



The Echo

December 2023

A publication of Bethany United Methodist Church, Weyers Cave, VA

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If you would like ...
and currently don't
receive the church
newsletter
and other important
updates by email, please
send your email address
to Cindy Kite at
office.bethany@gmail.com.

Advent at Bethany

Ugly Sweater Sunday – Sunday, December 10

Our Hearts Grow ... When We Worship. Wear your ugly or favorite Christmas sweater. We hope to have 100% participation. Share your Christmas spirit with the entire congregation!

Family Christmas Program – Sunday, December 17

Our Family Christmas Program called "Our Hearts Grow ... When We Remember the Story" will be during our morning worship service at 9:30 am. This event featuring the music of the season, lighthearted drama and our children's play, is sure to fill your heart with the love and spirit of the season. A light Christmas brunch will follow. This is a wonderful opportunity to invite friends and neighbors!

There is a sign-up sheet in the foyer for items needed for the brunch. We would appreciate all the donations. We also need people to help set up, serve, and clean up.

Christmas Eve – Sunday, December 24

Our Hearts Grow ... When We Celebrate His Birth. We will once again offer two services on Christmas Eve. Come to one or both! Bring your family and friends, or invite a neighbor. Re-imagine the sights and sounds of the night when Jesus was born.

9:30 am - This service will be geared to our children. There will be an appearance from the Bethany Barnyard Pals. Come enjoy the simplicity and joy of the beloved Christmas story.

8 pm - Come be part of our traditional candlelight service. Worship with the carols and scriptures proclaiming the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Bethany UMC Family,

That time of the year has somehow, somehow found us again. I knew it was coming as the television ads were starting to become redder and greener, the town of Verona had put up their seasonal lamppost flags, and college football season was ending ... but every year this season seems to sneak up on me. As a kid this was a season that I waited for all year long, and the post-Thanksgiving break was my physical reminder that it was here. That would have been the time I had my Christmas wish list finalized and the countdown was up on the fridge. As I have gotten older, that sense of anticipation has seemed to decrease; as the busyness of life increases. There is something to be said about the Christmas season sneaking up on us. We are busier than ever and whether you like it or not, Christmas is going to come. The season of Christmas songs on the radio or at the grocery store is going to come whether you have had a wonderful year or if it has been one you would like to forget. This is how God comes to us. Whether we seem too busy to slow down or are too hurt to feel any joy; God is still coming into our lives; wrapped in cloth waiting to warm and grow our hearts. God chooses to come into the world for those whose year has been wonderful AND for those who had a year to forget.

Our Advent Series this year is called "Tis the Season of Growing Our Hearts" and we are going to travel the road to Bethlehem, while also finding faith in the story of the Grinch. The biggest problem with the Grinch is that for

some reason his heart is two sizes too small. Whether deserved or not, the Grinch is ostracized from the "WHO's," and the outsider spends most of the story fuming about the sights and sounds of the season. It is not until the Grinch believes he has stolen the WHO's joy, that he realizes joy is something that cannot be stolen. My hope and prayer this Advent season is that you will find ways to grow your heart in Jesus; a place where our joy cannot be stolen. May we not get caught up in the season of busyness that we forget where our true joy is found. If you are looking for a way to grow your heart this season, make sure you join us Wednesday morning @ 10 or Wednesday evening @ 6:30 for our Advent Book Study. There are still a few books available if you would like one! And as always, if you need anything in this Advent Season, please do not hesitate to reach out. You all are in my prayers and heart, as you all continue to grow my own heart!

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Blaine



Love Offering for Pastor Blaine

Christmas will be here before you know it. In the past, Bethany has gifted our pastors with cash for Christmas. We usually pass an envelope during the service. Anymore, lots of us walk around with a debit card, but no cash or check in our wallets. This year, I want to give you a heads up that we will pass an envelope 3 Sundays in December - December 10, 17 and Christmas Eve. If you are not going to be there and want to give to the Christmas fund, feel free to mail a check to the church payable to Blaine Oliver-Thomas.

