



The Bethlehem STAR

Pride in Our Past - Faith in Our Future

May 2026

PEOPLE
POWER
CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD

★ CAJE NEHEMIAH ACTION
MONDAY, MAY 11TH, 2026
DOORS OPEN 6:00 PM

HARRISON HIGH SCHOOL
211 FIELDING RD, EVANSVILLE, IN 47715

Pastor's Perspective



This article is adapted from comments shared at a recent CAJE network meeting at the request of our Bethlehem network leader, Rev. Kimron Reising.

Kimron asked me to share with you why investing in CAJE is important to me. To answer this question, I must reach all the way back to college, which was the first time I ever considered the issue of corporate sin *in our modern world*. Sure, I grew up hearing stories about how the Israelites displeased God and had to wander in the wilderness or were sent into exile, but all of that was confined to those days long ago before Jesus came.

What mattered *now* was that I personally behaved in a particular way and took responsibility for the times I missed the mark.

The idea that I had any responsibility in collective sin never even entered my consciousness. After all, even as children, we knew the great injustice of the whole class being punished for a few misbehaving kids. It wasn't fair!

But at 18, for the first time I was thinking about what it meant for the systems we live in and among to be broken. Whose fault was that? Well, *I* was just barely a legal adult; surely issues like mass incarceration or the war in Iraq and Afghanistan weren't my fault!

But as I learned about systemic and collective sin, I also learned that repentance isn't just about assigning each sin to someone to claim and confess. I was and am complicit in these systems. That old image I had in my head of a scoreboard of "sins that belong to Emily" was slowly replaced by a sense of lament, of grief over a world so broken that I couldn't fix it *and* over the very real ways I contributed to its brokenness.

Once I learned about systemic sin, I couldn't unsee it. Systemic sin is

part of the fabric of our everyday lives. It plays a role in one school thriving while another struggles. It plays a role in why some can't pay their bills while others can live off passive income. It plays a role in nearly every disparity we can name.

With this new view of sin came a new view of repentance.

Repentance began to look less like guilt and more like responsibility. Part of repentance for me became naming the tangled up mess of our systems and working to untangle them however I could.

CAJE members are intimately aware of the complex entanglements of systems built to oppress. And we also know there are systems that disadvantage certain groups not by design, but as an unintended byproduct. The work to undo these errors—both intentional and incidental—is slow and without any guarantees. But it is a necessary part of repentance, and it is a necessary part of our faith.

Together, we routinely pray, “give us this day our daily bread.” We can point to so many places where the church literally puts food in people’s hands to get them through today. That’s important work!

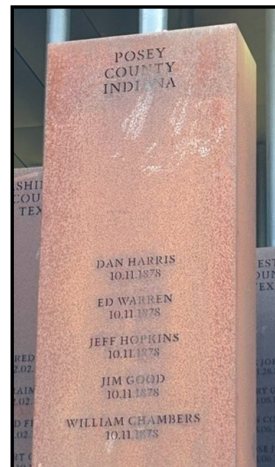
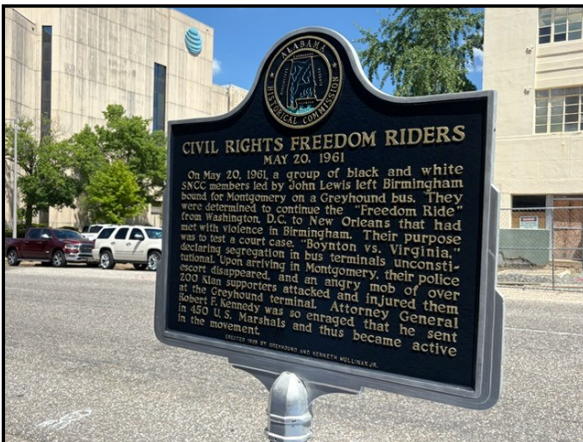
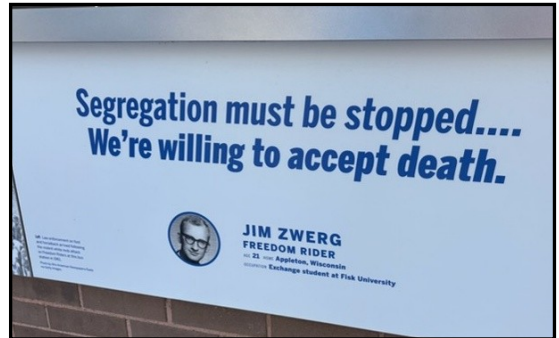
But we also pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We know how far earth is from the ways of heaven. How valuable these services are, the ways of heaven are not White Flag nights sleeping on a mat on the floor of a public shelter. The ways of heaven are safe, affordable housing for all. The ways of heaven are those that allow every one of God’s children to have the dignity of all they need for a healthy and whole life.

