & PROGRAM

DECEMBER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

December 7, 2nd Sunday of Advent
Letter from King Herod, Matthew 2:1-18
Liturgist: Craig Andrle
Ushers: Becky & Ted Grenis
Greeters: Rachelle Mineck

December 14, 3rd Sunday of Advent
Letter from the Innkeeper, Luke 2:1-7
Liturgist: Janet Holland
Ushers: Larry & Theresa Harder
Greeters: Nora Fetter

December 21, 4th Sunday of Advent
Letter from the Shepherds, Luke 2:8-20
Liturgist: Sarah Harris
Ushers: Jodie & Dan Chadima
Greeters: Larry & Theresa Harder

Wednesday, December 24, 7:00 p.m., Christmas Eve, Candlelight and Communion
Letter from Joseph, Matthew 1:18-25
Liturgist: Blake Kilberger
Ushers: Jim & Judy Serbousek
Greeters: Kevin & Shirley Bailey

December 28
Letter from Mary
Liturgist: TBD
Ushers: Jodie & Dan Chadima
Greeters: Eleanor Burke

January 4, 2026 Epiphany, Holy Communion, Star Sunday
Letter from the Magi
Liturgist: Dawn or Matt Zacek
Ushers: TBD
Greeters: Jodie & Dan Chadima

CHURCH BUSINESS

GIVING TREE

On the lower level at church is the Giving Tree which has tags for church giving ideas for Christmas.

Some items are:
Stamps
Grape juice or wine for Communion
Flavored creamer for refreshments after worship
Batteries AA
Batteries AAA
Batteries C
Batteries D
Batteries 9 V
Kleenex
Toilet paper
Liquid pump soap for bathroom sinks
Paper towels (on a roll)
Youth group snacks
Coffee
Paper coffee cups
Paper plates for Sunday goodies
Plastic forks
Post-it notes
Printer paper 8 ½ x 11
Printer paper 8 ½ x 14
White Out EZ Correct
NERF football
Pickleball paddles (with white plastic edging)
Clorox Ultra Clean Toilet Bleach Tablets

THANK YOU!!!

CHURCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Did you know you can make donations to the church online through Give+? Use the QR code or click on the "Give Now" button at elypres.org.

FINANCIAL UPDATE as of 31-Oct-2025 (83% of the way through the year)

Due to the significant offering in October and the $15,000 Soup Supper transfer, the cash balance of the General Fund recovered with a positive cashflow of $17,700 for the month. The General fund now has a positive cash balance of $6,700. October is the first month that reflects custodial labor and supplies for the LIFE Center.
We are 83% of the way through the fiscal year. The expenditures are 80% and the income is 82% versus the relative budgets.

Our church has 167 members as of Aug. 31st. This reflects the drop in membership due to the normal work process of confirming active members on the church rolls. For those who may not know, church membership is one of the data points used by the Presbytery to calculate how much our church owes for the per Capita budget to the Presbytery.

Account	Comments
1105 · General Fund	ending month balance of $6,687.86
4110 · Regular Offering - Pledged	94% of budget (YTD actuals of $81,955.60 on a budget of $87,380.00)
4116 · Regular Offering - Non-Pledged	62% of budget (YTD actuals of $47,137.77 on a budget of $76,509.00)
Total Income	82% of budget (YTD actuals of $168,804.94 on a budget of $205,836.00)
Total Expense	80% of budget (YTD actuals of $164,448.62 on a budget of $205,836.00)

FELLOWSHIP

CHRISTMAS EVE OPEN HOUSE AT THE MANSE

After the worship service concludes on Christmas Eve, you are invited to refreshments and fellowship at the Manse.

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

COUGAR CORNER FOOD PANTRY

Kennedy High School is looking to bulk up their Cougar Corner Food Pantry! The pantry provides important support to Kennedy students and families, and keeping it well-stocked helps them continue meeting those needs.

They are currently collecting:

Food Items:
Peanut Butter
Jelly
Oatmeal Packets
Ramen
Pasta and Sauce
Mac N Cheese (to-go containers)
Cereal
Granola Bars
Snack Crackers
Fruit Snacks

Non-food items:
Shampoo
Deodorant
Body Wash
Toothpaste

Of course, any non-perishable food items are always welcome!

Donations can be dropped off in the horseshoe entry area — there's a big bin right inside the doors labeled "Food Pantry". Every item helps make a difference for the Cougar community.

Thank you for your generosity! If you have any questions, please contact Christal Bressler.

SOCIAL JUSTICE GROUP

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40

Do you want to make a difference in the community, but don't know where to start? Consider joining the Social Justice Group! Please note that this is not a political group; it's simply a way to help people find ways to serve the community in meaningful ways.

Jesus' ministry was deeply rooted in justice, compassion, and equity, though He didn't use the modern term "social justice." His actions and teachings consistently lifted up the oppressed, challenged systems of inequality, and called people to love one another radically. Jesus addressed social justice through His actions and teachings, which focused on feeding the hungry, healing the sick, caring for the poor and oppressed, challenging injustice, showing compassion for society's outcasts, interacting with people on the fringes of society, and treating foreigners with compassion and love.

There are tons of opportunities to continue this work in our communities; it's just not always easy getting connected to those opportunities, especially with having a location outside of city limits. The good news is, there are so many churches and organizations already doing this work. As a church, we can help to add to their numbers. Some examples of work that we can participate in include:

- Protective Accompaniments: gathering together with others outside of Homeland Security to stand in solidarity and support for immigrant families reporting for their routine check-ins.
- Voter Information Events: learning about local candidates.
- Public Speaking / Solidarity: Attending and/or speaking at City Council or School Board meetings when topics of social justice are being discussed.
- Mobilization: Calling state representatives on important issues when injustice is being legislated.
- Helping Food Insecurity: Working with others to fill a food truck or serve in a soup kitchen.
- Foster children: Participating in a collection for teenagers aging out of the foster care system so that they can furnish an apartment.

