

the **HERALD**

PEORIA FIRST UMC | FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL 2026

A photograph of a wooden bridge with a glowing cross at the end, symbolizing a path to church. The bridge is made of dark wood and has a simple wooden cross at the far end. The cross is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. The bridge is set against a backdrop of bare trees and a cloudy sky. The overall mood is serene and spiritual.

One Path
One Church
Together

Planting Faith in the Hearts of Our Children

by Rosy Rios
Director of Children and Family Ministries

At Peoria First, our children's ministry is a joyful place where we walk alongside children as they take their first steps of faith. We strive to create a safe, nurturing environment where kids can discover God's love, grow in His Word, and form meaningful friendships.

Each Sunday, children engage in Bible stories, creative activities, prayer, and worship—all designed to help them know they are deeply loved by God and valued in His Kingdom. It has been especially encouraging to watch the children learn and memorize Scripture together. Through our new monthly challenge, they are memorizing a different psalm each month—Psalm 23 in November, and next, Psalm 100.

We are also blessed to see our children joyfully participating in worship through children's choir. We are so thankful for Ms. Allie and her faithful dedication to teaching, guiding, and encouraging our children through song week after week.

This ministry is made possible by the loving commitment of our teachers and volunteers who invest in the spiritual growth of the next generation, as well as by the families who trust us with their children. We continue to pray for God's guidance and strength as this ministry grows, and we warmly invite others to join us in planting seeds of faith that will flourish for years to come.



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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 jbelle@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.

Returning to the Ancient Path

by Pastor Miguel Rios
Associate Pastor

In a world that celebrates innovation, speed, and personal autonomy, scripture invites us to pause and ask an important question: Are we still walking on God's path, or merely on a path that feels right to us?

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God spoke to a people who were deeply religious yet spiritually disconnected. They had the temple, the sacrifices, and the leaders—but they had drifted from God's heart. In Jeremiah 6:16, the Lord offers a gracious invitation: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

The tragedy was not that the people lacked information. It was that they trusted their own judgment more than God's direction. They refused to stop, to look honestly, or to ask humbly. The result was a life that appeared stable but was moving toward destruction.

This tension is not limited to ancient Jerusalem. It speaks powerfully to the church today. We can be active, faithful in appearance, and deeply involved, yet still resistant to evaluating our spiritual direction. The most dangerous path is not the unknown one, but the one we assume is right without consulting God.

Proverbs 3:5–6 confronts this tendency directly:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Notice the emphasis—all your heart and all your ways. Partial trust produces partial surrender. We often invite God to bless our decisions rather than allowing Him to shape them. But God does not straighten paths we refuse to place in His hands.

The ancient path is not outdated or restrictive. It is the path of truth, humility, obedience, and trust. It is the road God has always blessed because it leads to life and rest for the soul.

As believers, the call is simple yet profound: stop long enough to examine our direction, look honestly at the fruit of our choices, and ask God for guidance with a teachable heart. We may discover that the way forward is actually a return—to the ancient path that still leads us home.



PASTOR MIGUEL RIOS

Associate Pastor,

Peoria First United Methodist Church



Walking the Path Together

by Pastor Tim Ozment
Directing Pastor

As we begin a brand-new year and start to move into the end of winter and towards spring, our church is entering a season of intentional discipleship. A year rooted not in urgency or anxiety, but in growing awareness of God's presence among us. Together, we are asking a simple but profound question: How is God forming us right now?

From January through February, our worship will focus on a sermon series called, "The Ancient Path." Drawing from Jeremiah's invitation, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths..." (Jer. 6:16). This series reminds us that the ancient path is not merely behind us nor is it somewhere we hope to arrive someday. Rather, the ancient path is beneath us. It is how we walk with God right now.

When we're anxious or facing difficult times it's easy to focus on what we fear losing or what we feel we need to recover. This series invites a shift from having to being. Having asked questions shaped by fear and scarcity: What do we need to survive? How do we regain control? What have we lost? However, being asked something different: Who are we becoming? Where is God present right now? What faithfulness is possible today?

This shift, from anxiety to attentiveness, from control to trust, is essential. Before we rush toward solutions, we are paying attention to how God is using this path to form us into God's people.

Looking back, we see those who walked this path before us were faithful in their generation. We recognize that God used this ancient path – the joys and challenges they faced – to form them into the disciples God wanted them to become. Nevertheless, we don't need to return to the "good old days" to find this path. This Ancient Path is beneath us right now. God is using this moment, this set of challenges, and these moments of great joy, to shape us into disciples of Jesus and children of God.

This walk prepares our hearts to recognize Jesus when He says, "Come and see," because we have learned how to recognize God's presence with us. So, as we move toward Lent and Easter, our focus will turn to the second sermon series: "Come and See...Go and Tell." This series traces the biblical movement from encounter, to transformation, and finally to witness. Jesus' invitation is "Come and see" (John 1:39). Then the invitation becomes His commission to "Go and tell" (Matthew 28:10).

