

## Covenanting Together to Start the New Year

As we step into a new year, we are reminded of the importance of beginning with intention and purpose. For our church family, this means gathering for our annual Covenanting Service. This tradition invites us to commit together to the shared journey of faith for the year ahead.

On Sunday, January 25, we will come together in worship to renew our covenant. This covenant is a declaration of the priorities we hold dear: placing Christ at the center of our lives, seeking God wholeheartedly, fostering fellowship with one another, praying faithfully, encouraging one another, using the gifts God has given us to build His kingdom, to name a few. It's an opportunity to align our hearts and lives with the mission God has called us to as His people.

This service is not just about signing a document—it's about renewing our dedication to walk as disciples of Christ, side by side. Along with signing the covenant, the service will include a time of communion to remember the sacrifice of our Savior and an anointing for the coming year, asking for God's guidance and blessing as we face the days ahead.

Whether you are a long-time member or a recent attender, you are warmly invited to join us for this meaningful time of commitment and worship. Let's begin the new year with hearts united in purpose, as we strive to glorify God and serve one another in love.

Mark your calendar for January 25, and let's covenant together as we step into all that God has planned for us in 2026.

January 2026  
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# The Church Corner



**First Mennonite Church**  
427 W. 4th Street  
Halstead, KS 67056  
[www.firstmennonitehalstead.org](http://www.firstmennonitehalstead.org)  
Pastor Steve Wilcox

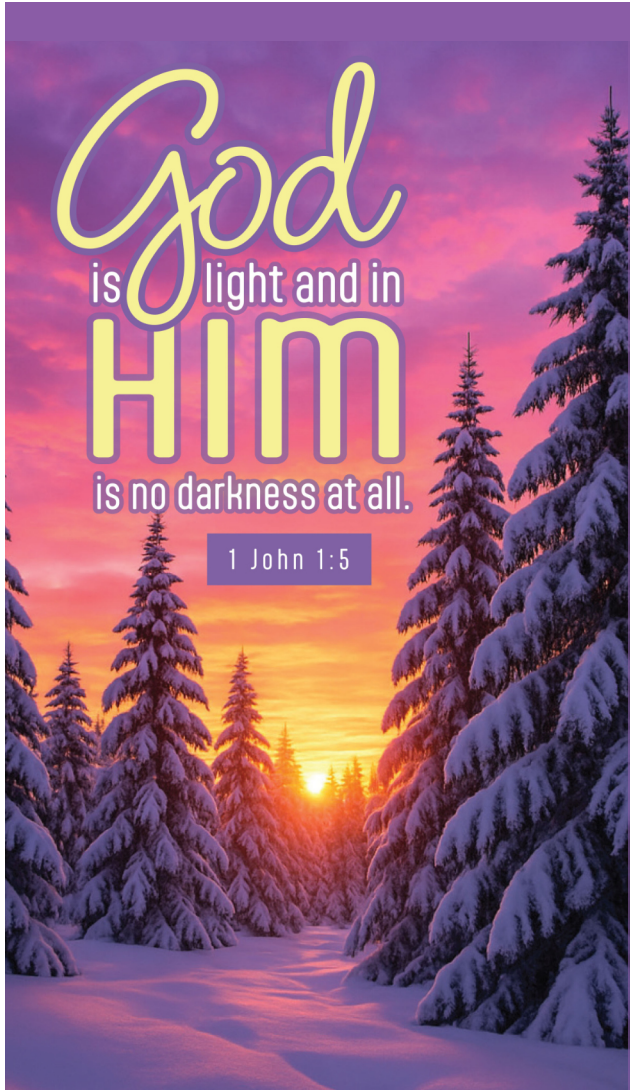
Phone: 316-835-2282  
Email: [office@firstmennonitehalstead.org](mailto:office@firstmennonitehalstead.org)

**Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.**  
**Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.**  
*\*The service is livestreamed on  
the church's Facebook page.*

**"We are a community of believers  
who follow Jesus Christ as we receive  
and share God's love."**

**We, of First Mennonite Church,  
valuing the convictions of our faith,  
endeavor to:**

- Engage our members in ministry
- Expand community outreach and
- Embrace new people in the love of Christ.



