

FOCUS

January 2026

Daleheightschurch.org



Dale Heights Staff

Pastor:
Pulpit Supply

Treasurer:
Wendy Weber

Music Director:
Dr. Alissa Freeman

Accounts Manager:
Dawn Westhoff

Office Manager:
Deb Hughes

Custodians:
Felipe Ruiz
& Lily Fabella

Grounds Keeper:
Jaime Bucholtz

Session Members

Acting Moderator:
Kristin Frederich

Clerk:
Gale Oakes

Verena Straubhaar (2025)
Gerry Klump (2025)
Edi Chan (2026)
Gale Oakes (2026)
Barb Fleishman (2027)
Wendy Weber (2027)

2026

God of our past, present and future, as the calendar turns and we greet another year, we ask not so much for answers to those questions that perplex us, but for confidence in your never-failing care for us.

As we reflect on the year we leave behind, we begin with gratitude for the moments and the milestones in which we experienced your presence. As we look to the year ahead, we start with hope for a kinder, more just, lavishly loving world. Through all the years, we depend on the abundance of your grace, the generosity of your mercy and the unwavering promise of your compassion.

Aid us, Almighty God, when we fail to be the people you create and call us to be. Comfort us, Abba, when we face times of sadness, loss and grief. Admonish us, LORD of all, when we neglect the teachings of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Guide us, Triune God, all the days of this new year, and indeed, every day of our lives until that time when we see you face to face. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. Jill Duffield, former editor of *Presbyterian Outlook*.

***“Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed”
(Proverbs 16:3).***

JANUARY

Breakfast

The Dale Heights monthly breakfast will be held on:

Saturday
January 10, 2026.

Serving will begin at 8:30 am.
The suggested donation is \$5.
RSVP to Roy if you have not already done so.



The annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, *January 18, 2026*, following worship.

Church Office Hours:

9:30-1:30

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday

A graphic with a blue background and white snowflakes. The word 'January' is written in a large, cursive font. Below it, the word 'Birthdays' is underlined. A list of birthdays follows: 05 Vicki Klump, 11 Jim Lundgren, 12 Keith Chan, 27 Theo Engebregtsen, and Deb Hughes. Below that, 'Anniversaries' is underlined, followed by a list: 01 Bill & Lenore Mercer, and 17 Edi & Keith Chan.

January

Birthdays

05 Vicki Klump
11 Jim Lundgren
12 Keith Chan
27 Theo Engebregtsen
Deb Hughes

Anniversaries

01 Bill & Lenore Mercer
17 Edi & Keith Chan

This
2026

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him."

Romans 15:13

The deadline for article submissions for the February issue of the FOCUS is January 27, 2026.



January 2026 Outreach News

Well, it was a busy year all around at Dale Heights and the Outreach Committee. Take a look at the Annual Report and you will see that we indeed had our hands in different baskets!

Holiday Baking Baskets

First of all, there were 5 Holiday Baking Baskets assembled and given to WayForward for some of their clients. Thank you Deb, our office manager, for your amazing generosity and work! Thanks to Deb's grandkids for their involvement as well! This year the leadership at WayForward decided to ask for food donations and Holiday Baking Baskets in light of the staggering numbers coming to them for assistance.

Blue Christmas Gathering

Our First Blue Christmas Gathering was very meaningful and it is a service and gathering we look forward to offering again. Deb can give a testimony from a phone call to the church:

A lady called the church to say that she saw the Blue Christmas event advertised in the paper. She said it was very uplifting to see this was being planned and, while she could not attend, she said it was very heartwarming that people still care enough to do that. She said just seeing it gave her a boost that she was really needing right then and she expressed her appreciation for the organizers.

We were small in number yet mighty in intent! The day was very cold, which kept people away, but after the service those of us who attended pulled up chairs and enjoyed not just the fellowship, but lots of delicious holiday treats and beverages! Despite what we may be going through that's especially difficult in the Season of Joy, God is with us – Emanuel!

Join us next year and bring a friend!

Christmas Joy

Well, it was an unusual year for the Christmas Joy Special Offering! We only had one!!! Minute for Mission from the pulpit due to cancelled church, another very cold Sunday morning and another week the pastor preaching skipped right over it in the bulletin!

Thank you for your giving to fellow people loved by God who were in need of assistance! You were and are blessings! Please know all of you are loved by God regardless if you gave a gift.

Outreach is always looking for ideas for projects and potluck speakers, so please share them with us! Thank you for the ways you support and help us!