So many of you have expressed how happy you are to have Pastor Blaine at Bethany. We are not paying him a big salary and your Christmas gift is a great way to not only show your love and appreciation, but also improve his financial situation at Bethany. I encourage you to participate.

Blessings, Jane Elkins



Missions Update

by Lori Mooney

December is here. Take some much needed time off and enjoy it with friends and family to celebrate Jesus' birth. Happy Birthday, Jesus!! Thank you for coming here to earth and then saving us from our sins. We owe you everything.

Thank you to everyone who donated gifts for the Apple Tree Project for Kingsway Ministries. You are making children's dreams come true with the gifts that you helped provide.

Thank you to those people who donated their time to ring the bell for the Salvation Army at the Shenandoah Valley Heritage Market on Dec. 2nd. There are plenty of time slots still open to volunteer your time. If anyone would like to ring the bell at any of the locations in Rockingham County, let me know and we can get you signed up.

The Gideons fundraiser "Presents for Jesus" is on its way. This is the tree that is in the narthex and if you donate \$5, then Gideons will purchase bibles

and give them to those who need them. Please be sure to donate to this worthwhile cause. You will put your name on an ornament and hang it on the tree. Spread God's love through the Gideons giving Bibles this holiday season and year-round. Thanks for your help.

Thank you to those who stayed after the service on Dec. 3rd for Mission Sunday or gave donations that will be going to our Food Pantry neighbors, military, or our local fire departments.

2023 was a great year here at Bethany UMC because of all your help and donations to different areas throughout the year. Keep up the good work and we will see what we can accomplish in 2024. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you.

Mission spotlight of the month:

Gideons. What began in 1908 as an Association of Christian businessmen placing Bibles in hotel rooms has evolved into an expanding mission to provide Scriptures to all people in nearly every facet of life. Today, we have taken more than 2 billion Scriptures in more than 95 languages to

200 countries, territories, and possessions across the globe. We exist as an advocate for the lost, to bring them the saving knowledge of the Word through not only placing and distributing Scriptures, but also through personal witnessing and by associating together for service. As a united force for the Gospel, we remain rooted in tradition, but we operate under the firm belief that anyone can be a valuable asset to this invaluable cause. We provide many opportunities to partner with us through either prayer or financial support. Join us, and let's spread the Good News. If you would like to make an extra contribution, please put in the offering plate and mark it for Gideons.

If you know of someone who needs help, please let us know.

Lori Mooney, co-chair, 540-820-7394
brownsugarcookie@yahoo.com

Nancy Colvin, co-chair, 540-910-0272
nwcolvin@gmail.com

The Christmas Tree

From a Tree a Manger was Made,
On the First Christmas, in it He Laid

Also From a Tree a Cross was Made
And On it, for Our Sins, the Price He Paid

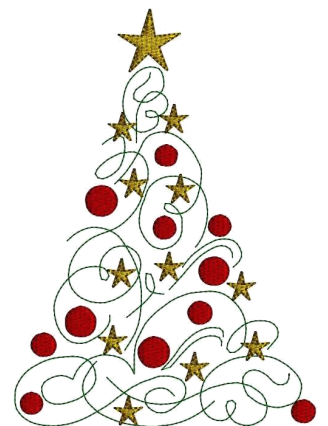
I remember Each Year, as the Tree I Adorn
His gift Giving Began, the Day He was Born

As I Gently Place Each Ornament of Gold
In His Hands I Place my Heart, and My Life,
For Him to Hold

Trusting in Him to take Good Care of Me
I Pray and I Sing, as I Decorate the Tree

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Light," said He,
That's Why I put Lights on My
Christmas Tree.

(anonymous)





Financial Update by Cindy Kite

It's long ... I apologize before you even start reading!

Here we are again ... at the end of another year. Looking back, do you have lots of good memories? Many blessings to be thankful for? Any regrets? Any "I wish I had's? Are there things that you want to be better at in 2024 or is there something you are determined to start? Were you satisfied with life in 2023? With your faith? Or is there room for improvement? What type of resolutions will you be making this coming year? Our Advent theme is "Tis the Season of Growing Our Hearts." How will you grow your heart this Advent season?