## A Bittersweet Christmas

Christmas and joy seem almost synonymous—unless you're the Grinch...well, at least the Grinch in the first two-thirds of the movie. After that, he radiates joy the way we expect everyone to this time of year. And it is an expectation, isn't it? We go around saying Merry Christmas, as if the very greeting is a gentle command: Be merry now—because it's Christmas.

In this season draped in tinsel and threaded with carols and festivity, what happens when joy is not the only emotion in the room? What if a person carries sadness, grief, or heaviness alongside those melodies that insist everything is bright and beautiful? Sometimes the cultural pressure to feel constant joy can itself feel like a burden. When joy is pushed so relentlessly, other emotions—grief, loneliness, worry—can feel like failures, like betrayals of the season itself. But perhaps that's not how it was ever meant to be.

Maybe it's okay—holy, even—to have a bittersweet Christmas. To recognize that life, as it really is, holds both shadows and light. That sorrow and joy are not enemies. That they can sit at the same table, and sometimes the presence of one even deepens the other.

Do we really imagine the first Christmas as being purely joyful? Mary and Joseph walked into that night carrying the weight of misunderstanding, suspicion, and uncertainty. Their marriage and reputation were clouded by questions. They traveled far, weary and anxious, only

to find no room available—leading Mary to give birth in a place no mother would choose. It has become a beloved scene in our nativity sets, but in the moment, how joyful was it really?

And yet—there was joy. Real joy. The kind that breaks into the dark, not by denying the shadows but by shining through them. Yes, profound joy bloomed in that humble space when Jesus arrived, and Mary held him close. But woven through that holy night were threads of hardship, uncertainty, and perhaps even disappointment at the circumstances. Bitter and sweet, mingled together from the very beginning.

From then to now, this is still the way of life. We do not live in seasons that are only bitter or only sweet. They mingle. They coexist. So if you find that your Christmas isn't 100% joy, 100% of the time—I want you to know that it's okay. You do not need to hide the hard parts or dress yourself in fake joy in the belief it's your seasonal duty.

Be honest with yourself. Be honest with God. Share your heart with those you trust. Giving the bitter places room to breathe might just make the sweetness that does come all the richer. Like many foods are enriched by the addition of something bitter, so too may our lives be enriched.

Whether this Christmas comes to you wrapped in joy, tinged with sorrow, or held somewhere in between, may you receive moments of sweetness that shine gently through. And may you know that the Savior born into a bittersweet world enters yours with compassion and hope.

Blessings,  
Pastor Steve

## Church Announcements

1. The church calendar can be found on the homepage of the church's website ([firstmennonitehalstead.org](http://firstmennonitehalstead.org)).
2. The deadline for the February newsletter is Monday, Jan. 26.
3. The Neighbors Store pantry requests toothpaste and Hamburger Helper for the month of January.
4. Offering Schedule for January:  
Jan. 4: MC USA  
Jan. 11: Church Budget  
Jan. 18: Western District Conf.  
Jan. 25: MCC Relief Sale
5. The link for our church online library is [librarything.com catalog/FMCHalstead](http://librarything.com/catalog/FMCHalstead).

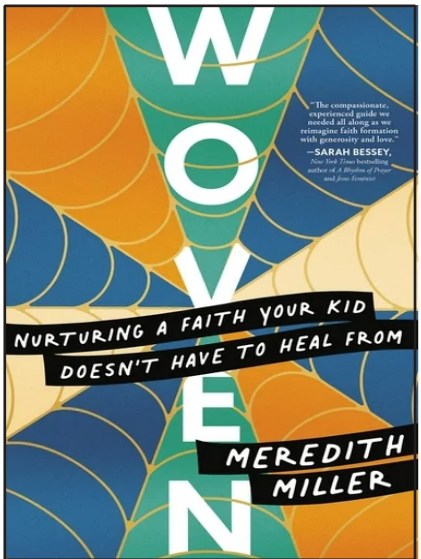
## Treasurer's Report

Budget Balance @1-1-25	239.32
Jan-Oct Receipts	121,060.01
Jan-Oct Expenses	(119,276.83)
Budget balance @10-31-25	2,022.50
November Receipts	14,516.54
November Expenses	(13,564.22)
Budget balance @11-30-25	2,974.82

## WDC Book Study

"There is a way for you to introduce your kid to God, even when the God you were told about as a kid doesn't totally align with who you believe God to be now. You can still talk about the Bible now that you know how mysterious and unwieldy a book it really is. You can offer answers to your child's questions about faith even when you now have so many questions of your own. This book will help you learn how."