Submitted by the Outreach Committee:

Edi Chan, Jamie Engebretsen, Barb Fleishman, Gale Oakes, Wendy Weber and WayForward Committee Members Gerry Klump and Roy Lembcke

Riding the Roller Coaster of 2025 to Create Stability

An End-of-Year Message from Executive Director Ellen Carlson

I love roller coasters, even at my age! I love the anticipation of the climb, the rush of the drop, the way your stomach flips on a sharp turn. But I'm able to enjoy them because I know the engineers have designed every heart-racing twist for maximum safety. 2025 felt like being strapped into a roller coaster ride that we didn't choose to get on, nor that felt safe. Federal policy and funding changes sent us climbing, dropping, and whipping around corners we couldn't have imagined. We had to lean into every turn and figure out in real-time how to keep everyone as safe as possible—and remain seated in the cart.

What made it possible to stay on the track through all the twists and turns? We held on to each other. Our community strapped in alongside us on the bumpy ride—ascending to maximum highs by partnering to create stability in our community. Throughout the ups and downs and uncertainty, WayForward Resources has stayed grounded in our mission and values, while being nimble and responsive to what was happening around us. **And together we made a difference.**

One of the most significant challenges of the year occurred a couple of months ago, when SNAP benefits lapsed due to the federal government shutdown. Visits to our food pantry increased rapidly during that time as thousands of local SNAP recipients, who depend on those benefits to buy groceries at the store, worried about how they would feed themselves and their families. I was overwhelmed with sadness by what was happening to people in our community—and at the same time, I was also overwhelmed with gratitude and joy by how **the community responded immediately**—mobilizing and jumping in with increased food and financial donations. Working late, I would see cars drive in to drop off boxes and bags and carfuls of food without pause. By comparison, we had nearly **three times as much food donated** during the six weeks after our information went out as we did last year during this same time period. People experiencing this scare had access to ample food because you donated your resources of food, money, and time. We came together in this critical moment because we all envision a community where no one has to worry about if they will go hungry.

And while SNAP benefits have since been restored, **much uncertainty and concern remains**. Expected federal cuts to SNAP in 2026 will put 90,000 Wisconsinites at risk of losing their benefits. This will increase the number of people relying on food pantries. WayForward's food pantry and the pantry system in our community are already stretched trying to keep pace with the record-level demand.

Continued

Thankfully, to date, we have not had to turn anyone away from the food pantry, but it remains challenging to keep our shelves stocked with food.

In the year ahead, we will be working even more closely with five other large food pantries in Dane County to explore new ways to order food together in bulk and pool our resources to bring in more food. And we will be relying even more on community food donations and food drives to ensure we can continue to feed our neighbors.

Our housing programs are also experiencing record demand. This past October, we received **the most emergency fund requests we have ever had** in a single month. One factor is that housing prices in Dane County are climbing much faster than wages. While new housing is continuously being built, it has proved challenging to keep up with Dane County's growing population of all incomes. (Did you know that some projections have the Dane County area population at more than 1 million people by 2050?) Solving our housing problems truly requires a community-wide effort. This year, we hosted a number of informative presentations in order to share what we are seeing in our programs and hearing from the people we serve with decision-makers and community members. We hope this increased knowledge and understanding will lead to new approaches and effective solutions.

The roller coaster of federal policy changes impacted our housing programs as well. We were awarded a significant federal grant in 2024 to support our Connections program, which helps families in doubled-up situations (living with others because they don't have anywhere else to stay) move into stable housing. While we had expected the funding to arrive over the summer to pick up where previous funding was sunsetting, it has still not arrived. There continues to be complications and confusion with much of the federal funding for community housing programs. This has caused disruption not only to our program, but to housing programs throughout the community. While we are still hoping for our grant to arrive, we are also exploring alternative ways to support families in this program in 2026.

When people ask me, "How are things?," it can be difficult to answer! **It's hard right now for so many people in our community.** We talk with people every day who are facing huge barriers and who are feeling scared as

they have seen a wide range of stability-supporting community resources disrupted. But also, **we have been inspired and energized by the strength of our community's support** that has helped us navigate these bumps and curves so that we can continue to provide food and housing resources for our neighbors.

We are still strapped into this bumpy ride. But we're keeping our eyes wide open, preparing for the year ahead that we anticipate will be full of more unexpected twists and curves.