“On earth as it is in heaven” work is the slow efforts of justice work. I invest in CAJE to be part of that work, work that takes seriously the brokenness of our world and endeavors to do something about it right here in our community.

The entire congregation is invited and encouraged to show up to the Nehemiah Action night at Harrison High School on May 11 at 6:30 p.m. Come, help us show our elected officials that the “least of these” matter to us every time we step into the voting booth.



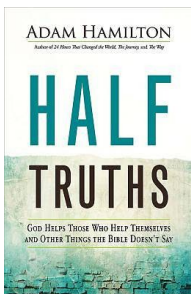
In mid-April, 28 pilgrims from the Evansville Tri-State Association (15 of whom were from Bethlehem) traveled south to bear witness to the history of slavery and the struggle for civil rights in our country. We had a meaningful experience and look forward to sharing about the trip in the near future. We also look forward to discerning what our next steps are, as people committed to furthering the cause of justice and equality in our own community. Stay tuned!





Congregations Acting for Justice and Empowerment

Everyone is invited on May 11 at 6:30 pm for the Nehemiah Action when we will gather at Harrison High School, over a thousand strong, to present our research and our solutions, to those who have the power and the responsibility to listen and act in implementing a course of action that we will prescribe for them. This year's Action has the potential to directly support the Diversion Program at United Caring Services. Support our church, UCS, and our community by giving one night of your presence at this action for Justice! Doors open at 6:00 pm, with plenty of parking for everyone.

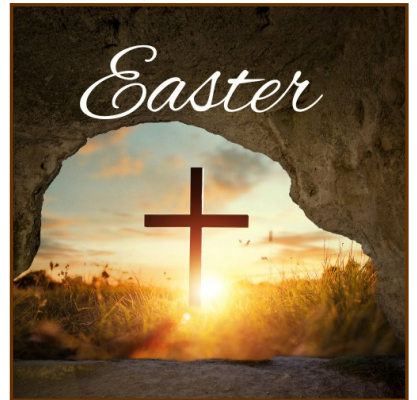


The Tuesday morning Bible study group will begin their next book on May 12 and conclude on June 23. The book titled *Half Truths: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves and Other Things the Bible Doesn't Say* is written by Adam Hamilton. Books should be available at thriftbooks.com for about \$8. Please contact [Donna Marvel](#) with any questions.



Maundy Thursday





SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER PARTY

Sponsored by
Mrs. Margaret and
BUCC Adult/Youth
Volunteers

Papa John's
Pizza
(included)

Adults Night Out

Fundraiser for Bucket
Blitz Supplies



//////
MAY 29TH
6-8 PM
\$25 PER FAMILY

SPOTS LIMITED

Ages K-6
Pre-K Welcome For children familiar with our
Sunday Morning volunteers and location.

Tuesday Evening Bible Study

Join the evening Bible study at 6:30 pm anytime on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. See the schedule below listing the dates and scriptures covered. Please contact Pastor Doug with any questions.

May 5	Acts 17:22-31 *1 Peter 3:13-22 John 14:15-21	June 9	Exodus 19:2-8a Romans 5:1-8 Matthew 9:35-10:8
May 19	*Acts 2:1-21 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 John 7:37-39	June 23	Jeremiah 28:5-9 Romans 6:12-23 Matthew 10:40-42

*Denotes scripture covered by Pastor Emily for the upcoming weekend.

Altar Flowers



Donate Sunday morning altar flowers to celebrate a special occasion or remember a loved one. Prices are \$40 for two vases and/or \$35 for one centerpiece. To view available dates and sign up, see our website bethlehemucc.org. Paper forms are always available in the vestibule (office entrance open 24/7), church office hallway, Welcoming Area, children and youth entrance, and narthex.

Upcoming available dates: May 31 & June 7

If you have any altar flower questions, please contact [Carol Kolb](#).



May 2 and 3 is a communion weekend, so we will be collecting canned fruit for the Tri-State Food Bank. Please bring canned fruit (with pull-tabs if possible) to worship on Saturday or Sunday and place them by the altar. 84 items were collected in April. Your support for this ongoing offering is appreciated!



Greetings from Council!

From the April council meeting, we are excited to report that we unanimously approved a plan by Eosin to update the floors in the Fellowship Hall. This will get started when possible while navigating our busy church calendar. We are grateful to Eosin for their vision and looking forward to one more step in refreshing that space.

Also we discussed the ongoing safety updates for church. We are specifically working on a few simple things that make a large impact in keeping our children and all of our congregants safer while participating in Sunday school, worship, and other activities.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, please contact me at my email amyspurl@gmail.com or in person anytime.