Parents, grandparents, and teachers are invited to read *Woven* by Meredith Miller in an online book study with Western District Conference. Talk to Casey about getting a hardback or an audiobook to discuss with the group on Tuesday evenings beginning January 13. Using spider web imagery, we'll discern healthy ways to nurture faith in our congregation's kids. Drop-ins or occasional attendance welcome!





## Council Meeting Minutes

from Nov. 24, 2025

- Pastor Steve opened the meeting with prayer. October minutes were revised.
- Discernment Team: Sara Smoker reported that a church treasurer has been selected - David Mueller - and a church council secretary - Sara Smoker. They will start after approval by a congregational vote at the Annual Meeting in January.
- Vision Team: Jesse Mueller reported that the Covenanting and Anointing Service will be January 25, 2026. The pastor review is complete for 2025 and results will be shared in the December or January council meeting.
- Care Ministry: Steve said in their meeting they talked about cares in the church. Marilyn Schrag is going off the ministry and Marylin Balzer will be going off at the end of the year.
- Hospitality Ministry: Kaitlen/Brocia reported that there will be a ladies/ girls brunch on December 6, and a New Year's Eve activity at 7 p.m. with a white elephant gift exchange and games, etc. The youth group is planning to go to Snow Camp (Feb 13-15) and would like to have a fundraiser lunch on January 25 at the Annual Meeting to help with expenses.
- Mission Ministry: Dwight reported that approximately 300 people (including takeout) were served at the Mission Supper. Approximately \$5900 was donated (before expenses taken out). Everence matching funds are still available. Dwight encouraged people to submit an application.
- Nurture Ministry: Debbie reported that the fall mission offering will be used for 4 Angel Tree names. The remainder of the money will be used to provide a meal for the Health and Rehab staff. Kaitlen and Casey attended the WDC Kids Meet Christ Workshop, which focused on how to include kids in worship. An adult Bible study will possibly start January 14, 2026. Children's Christmas program practice will be December 3 and 10. The program will be December 14.
- Stewardship Ministry: Treasurer's report - Larry reported a budget balance of \$2022.50 at the end of October. James reported that they received 2 bids from roofing contractors and have approved one. Work on the roof won't start until next summer (no leaks at this time). James also reported they have been working on budgeting for next year. Mick Bean joined the stewardship ministry.
- Worship Ministry: Steve reported that they are working on Advent readings and cleaned up the choir room.
- Pastors Report: Steve reported that he attended a preaching master class at Bethel.
- Council continued membership discussion from the October meeting. More discussion in December and possibly voting on adding an addendum or changing the constitution to add covenant members.
- The next council meeting will be December 15, 2025. The Annual Meeting is January 25, 2026.



### January Calendar

Jan. 7	11:00 a.m. Mary Cummings Memorial Service	12:30 p.m. Annual Meeting	6:00 p.m. Jr. & Sr. High Youth Groups
Jan. 10	9:00 a.m. Verenike Making Day	6:00 p.m. Women's Bible study	
Jan. 11	6:00 p.m. Jr. & Sr. High Youth Groups	Jan. 28 5:00 p.m. Kids Club	6:00 p.m. Wed. night meal
	6:00 p.m. Women's Bible Study	6:45 p.m. Adult Bible study	
Jan. 14	5:00 p.m. Kids Club	<b>Looking Ahead</b>	
	6:00 p.m. Wed. night meal	Feb. 13-15	Sr. High Youth to Snow Camp at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp
Jan. 19	6:00 p.m. Nurture meeting	Feb. 18	Ash Wednesday
	7:00 p.m. Church Council meeting	Feb. 22	Last Sunday Potluck
Jan. 20	7:30 p.m. Vision Team meeting	Feb. 28	Verenike Supper
Jan. 21	5:00 p.m. Kids Club		
	6:00 p.m. Wed. night meal		
Jan. 22	6:45 p.m. Adult Bible study		
	9:00 a.m. Prayer Team meeting		
Jan. 25	10:30 a.m. Covenanting & Anointing Service		
	12:00 p.m. Sr. High Youth Group Fundraiser Lunch		