During Lent, we will invite you, our congregation, and then our community, to come and see where Jesus is already at work among us: through Sunday worship, Loaves & Fish, Alive worship service on Saturday, at Lincoln School arts and choir, Lincoln School Buddy ministries, Hispanic ministries, and so many other expressions of faithful presence. We believe that faithful witness grows from encountering God and not out of obligation. The invitation is to come to one or more of these outreach ministries to see where God has called us to Him in the work God is doing in these places. We'll have signup sheets for opportunities and open invitations to "come and see." Holy Week will be a time of watching and waiting with Jesus, culminating in Easter's joyful call: "Come and see the place where He lay... now... Go and tell." We will again offer the Good Friday "Funeral for a Friend" service this year with some fresh eulogies from people who knew Jesus well. Those who attended last year know how powerful this evening is. So, invite your family and friends, and join us as we honor Jesus and see lives transformed.

After Easter, the invitation continues as we invite everyone to come back to see how Sunday school, small groups, and shared spiritual practices draw us deeper in our faith and closer together. Come back and experience another uplifting worship service and check out our Sunday school opportunities as we grow together as disciples of Jesus.

Throughout this season, we are paying attention to our journey on this ancient path that God has called us to walk. We're going Higher in worship, Wider in outreach and mission, Closer in fellowship, and Deeper in formation. Our hope is simple and faithful: Formed by God's presence and having encountered Jesus ourselves, we are sent to invite others to see this ancient path — this way of life — as we learn together how to live in Jesus.

We're looking forward to walking this path together.



**GOD IS USING THIS MOMENT,
THIS SET OF CHALLENGES, AND
THESE MOMENTS OF GREAT JOY,
TO SHAPE US INTO DISCIPLES OF
JESUS AND CHILDREN OF GOD.**



PASTOR TIM OZMENT

*Directing Pastor,
Peoria First United Methodist Church*



LISTENING POINT

by Christina Koeppel
Director of Youth and AV Ministries

In December, I was starting to feel the need to change up my quiet time with God. It wasn't that I wasn't still spending time with God, it was just becoming stale. By stale, I mean my mind was wandering more and I couldn't focus on God as well anymore. I reached out to staff and friends to see what spiritual practices they were using to

draw near to our Creator. Lots of great options, but one really stood out. It just so happened that one of those beautiful days in January aligned with my Monday sabbath. I grabbed one of my bibles and left the house. I knew I would land in one of the great parks in the area but just let the Lord lead. I pulled into Forrest Park Nature Center and knew I was in for a hike. And so, I started down the path, or I should say up, as the path soon led up a hill. I had already decided that at each Eagle Scout bench I would stop and read a portion of the word. Halfway up the hill was my first pit-stop and my lungs thanked me. I opened my bible and landed in Jeremiah, but I knew that wasn't quite where God was leading me. Or maybe that was my first pit-stop, as I read about drought, famine, and war. Although it spoke to me, "They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So, the Lord does not accept them; he will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins." Jeremiah 14:10

My soul felt that but was thirsty for hope. I believe God was pushing me through a time of repentance and a reminder of whose I am. After praying, I flipped to the book of Esther. What I didn't know is that there were exactly the right number of benches to read the entire book of Esther on the path. You could say I planned it that way, but it's been years(!) since I walked through the park. As I reflected on first that passage in Jeremiah and then on the book of Esther, I found that many of my doubts and questions for God were answered.

The example of God's planning for "a time such as this" on the path of life is one that we all can learn from. He has been with us for generations; He is the God of the past. He is with us now; He is the God of the present. He will be here long after we are gone; He is the God of the future. Although He is the beginning and the end, I do believe that God has a purpose on each of our lives, it may not be as big as saving a whole people from oblivion, but He has designed each of us and knows us intimately.

After my time in the park with God, I went to the used bookstore and found a book on prayer that is speaking to my heart, (Praying like Monks, Living like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer by Tyler Station).

Whether you are a new believer or one of our seasoned saints, God is not done with you. How are you responding to God? Are you spending time in prayer and devotion? Are you leaving Him room to speak into your life? Do you need to change things up like I needed to? I pray that God will open the doors of your heart, soul, and mind to what He is doing in and through you.



Medical Brigade to Honduras

by Kevin Nelson
Mission Team

In September 2025, the United Methodist Church in Honduras (UMVIM) hosted a Medical Brigade for Aposento Alto United Methodist Church. Aposento Alto means “upper room” in Spanish, and it is the partner church in Honduras for Peoria First UMC. This effort, aimed to provide free and accessible health services to residents who often lack sufficient healthcare options, was funded by Peoria First.