Thank you,

Amy Spurling
Church Council President



Let's Celebrate Our Graduate

Caroline Palmer



Caroline will be attending Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. She plans to major in exercise science with a future goal of becoming a pediatric occupational therapist.

Her fondest Bethlehem memory was the 30 Hour Famine. It made her realize how much we have to be thankful for in our world.

Financial Recap

March General Account

	<u>2026</u>	<u>2025</u>
Monthly Beginning Balance	\$ 181,127.71	\$ 174,030.14
Monthly Pledge Deposits	46,040.24	45,247.77
Monthly Other Deposits	1,495.12	1,709.37
Monthly Operating Disbursements	(34,590.83)	(34,301.02)
Monthly Other Disbursements	(10,182.36)	(8,636.88)
Monthly Ending Balance	<u>\$ 183,889.88</u>	<u>\$ 178,049.38</u>

YTD General Account

Beginning Balance	\$ 168,584.96	\$ 170,535.44
Pledge Deposits	122,493.22	125,292.31
Other Deposits	9,532.61	4,363.67
Operating Disbursements	(117,791.92)	(123,430.47)
Other Disbursements	1,071.01	1,288.43
Ending Balance	<u>\$ 183,889.88</u>	<u>\$ 178,049.38</u>



TIME AND TALENT LIVE AUCTION

Last Sunday after worship, we gathered in the Fellowship Hall for a lasagna lunch, followed by the Time and Talent Auction, sponsored by the Outreach Team to raise funds for the 2026 Bucket Blitz. Thanks to the generosity and sharing of talents by our Bethlehem family, it was a great success and a good time was had by all!

We raised \$3,852, not counting money from the Giving Vortex and School's Out Party, which will completely fund this year's Blitz, with a nest egg for 2027!

Big thank you's to our donors and bidders, the Outreach Team, Margaret Eberhart and our Sunday School teachers for helping our children and youth create their fabulous Diamond Dot art, Pastor Emily, Kristen Molander, Troy Vaupel, and our auctioneers Mike Dean and Stephen Risinger.





Our children and youth shared their gifts by creating a variety of Diamond Dot Art items which were individually priced and sold.



Why Use “Native” Plants?

Kathy Solecki, writing for the Green Team

With the warming days, we are drawn to the beautiful displays of colorful flowers everywhere, from grocery stores, to big box stores, to local nurseries. There, you may have noticed displays of plants marked “native”. Even Bethlehem’s own Green Team is working to establish a couple of small plots of “native plants”. What is that all about, and why would anyone want “native” plants anyway?

To understand this trend, we need to look at the complex web of life that sustains all of us on God’s good earth. The base of animal life on our planet is composed of insects. Insects aerate and enrich the soil, pollinate crops, and provide food, either directly or indirectly, for most other animals. If insects were to disappear, our own extinction would not be far behind.

Perhaps you have heard of the “insect apocalypse”. Scientists estimate that nearly 45% of our insect population has disappeared over the past 40 years, thanks to a loss of plant life and the heavy use of pesticides. Looking around our neighborhoods, that seems hard to believe, when we are surrounded by lush green lawns and those beautiful flowers I mentioned earlier. What’s the problem?

It’s this: *most plant-eating insects can only eat plants with which they share evolutionary history.* To paraphrase local naturalist Sharon Sorenson, any plant which was not here when the Pilgrims arrived, is not native. This means that our beautiful lawns, sown with non-native grasses, and most of our lovely, hybridized flowers might as well be plastic, for all the nourishment they provide to insects. And so, without native plants, our yards are bereft of insects, butterflies, and birds. To restore them, we need to return to native plants.

Continued



To learn more, pick up any book by Douglas Tallamy, or Evansville author Sharon Sorenson. Come to the Native Plant sale offered by the Indiana Native Plant Society at the Vanderburgh 4-H fairgrounds on May 23. Or chat with a member of Bethlehem's Green Team. Working together, we can restore a balance of nature for future generations!



After almost 10 years, the Bethlehem website has received a needed refresh. Our site was frequently cited as a useful tool for discovering more about the church and ways to get connected as people joined Bethlehem through the years. The church family's favorites like Sunday's Worship Livestream and Sermon Archive remain on the homepage, along with easy access to the church calendar. User-friendly navigation leads to fresh and updated content. We hope the church family and the community alike find this makeover to be a helpful resource for years to come.



March 31, 2026 Financial Update

Stewardship is about ministry and faith. Every dollar we give supports ministries at Bethlehem. Church Council wanted to provide this first quarter report of our congregation's financial support for our ministries.

As many will recall, in the summer of 2025 Bethlehem was on a giving pace (roughly \$460,000 annually) that was below our 2025 budget (roughly \$532,000).