## Upcoming Church Events

### Verenike Making Day

It's time to prepare for our annual verenike supper! All are welcome to help make verenike on Saturday, January 10, beginning at 9:00 a.m. and ending when the job is done. There are tasks for all ages, and it's always a fun time of



working together. Any and all help is welcome, whether it's for an hour or four. If you have questions, talk to a member of the verenike committee: Alan and Marilyn Mueller, Gregg Dick, Kaitlen Ortman, Dwight Mueller, Jesse Mueller or Ethan Wilcox.

### Kids Club

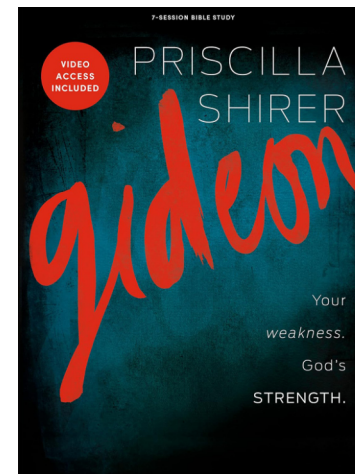
Kids Club returns for a winter session on Wednesday, January 14, from



5-6 p.m. and will continue through March 4. A supper will follow at 6:00 p.m. for Kids Club participants and their families. Elementary kids (K-6<sup>th</sup> grades) will continue lessons from the Sermon on the Mount and what it means to be part of God's Kingdom. Preschool kids (3-5 years) will learn about some of the big Bible stories from the Old Testament. If you know a kid aged 3 through 6th grade, please encourage them to join us!

### Women's Bible Study

A new women's Bible study will begin on Sunday, January 11, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. We will be going through Priscilla Shirer's study on Gideon, a thought-provoking study that will help us discover how God's power is made perfect in our weakness. Meetings will be on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. Participant workbooks can be purchased on Amazon or at Faith and Life Bookstore in Newton. Talk to Kaitlen or Melanie if you have any questions. All women are welcome!



Clockwise from top left: The preschool - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students led the congregation in singing "Go Tell It On The Mountain" during the Children's and Youth Christmas program; Jo Pjesky handed out treats to carolers; the high school youth sang with Cindy after putting items for MCC on the Christmas Tree; carolers sang to Edith Unruh and her neighbor on Christmas Eve; Emmit Jacob prepares for his role of Joseph in the Christmas program on December 14.





## Christmas at First Mennonite of Halstead

December is a busy month at FMC. From the Waffle Breakfast and Tree Decorating Service at the beginning of the month, to the Christmas Eve service and caroling at the end, the month is full of practices, events, giving to others and serving one another. Enjoy this photo recap of our Christmas activities, and if you missed an opportunity to participate this year, plan to join in next year!

Clockwise from right: The Christmas Tree offering for MCC included 218 bars of soap, 70 combs, 215 onesies and 50 infant sleepers; the junior high Sunday School class decorated sugar cookies with some residents at Halstead Health & Rehab; Pastor Steve served drinks at the Women and Girls Brunch; Jim and Marj Gundy were Advent readers one week; the Waffle Breakfast is a seasonal favorite.



## Senior High Youth Group Fundraising Meal Prior to the Annual Meeting

The Senior High Youth Group will host a fundraiser lunch on Sunday, January 25, prior to the Annual Meeting. Proceeds will support travel expenses for the youth group to attend Snow Camp at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp in February. While the meal before the Annual Meeting is usually a potluck, this time the youth will take care of preparing the food—so all you need to do is come and enjoy!