I don't know about you, but I am going to be more intentional about my commitment to Bethany, to God, my commitment to love and help others with the talents and blessings God has given me. One way of doing this is through my giving. Randy and I were like many people who gave weekly ... **WHEN WE WERE IN CHURCH!** Those Sundays when we were sick or off doing something else, we never made up that weekly commitment. Like a lot of us, we thought missing a week of giving wasn't a big deal or wouldn't make much of a difference. But you know what? It does!! (And I know it does, I'm Bethany's treasurer ... I have the inside scoop.) We made the decision that giving every week or month was important. That's why we set up online giving through the website. Our giving is always there, every month, even when we aren't. That's one thing we wanted to be more intentional about. It was important to us to honor the commitment we made to Bethany and to God. He has given us all that we have ... every blessing we can count; therefore, being thankful, we give back.

How about you? What's important in your life? Is your faith the most important thing in your life? Or does it come in second? Third? Fourth? Does it even make the top ten? We are so busy with our families, work, friends, other commitments we've made. Busy, busy, busy. Busy isn't an excuse. I've tried to use that as excuse. It doesn't work. Oh, it does for a little while, but not if you want your heart to keep growing. I made the decision to put my faith in God above all other things in my life, and in doing so, my heart has grown. Being a faithful giver is a tangible example of growing our hearts. Using the talents God gave us is

November 30 - Week 48		
Budget	225,467.00	
Where We Should Be		208,123.20
Where We Are		184,927.75
Deficit of		-23,195.45
Net Percentage		-11.1%

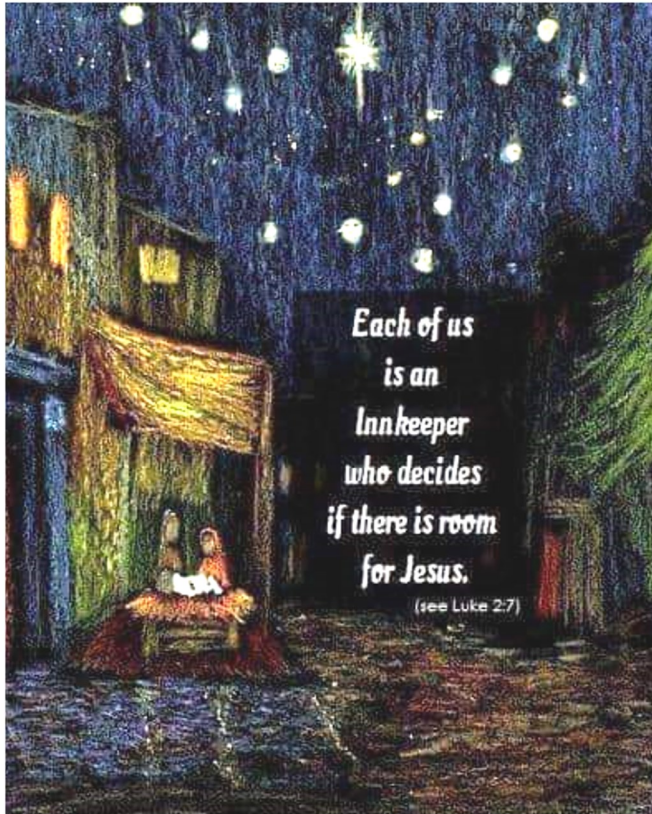
another example of a growing heart, of becoming a faithful servant of our Lord.

Talking about money and church all in the same sentence, is taboo to many. But, hey, since I'm the church treasurer, it's what I get paid to do. Bills aren't fun and exciting to talk about but they have to be paid each month ... electric, heat, office supplies, repairs to the building ... minor and significant. We have to purchase those little items we don't even think about ... paper plates and cups, coffee, cleaning supplies, and even toilet paper. Where would we be without that?!?! We also have to pay our staff for their time and commitment to all of us.