Bethlehem did a good job of managing expenses, and the congregation responded generously during the last three months of 2025 to finish the year at roughly \$500,000 of annual giving, which meant we ended the year having spent just .4% over what we brought in.

Simply put, Bethlehem did a great job of financially supporting its budgeted ministries in 2025. Bravo and well done!

Bethlehem also responded generously to the Fall Stewardship Campaign in support of our 2026 ministry initiatives.

Through the first three months of 2026, our annual giving is projected to be nearly \$530,000.

Our budgeted annual expenses are similar to 2025 and are again roughly \$532,000. Additionally, we are on a good pace so far managing our expenses.

The Summer season is often "slower" at Bethlehem, and that includes our giving which tends to trail lower until school picks up in the Fall.

We encourage you to be diligent in your financial support of our ministries. Keep up the good work!

Spring Spruce Up





Dear Bethlehem United Church of Christ,

We would like to thank you for your faithful giving. It truly means so much and is making a difference. What a blessing we have been given to share the Gospel with so many children in Evansville. We pray for God to continue to richly bless this ministry and are especially grateful for your support.



Sincerely,

Lesley King
Administrative Assistant
Weekday Christian

On behalf of AARP Tax-Aide Indiana Evansville Team, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to you for extending your hospitality in allowing us to utilize your campus to prepare taxes.



Because of you, we were able to help 184 people file their taxes this year. I know each and every one of these people were very thankful and appreciative as well. We heard many comments of how nice and inviting your campus is.

Please tell your congregation how much we appreciated and enjoyed your hospitality.

Thank you!

Bonnie Reeves
AARP Tax Aide Indiana

Dear Friends at Bethlehem,

Thank you very much for sponsoring the court rental for the recent Pickleball Tournament to benefit United Caring Services. Your continued support of UCS and its mission is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Lee Ann Shafer
UCS Board Member

Thanks for all who contributed to the ETSA UCC's Lenten breakfast offerings. More than \$2,500 was divided and sent to UCS and Tristate Food Bank.



Dear Friends at Bethlehem United Church of Christ,

Thank you so much for supporting our New American community (\$1,377.34) by contributing to the IWRC (Immigrant and Welcome Resource Center)! Whether through one-on-one case management conversations and referrals, summer camps and after school program, legal clinics or the English Conversation Club, we are grateful to partner with you to make a positive difference in our community.

Support from individuals like you helps us carry our mission as a trusted partner and advocates for our immigrant neighbors in increasingly challenging times. We served over 3,000 individuals in our community since launching the Center, through both direct services and advocacy events. From a 100% volunteer-led organization in 2024 to launching our physical office and hiring our first staff member in February of 2025, we are very proud of what's been accomplished so far thanks to you and our community partners.

As we look forward to a new year, we know we will face ongoing and emerging challenges. We look forward to partnering with you to continue making a positive impact in our community for years to come!

With gratitude,

Elisabet (Ely) Sena-Martin, Executive Director
Niti Moore , President, Board of Directors

(continued)

YEAR 1 | IWRC DECEMBER 2025 | IMPACT



Served **2,045 New Americans** from **+22 countries** and engaged **1,502** community members in **learning about & serving** the immigrant community

DIRECT SUPPORT TO NEW AMERICANS



458

Participants in cultural celebrations, town halls, and community events at IWRC



398

Participants in legal clinics, workshops & "Know Your Rights" presentations



140

Participants in New Americans Academy & English Language Development



1035

Residents supported through case management, community baby shower & support groups



238

Participants in immigration study data gathering sessions directly supported by IWRC volunteers



66

students participating in summer camps and afterschool programs

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



1033

Participants in cultural competency presentations & advocacy events on behalf of New Americans



31

Community events serving New Americans where IWRC volunteered



92

IWRC Advisory Board members representing 63 organizations & community partners



277

Volunteers supporting IWRC & partner programs and activities




IMMIGRANT
WELCOME
& RESOURCE
CENTER


📍 500 S. Green River Road, Evansville IN 47715

🌐 evimmigrantwelcomecenter.com

✉ evimmigrantwelcomecenter@gmail.com

☎ 812-545-7734

 EVVImmigrantCenter

 [evimmigrantwelcomecenter](https://www.instagram.com/evimmigrantwelcomecenter)



BETHLEHEM
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
6400 Oak Hill Road
Evansville, IN 47725

Please contact the church office if you are aware of any address changes.

(812) 867-2497 (Office)

email: church@bethlehemucc.org

website: bethlehemucc.org

Follow us on Facebook,
Instagram, and Twitter

Office Hours

Monday 12:00 - 3:00 PM

**Tuesday - Thursday
10:00 AM to 3:00 PM**

OUR VISION STATEMENT:

***Striving to welcome all who seek God; to grow in faith;
and to love neighbor as self through action.***