## Adult Bible Study

An adult Bible study will begin on Wednesday, January 14, at 6:45 p.m. following the Wednesday evening supper. All adults are welcome to attend both the supper and the study. Debbie Nightingale will leading the study, which will be announced soon!

## Church FAMILY PRAYER LIST

- Pray for Phil Aylward following the passing of Linda on Christmas Day. Pray for both of their extended families as well as they grieve their loss.
- Pray for the upcoming Covenanting and Anointing Service and Annual Meeting on January 26. Pray that these important traditions will be meaningful and life-giving for the congregation.
- Pray for the people of FMC, that we will desire to grow in our relationship with Jesus and will invite others to grow as well.
- Pray for the Mission Committee, that they would lead FMC in praying for and serving our partner missionaries well.
- Pray for those in our congregation for whom winter is a difficult and challenging season. Pray for safety for each person as they leave their home in potentially inclement weather.
- Pray for the new sessions of Kids Club and Adult Bible Study that will begin on Jan. 14. Pray that those who need to be in attendance will come and that both will nurture faith in those present.
- Pray for the Church Council leadership as they make decisions on behalf of the congregation. Pray for wisdom for each member.



This month features Kyle, Tia and Lucy Regier, a young family who has been at FMC for four years.

**Where did you grow up and how did you meet?** Tia grew up in Goessel and attended Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church. Kyle attended Remington schools and went to Grace Hill Mennonite Church. The two met during their freshman year at Bethel College through mutual friend groups who often spent time together. Their first date was at the end of their freshman year, and they were married following their graduation from Bethel in 2017. They spent their first four years of married life in the Chaparral School District, located between Harper and Anthony, southwest of Wichita.

**How long have you attended FMC?** Kyle and Tia have been attending FMC

since they moved to Halstead in 2021.

**What brought you to FMC?** The Regiers already knew people at FMC. Gregg Dick had been Kyle's golf coach at Bethel and they knew several of the Mueller family as well. "We decided to try it out and it felt like a good fit," they said.

**What ways have you served or been involved at FMC?** Kyle can be found at the sound board in the balcony on a regular basis and has sung in the choir when his schedule allows. Tia has helped with Sunday School and VBS and also serves in the nursery.

**What about the church (FMC) means the most to you?** "The relationships and the people we've gotten to know," Tia said. "We started going to Sunday School more often now that Lucy is in Sunday School, and it's fun to make connections with other young adults in the church who are in a similar life stage as us." Kyle added that the connections with people of all different age ranges and stages of life is nice.



Kyle, Tia and Lucy Regier

**What's a special memory you have connected to FMC?** Tia appreciates the opportunities for fellowship outside of church, especially the summer outings at the pool, the Sunday School picnic and the golf outing. One of Kyle's favorite memories is when Pastor Steve asked who was ready to go during a children's time, and Lucy took off running down the aisle to the back of the sanctuary, ready to head outside.

**What's something people might be surprised to learn about you?** Kyle recently took up running and ran his first half marathon this past fall. He is in his fifth year teaching social sciences at Halstead High School. Tia enjoys reading and baking when she has time and is in her fifth year as a school social worker in the Moundridge School District. Their daughter, Lucy, is 2 ½ and loves babies. The Regiers are expecting their second child at the end of March.



## JANUARY Birthdays & Anniversaries

- (A) Dick & Marj VanWye (67 yrs)
- Kenneth Schmidling
- Denice Klassen
- Mark Berger
- Isaiah Haspels
- Shelby Korgel Wilson
- Vivian Snell
- Eric Mueller
- Nathan Allen
- Debbie Nightingale
- Lakyn Ortman
- David Haspels
- Brenna Kaufman
- Kathleen Koehn
- Thomas Finley
- Sara Smoker
- Grayson Chandler
- Elaine Mohler
- Sawyer Mueller
- Andrea Wingard
- Brendan Gundy
- Kaleb Black
- (A) T.J. & Stacey Hackler
- Josie Whorton
- Max Whorton
- Julie Parker
- Julie Dalke
- Ann Lintz
- (A) Jerry & Carol Linn
- Rick Lee
- Leah Kawanguzi
- Trae Regier