As you can see in the chart above, we are \$23,195.45 behind our 2023 budget. Our giving is behind where it usually is at this time of the year. We have lost individuals and families this year, whether by death, or by choice. Some were very faithful givers. We'll need folks to step up in the New Year to keep things moving in the right direction here at Bethany. I have no doubt you will.

I know the folks at Bethany have big, generous hearts. You've support Bethany in many other ways. You have donated funds to help the Michael and Wagoner families in their time of need. You have donated to our youth and their summer mission trip. You gave candy for the Easter Egg Hunt and Trunk or Treat. You purchased gifts for Kingsway Apple Tree. You helped a church in Maui start rebuilding after the wildfires. You've supported Bethany and our ministries in many, many ways. Thank you! Thank you for your faithfulness, for your generosity, for always stepping up when needed. As much as we accomplished in 2023, we are looking forward, with excitement, to see where God leads us in 2024. And to how much He will help each of our hearts grow in the coming year.

From our house to yours, Merry Christmas!



BUM BITES

The youth have spent the month showing their gratitude in many different ways! We resumed our Bible Exploration and studied the Beatitudes found in Matthew. They even wrote their own Beatitudes for modern times. Our youth are so insightful and full of God's spirit! The youth made desserts after church on November 26th for Hanging of the Greens. Then, that evening, they are served the meal to all who attended.

There are many nods outside of church going to our youth! Garrett Simmons participated as a member of the State Fort Golf Team. Maecy Ann Frizzelle was awarded with Regional 1st Team Volleyball, 1st Team All District

volleyball, and Shenandoah District Volleyball Player of the Year. They awarded Amelia Simmons 2nd Team All Regional and 2nd Team All District for volleyball. Mia McLaughlin was part of the state Fort Women's Cross Country team. Happy Huffer participated as part of the Regional Riverheads Competition Cheer Team. Lucy Huffer has been busy with All County Chorus, musical work shop, and has auditions/selections coming up for Frozen and District Chorus.

We are grateful that all of our talented youth are part of this church and growing in Christ every day!

Blessings to you,

Bridgett



Bethany Family Christmas Program - Sunday, Dec. 17

Come and enjoy a worship service filled with Christmas music, a play by our children, and some fun skits presented by our Bethany Players.

Afterwards we'll celebrate with a Christmas Party. There is a sign-up sheet in the foyer.

This is a perfect day to invite a friend or neighbor and spread the Christmas spirit.

A Member's Thoughts by Jenn McLaughlin

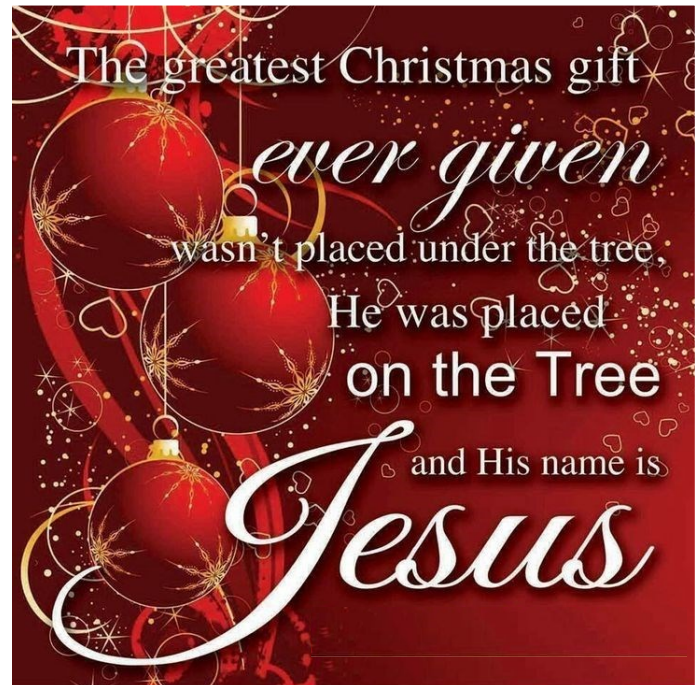
"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." Luke 2:1-7

One of my favorite Christmas traditions each year is reading the story of Jesus' birth as told in the gospel of Luke. When I was growing up it was my dad's family that started this tradition in my life. The extended family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins would gather for a meal. Afterwards, the kids would impatiently wait as the adults drank their coffee, visited with one another, and then cleared and cleaned the table. Finally, it would be time to gather together around the living room where all the presents were piled.