We ask for your continued partnership in our work together to ensure everyone in our community has the nutritious food and stable housing needed to thrive. There are a number of ways you can still join us in making a difference this year. [Make a tax-deductible financial donation online](#), by check, from your IRA, appreciated stock, or donor-advised fund. Donations of your time through [volunteering](#) or donations of food also make an immediate, impactful difference. You can purchase items directly from our [online wish list](#) for delivery, or use our [top 10 list](#) to buy items locally to drop off.

Thank you for choosing to create stability in our community—here, now, and for the future.

Sincerely,



Ellen Carlson, Executive Director



The next SUITE OF SEASONS performance will feature
the **Avanti Piano Trio:**

Dr. Alissa Freeman, Piano – Hillary Hempel, Violin – Hannah Wolkstein, Cello

Saturday - January 10, 12:00 noon
Studio 4 @ 5003 West University Ave
(NOTE this is close to the church!)

This is an RSVP, ticketed event: \$20 adults.
For each adult reservation, receive one free youth ticket - please
specify this in your reservation email.

Please email Shad to RSVP: **thestudio615@gmail.com**



**Indigenous wisdom challenges & inspires us in the
"Sacred Wisdom, Sacred Earth" film
at 7:30 pm, Saturday, January 10, 2026**

[Faiths Connect for Climate Action](#), [Faith In Place](#), and [First Unitarian Society of Madison](#) invite you to join us in person for one of the earliest screenings of "[Sacred Wisdom, Sacred Earth](#)" at 7:30pm on Sat. January 10, 2026 at First Unitarian Society in Madison (900 University Bay Dr.).

This [Loka-Initiative](#) produced 60-minute film unveils the deep connection of the Native tribes of Wisconsin to the land and waters of the Great Lakes and how that seeds their efforts to restore spiritual, cultural, and environmental resilience. Esteemed culture keepers of Native tribes of Wisconsin share stories and speak to what must be remembered and passed on during this time of ecological, climatological, and spiritual crisis.

After the film there will be light refreshments and discussion.

Please register for the film showing at:

<https://bit.ly/jan10-madison-film>

We hope you can join us! Family and friends are welcome.

For further information about Faiths Connect for Climate Action (FCCA) upcoming events, please see our webpage: [FCCA](#)

Life in the Winter Garden

Native landscaping in winter embraces dormant stems, seed heads, and evergreens for structure, food for wildlife (berries, seeds), and habitat, and provides texture, color, and pollinator support. Plants with winter interest like winterberry and red twig dogwood provide crucial year-round ecosystem services and look great. A "dead"-looking native garden provides vital resources, is an essential part of a natural cycle – and, with a simple mindset shift, dormancy is as beautiful as any season. Winter is also the perfect time to grab a mug of tea or cocoa while you plan, observe natural cycles, and prepare for next year.



Canada Goldenrod © Jenny Pilling

Native Plants in Winter - Benefits

- *Food & Shelter:* Seed heads feed birds; berries sustain wildlife; hollow stems house insects; and fallen leaves provide critical habitat to beneficial insects such as native bees, butterflies, moths, firefly larvae, beetles, and predatory insects and wasps.
- *Structure & Beauty:* Dormant [native ornamental grasses](#), dogwood twigs, and evergreen ferns, such as [Christmas Fern](#) – a native, woodland fern with dark green, leathery fronds – provide color, texture, and groundcover when most other plants are dormant.
- *Ecosystem Support:* Adapted to local winters, native forbs, grasses, shrubs and trees support biodiversity even when seemingly "dead".

Winter Interest Plants

- *Berries:* [Winterberry Holly](#) is a good choice for wet/damp, acidic soils, possibly a rain garden. With sufficient space, Nannyberry is a native power player, with fall berries that often linger to winter.
- *Color/Texture:* Red twig (AKA red osier) dogwood has bright red stems, [native grasses and sedges](#) look wonderful in snow, and goldenrod provide beautiful seed heads.
- *More Information:* [Wild Ones](#), the [UW Arboretum](#) and [Johnson's Nursery](#) all have information and resources on Wisconsin/Dane County native plants and shrubs.

DALE HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

5501 University Ave.

Madison, Wisconsin 53705



JANUARY CALENDAR

- 4 Worship – Brenda Moten
- 10 Church breakfast
- 11 Worship – Kathleen Owens
 Communion & Session
- 13 Property & Finance
- 18 Worship – Kathleen Owens
 Annual Congregational Meeting
- 22 Choir practice at 12:30pm
- 25 Worship – Melissa Schmidtg
- 29 Choir practice at 12:30pm



Liturgists

- January 4: Melanie Klump
- January 11: Edi Chan
- January 18: Wendy Weber
- January 25: Jim Fleischmann