Caring for the Community. The Medical Brigade included volunteers from Aposento Alto, staff from UMVIM, and medical professionals. The medical team was made up of Honduran health professionals, including specialists in: General Medicine, Pediatrics, Gynecology, Dentistry, and Pharmacy. Their main goal was to offer primary medical care, detect common illnesses early, and give patients immediate treatment and counseling for self-care. The team also focused on raising community awareness about health through preventive education.

Three Days of Service. The brigade took place over three days, from September 8 to 10, 2025. Each day was opened in prayer. In addition, several patients received individual prayer throughout the medical brigade. Monday, September 8: The team provided general medical care, as well as dental and gynecological services for 159 patients. Tuesday, September 9: The number of patients increased significantly as word spread quickly about the medical brigade. Services also included cytology for cervical cancer detection for 28 patients. Wednesday, September 10: The



final day was also very productive, with 117 general medicine patients and 7 gynecology patients evaluated and treated.

A Major Success. The medical brigade provided crucial medical, gynecological, pediatric, dental, and pharmacy services to nearly 500 people. Though no urgent diseases were detected that required immediate hospitalization, the team offered important guidance on health promotion and prevention.

The medical brigade also offered a connection between Aposento Alto and its surrounding community. UMVIM is committed to continuing its support for vulnerable populations through these kinds of community health activities, which have had a great impact on the physical and spiritual health of many families.

*Text adapted from article in Spanish by Milton Ilovaes, United Methodist Volunteers in Missions.



ONE ART

Peoria First UMC Creatives

by Eugene Maison
Director, Fine Arts



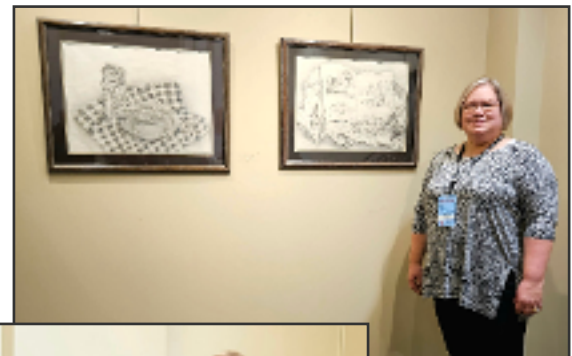
The 2026 One Art Exhibit reception marked the first exhibition and reception of the year for the Foster Gallery, and it was a joyful and inspiring way to begin the year. The event celebrated the creative gifts within the Peoria First UMC congregation. The exhibition highlighted the many ways faith, beauty, and everyday life show up through art in our community.

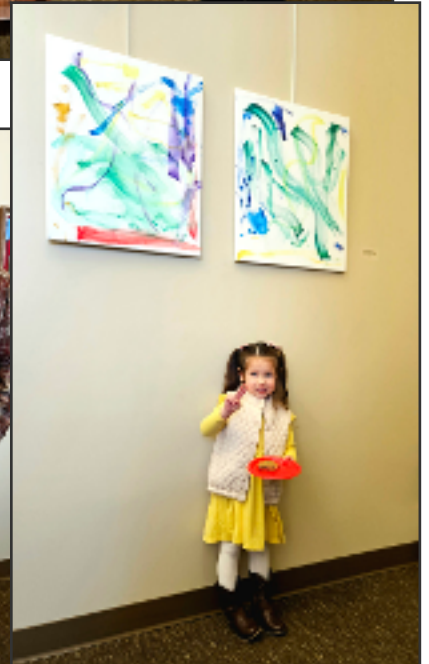
The works on display spanned a variety of media, including graphite drawings, collage, installation, photography, woodwork, ceramics, painting, paper flowers, mixed media, intarsia, needlework, knitting, quilt, poetry, and music. Artists ranged in age from just 3 years old to 90-plus, showing that creativity has no boundaries and flourishes across generations.

A particularly special part of the exhibition was discovering that some of the artists were “secret artists,” members whose creative work had previously gone unnoticed. This element of surprise made the experience even more meaningful and reminded everyone of the hidden talent within the congregation.

The reception itself was warm and welcoming, with plenty of space for conversation, reflection, and connection. Meeting the artists and hearing their stories brought each piece to life and strengthened the sense of community.

Overall, the 2026 One Art Exhibit reception was a wonderful and inspiring start to the year, celebrating the God-given talent and creativity of Peoria First UMC members and showing how art can connect faith, life, and community in meaningful ways.





Our heartfelt thanks to all our volunteers for their dedication 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.

Staying Connected to the Path God Has Set Before Us

by Julie Bell

Director of Communications

In today's busy world, staying connected as a church family is more important than ever. One of the ways we care for, support, and encourage one another is by staying informed and engaged with what's happening in the life of our church. We're grateful for the tools that help us do just that, and we invite you to make use of them as part of your weekly routine.