The wait for presents always seemed "forever" to my young self, and it wasn't over yet. Before a single gift was unwrapped, my grandfather would take up his bible and open to Luke chapter two for the story of the first Christmas gift. A Savior.

As a small child I never appreciated the reading of Jesus' birth. It seemed to me in those early years it was just another delay before the excitement of shiny new gifts. As I grew older the reading of Jesus' birth began to take on new meaning for me. I began to understand that this small



baby was the gift, and not all the presents waiting to be unwrapped.

Now as an adult I'm even more grateful for this Christmas tradition. My dad's family still gathers together to celebrate Christmas (this year Jeremy and I will be hosting). The faces at this gathering have changed over the years. There have been new additions to the family through marriages and births, as well as losses through the years. It isn't my grandfather's strong but gentle voice reading the words, but different generations.

Yes, there have been changes through the years, but the story remains the same, and now I have the honor of sharing this tradition with my children. Sharing the story of the greatest gift we have ever received, the gift of our Savior and King, Jesus!

"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" Luke 2:11.



Caring Cards

Caring Cards will meet on Tuesday, Dec. 5 at 10 am ...
PLEASE NOTE THE DATE

CHANGE! You are invited to join this group as they fellowship and write notes of encouragement to our Bethany family. There's no commitment. Come when you can. There's nothing better than letting someone know they are being thought about!

We typically meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 10 am at the church. Handmade and other cards are always welcome if you would like to donate them to this group. Questions? Talk with Becky McCarty.



Young at Hearts

Join the Young at Hearts group for their Annual Christmas Party at Mrs. Rowe's in Staunton on Tuesday, Dec. 5 at 12 noon. Don't forget your white elephant gift!! This is always a fun time after lunch. It can get a little intense sometimes... but always fun!

Our January lunch will be held at Thomas House in Dayton at 12 noon on Tuesday, Jan. 2. We will be welcoming Leslie Wagoner as our new leader! Thank you Carolyn Swartz for all the years you have led this group. You are very much appreciated.



Donuts & Devotions

All men are invited to attend "Donuts & Devotions" on the third Saturday of each month. This will be a time of donut eating, coffee drinking, fellowshiping, sharing of devotions and praying! Invite a friend or neighbor to come with you. It's a great way to kick off fall with something new. There's no commitment. Come when you can. **This month we will meet on Saturday, Dec. 16 at 8 am in the fellowship hall.** Questions? Contact Pastor Blaine or Chuck McCarty.



Get Involved in Something New in 2024!



The BUMS Christmas Post Office is officially OPEN!!

Want to spread some old fashioned Christmas cheer? Send Christmas greetings through the BUM Post Office. Postage is a donation of .25 cents per card or whatever donation you want to make, which goes to the BUM Mission Fund for their summer mission trip. Please have your cards to the church by Sunday, Dec. 31. You can place your cards in the appropriate basket in the fellowship hall.

And don't forget to check the baskets for cards sent to you by your church family!!

What a wonderful way to share the Christmas spirit with others!



December Coffee Hours



Want to talk with Pastor Blaine outside the church? Maybe get to know him a little better, and he get to know you better? Oh, and he loves to talk college football ... well maybe not so much these days!! **He will be at Valley Pike Rumor Mill on Thursday, Dec. 14 from 9:30 - 11:30 am.** Come by and say hello. Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea and some good conversation!