These are only a few examples. There are many ways to get involved and help others. By signing up for the Social Justice Group, you simply add your name to an email distribution. You can then stay up to date on ways to help and get involved as little or as much as you would like. If you are interested in being added to the distro list, contact Rachel Manders.

YOUTH GROUP

In November, Youth continued to fellowship in the LIFE Center with our Midweek Mash on Wednesdays, and on Sundays after worship, Youth attended either Youth Sunday School or Confirmation class.

Also in November:

- Youth saw two contemporary Christian concerts
- Seven Youth, with the guidance of many wonderful adult helpers, prepared and served a Thanksgiving dinner for 31 sit-down guests and eight take-home plates for the seniors in our church
- Youth collected items and packed 55 boxes for Operation Christmas Child

BIG Thanks to Judy S, Steve S, and Darla M for helping with Midweek Mash events!

BIG Thanks to Joanne C, Norm and Terry Z, Craig and Becky A, Darla M, Jeri and Casey H, Faith and Xander S, and Steve S for guiding the youth in preparing, serving and for cleanup of the Thanksgiving meal!

BIG Thanks to all who donated items and funds for postage, wrapped, prepared and packed the Operation Christmas Child boxes! Fifty-five children around the world will learn about Jesus and feel God's Love from our little country church!

In December, Youth will participate in the Advent festival and church decorating day (actually on November 30th). We will celebrate the Birth of Jesus with a Christmas party on Wednesday 12/17 - this is also our last Midweek Mash of the year!

Also, in December, place your order for decorating the sanctuary with Poinsettias for Christmas! **Each 6" poinsettia plant is $15.00,** and can be purchased "in Honor of" or "in Memory of" a loved one. Poinsettias can be taken home anytime after Christmas Eve Service, or it can be donated to our church Deacon Team to be shared with a church member in need of some cheer**. We will accept orders through 12/10** for poinsettias to decorate for Christmas Eve.

BIG Thanks to all who donate the redeemable cans and bottles to Youth Group! We are grateful to all of the donors! We will continue to collect these throughout the year and use this money for Mission Projects and fun! Donations of redeemable cans and bottles can be brought to church and left in the Youth Room, or call Angie for pick up or delivery.

Please let me know if there are any questions about youth programming, and thank you for your prayers and continued support!

Blessings~
Angie Zahradnik Ehle

YOUTH SCHEDULE: DECEMBER 2025

Sunday, November 30: First Sunday of Advent
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. Youth Group (YG) Sunday School / Advent Festival / Church Decorating
11:30 a.m. Soup and Bread Potluck

Wednesday December 3:
7:00 p.m. YG Midweek Mash at the LIFE Center

Sunday December 7: Second Sunday of Advent
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. NO Youth Group or Sunday School

Wednesday December 10: POINSETTIA ORDERS DUE
7:00 p.m. Midweek Mash TBA

Sunday, December 14: Third Sunday of Advent
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. YG Sunday School

Wednesday December 17:
7:00 p.m. YG Christmas Party at the LIFE Center

Sunday, December 21: Fourth Sunday of Advent
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. YG Sunday School

Wednesday December 24: CHRISTMAS EVE - NO MIDWEEK MASH TODAY
7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Worship

Sunday, December 28:
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. YG Sunday School

Wednesday December 31: NEW YEARS EVE - NO MIDWEEK MASH TODAY

Sunday, January 4, 2026:
9:30 a.m. Worship
10:30 a.m. YG Sunday School

First Presbyterian Church near Ely Calendar, December 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 10:00 Chair Yoga	**2** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**3** 9:30 Bible Study 11:30 Chair Yoga 5:30 Handbell Practice 7:00 Chancel Choir 7:00 YG MW Mash	**4** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**5** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**6**
7 2nd Sunday Advent **Food Pantry Sunday** 9:30 Worship 10:30 Fellowship 10:45 Sunday School	**8** 10:00 Chair Yoga	**9** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**10 Poinsettia Orders Due** 9:30 Bible Study 11:30 Chair Yoga 5:30 Handbell Practice 7:00 Chancel Choir 7:00 YG MW Mash	**11** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**12** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**13**
14 3rd Sunday Advent **Warm Toes Ends** 9:30 Worship 10:30 Fellowship 10:45 Sunday School	**15** 10:00 Chair Yoga	**16** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**17** 9:30 Bible Study Tea 11:30 Chair Yoga 5:30 Handbell Practice 7:00 Chancel Choir 7:00 YG MW Mash	**18** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours 6:30 Session Meeting	**19** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**20** Newsletter Deadline 5:30 Potluck 6:00 Card Club
21 4th Sunday Advent **Christmas Joy Offering** 9:30 Worship 10:30 Fellowship 10:45 Sunday School	**22** 10:00 Chair Yoga	**23** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**24 Christmas Eve** 7:00 Candle Light Service 8:00 Manse Open House	**25 Christmas Day**	**26** 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**27**
28 Christmas Band 9:30 Worship 10:30 Fellowship	**29** 10:00 Chair Yoga	30 9:00-12:00 Office Hours	**31 New Year's Eve** 11:30 Chair Yoga			

COMING UP: January 4, 2026: Star Sunday 9:30 a.m., Epiphany, Holy Communion, Food Bank Collection, Fellowship 10:30

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