Our church website, peoria1.com, serves as the central hub for information. It is always up to date and available anytime. From worship service times and upcoming events to ministry opportunities, sermons, and ways to get involved, the website is a reliable place to find what you need - whether you're planning ahead or inviting someone to join you.

Another important connection point is eHighlights, our weekly email newsletter delivered every Friday morning at 6 AM. It provides a snapshot of what's coming up in the days and weeks ahead, along with important announcements and opportunities to serve and connect. We encourage you to take a few moments to read it each week—it's an easy way to stay engaged with the life of the church. If you're not already subscribed, you can sign up at peoria1.com.

Our church app (peoria1) brings everything together in one convenient place on your phone. Through the app, you can access the church calendar, register for events, watch or listen to sermons, and stay connected wherever you are. If you haven't downloaded it yet, we invite you to do so and explore all it offers—it's designed to support you even when life feels full.

Another helpful way to stay informed is through The 116 Podcast. Each episode shares relevant information, conversations, and updates about what's happening in the life of our church, offering insight and encouragement you can listen to anytime, wherever you are.

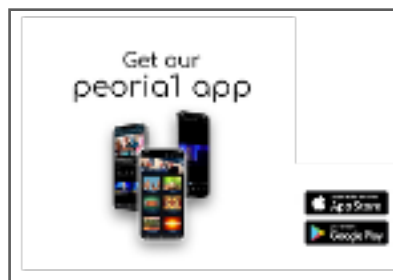
When you're on campus, we also invite you to take a moment to check the video boards throughout the building. These screens share timely announcements, event reminders, ministry highlights, and welcoming messages before and after services and in common areas. They change weekly and are especially helpful for last-minute updates and new opportunities to connect and serve.

By using these tools together - the website, weekly newsletter, app, and in-building video boards—we can stay better connected and informed as one church family. This shared awareness helps us communicate clearly, reduces confusion, and strengthens our sense of community.

Staying informed is more than knowing dates and details—it helps us remain attentive to the path God has set before us. As we stay connected to the life of the church, we are better equipped to follow where God is leading, participate in His work, and grow together in faith and service.



peoria1.com



Every Act of Love Matters



by Kirsten Tharp
Director of Congregational Care

Congregational Care is not a separate ministry for a few—it is a calling we all share as followers of Jesus Christ. In the United Methodist tradition, we believe faith is lived out through acts of mercy, compassion, and connection. Congregational Care often goes on quietly behind the scenes, but it is one of the most important ways we put those beliefs into practice, as we care for one another in both ordinary and difficult moments of life.

Scripture reminds us, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Congregational Care is how we live out this calling together. At its heart, it is about presence. It is checking in on someone you haven’t seen in worship, sending a card to a member who is grieving, offering a ride to church, or sitting and listening without trying to fix anything. It is praying for one another by name and trusting that God works through even the smallest acts of kindness.

Our Congregational Care ministry supports individuals and families including those who are homebound or hospitalized, and through home communion, prayer support, grief care, caregiver encouragement, and outreach to those who may feel isolated or overlooked. While some of these roles involve organized teams such as Caring Hearts, many opportunities for care happen naturally in everyday church life.

You do not need special training, a title, or a long-time commitment to participate in congregational care. Everyone can take part. Writing a note, making a phone call, delivering a meal, or offering to pray with someone are simple but powerful ways to serve. Small groups, Sunday School classes, youth, and families can all share in this ministry by intentionally looking for needs and responding with compassion.

United Methodists often speak of “open hearts, open minds, and open doors.” Congregational Care invites us to live those words fully. When we open our hearts to one another’s joys and struggles, open our minds to the diverse ways people experience life, and open our doors to welcome and include, we become a church where no one walks alone.

If you notice someone who could use support—or if you find yourself in need of care—please reach out to the church office so we can respond together. Likewise, if you feel called to serve, there are many ways to be involved, whether through ongoing service or occasional acts of care.

Together, through prayer, presence, and faithful action, we are on the path to grow as a caring community rooted in Christ’s love. Every act of care matters, and every person has a role to play.



Peoria FIRST Mission Wall

by Julie Rolffs
Missions Team, Chair



By now, hopefully, you have seen the Missions Map in the hallway between the Worship Center and the Gathering Space. The pins in this map provide us with a visual representation of the breadth of our congregation's impact around the world since 2005 (red for current connections, blue for past connections). Anywhere our "dollars" have landed is marked with a pin. In the coming weeks, you will see the addition of the words from Acts 1:8, along with a display of photographs in the Gathering Space to complete this effort. We hope you will spend some time with the map and photos, once they're up, and help explain these visual displays to our guests and visitors. This is your church in action, "in Jerusalem (Peoria), and in all Judea (Illinois) and Samaria (USA), and to the ends of the earth (around the world)" (Acts 1:8).

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

3 Ways to Give:

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