Merry Christmas

Prayer List

Members: Jan Gorden, Pam Lynn, Laura Lucas, Jackie Dunsmore, Leslie Wagoner, Bradley & Wyatt Dunsmore, Kathleen Stump

Extended Family: Lisa McCormick - friend of Rosemary Wagoner, Alma & Neese Spitzer - aunt & uncle of Barbara Long, Sandie Donald - daughter of Carolyn Swartz & sister of Cindy Kite, Clem, Jr. & Hannah Smiley - brother and sister-in-law of Carolyn Swartz, Chad Richards - son of Pete & Cheryl Richards, Samantha Steed - mother of Tabatha Steed

If you would to add someone to the prayer list, please let Cindy Kite know at 540-234-8880 or office.bethany@gmail.com. All requests will be left on the prayer list for four weeks unless otherwise requested.

December Birthdays

1st Jeff Ritchie &
Gerald Fulton

3rd Kristen Kile

5th Annie Roller

9th Hudson Dunsmore

16th Shawn Cook

19th Layne Shifflett

20th Elizabeth Williams

21st Amber Casey

23rd Jane Elkins

25th Alexander Carter

26th Garrett Roller

29th Jake Frizzelle

21st Barbara Miller

Pam Roller

Randy Roller

26th Jeremy McLaughlin

28th Peggy Lucas

If your birthday is not listed
or is listed incorrectly,
please email Cindy Kite at
office.bethany@gmail.com.

January Birthdays

2nd Garrett Simmons

7th MacKenzie Crawford

8th Krisalyn Mooney

13th Abby Michael

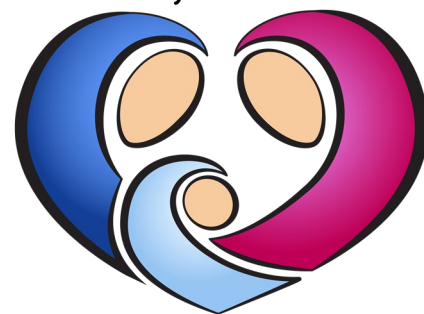
15th Mark Whitecotton

15th Sharon Northrop

18th Abe Smith



Jesus is the
Heart of Christmas



Thank you for your prayers,
encouraging words, cards, gifts,
and kindness shown to our family
throughout the past year.
From my mother's first stroke
1 year ago to her passing
this past month,
you have helped in countless ways
to navigate very difficult challenges.
I'm grateful.

Cheryl Richards & Family

December 2023



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 Mission Sunday Activities after the worship service 	4 4-5:30 pm - Food Pantry	5 10 am - Caring Cards 12 pm - Young at Hearts 	6 10 am & 6:30 pm - Advent Book Study 6:30-7:30 pm - Christmas Choir Practice	7 6-8 pm - Girl Scouts Using Fellowship Hall	8	9
10 Ugly ... Or Not Sweater Sunday 	11	12	13 10 am & 6:30 pm - Advent Book Study 6:30-7:30 pm - Christmas Choir Practice	14 9:30-11:30 am - Coffee with the Pastor (Valley Pike) 	15	16 8 am - Donuts & Devotions
17 9:30 am - Family Christmas Program & Party to follow 	18	19	20 10 am & 6:30 pm - Advent Book Study 5:30 pm - SPPRC 6:30-7:30 pm - Christmas Choir Practice	21 	22	23
24 9:30 am & 8 pm 	25 	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Bethany United Methodist Church

3700 Lee Highway
Weyers Cave, VA 24486

www.mybethanyumc.org



Family Christmas Program
Sunday, Dec. 17
9:30 am



"The Echo"

A Publication of Bethany United Methodist Church
3700 Lee Highway, Weyers Cave, VA 24486
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www.mybethanyumc.org

Blaine Oliver-Thomas, Pastor
850-508-7245
blainethomas@vaumc.org

Dale Roller, Praise Band Leader
Cindy Kite, Secretary/Treasurer
Bridgett Crawford, Youth Leader
Danny Perry, Sexton

January Newsletter Deadline: Dec. 20, 2023
Please submit articles to Cindy Kite at
office.bethany@gmail.com

Webmaster: bethanyumc.website@gmail.com



connect. grow. serve.

At Bethany we ...

Connect with God in community
Grow in our likeness to Jesus Christ
Serve our neighbors