



Cordata Beacon

A Publication of **Cordata** Presbyterian Church

January, 2026



A Message from Pastor Greg: *Limits*

Inspired by (and generously borrowing from the thoughts of) my friend, the Rev. Lauren Hunter (the Whitworth University Office of Church Engagement's project administrator for our Resilient Church Initiative), here's a New Year's reflection on the gift of "limits."

Are you, like me, very aware lately of your own limits--limits on my time, limits on my energy, limits on my patience, limits on my creativity, limits on my ability to be more than one place at a time? I'm sure each of us is painfully aware of our limits, especially during the busy season that comes with the ending of one year and start of another. And I'll bet that none of us really like the limitations we discover in ourselves. We prefer to be everywhere, do everything, and do right by our family, friends, neighbors, church and loved ones in our little corner of the world. But we just can't do it all, can we?

So, how astounding to discover that God willingly took on limits. The Creator of all things *took on flesh and moved into the neighborhood*, as we've just been freshly reminded this Christmas season. The entire fullness of the limitless God, who could and did breathe the world into being came to dwell in a newborn child. This little baby took on a new set of limits – depending upon his parents even to keep him alive – and because of these limits we also have become children of God.

I wonder how God is showing up in the face of our "limits." Has God been meeting you in your limits? How so? CPC is an active congregation...active in ministry, active in relationships, active in commitment to the Lord and one another...and sometimes that brings frustration and fatigue. But maybe as we reflect on our limits, we will discover that the Lord shows up and dwells within them.

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. [2 Cor. 12:9 (NIV)]

With you in Christ,
Greg Ellis, Pastor

Seen/Unseen

By Carol Lawrence

*For the things which are seen are temporary,
but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)*

Once again, I'm showing you a photo that violates a fundamental principle of good photography. Instructors admonish photography students: Don't lead the viewer's eyes to something they cannot see. These young boys are clearly entranced by something, but we can't see what. The one on the left, particularly, shows some consternation. The other boy seems a bit puzzled. The boys were watching gauchos practice for a horse race in Argentina. This specific race is a short sprint. The riders stand up in the saddle, racing full speed, and try to catch a small brass ring hanging above the track. Knowing this context, we can imagine the boy on the left thinking, *How do they do that?* The other simply seems awestruck. We cannot see what they are looking at, but we can see what's important about the boys—their fascination, inspiration, admiration of the gauchos' skill.

As we approach the start of a new year, it's natural to spend some time in reflection, looking back over the past year's events, pondering what the new year may hold—activities, challenges, fears, hopes. We have seen the events of 2025—our efforts, challenges, successes. As we begin 2026, we form expectations, we have hopes, we make plans, but outcomes are all unseen, to us. How fortunate that our God watches over the long sweep of time—the past we have seen, the present we live in, and the future, unseeable to us, but fully foreseen to Him, as part of His plan. Scripture tells us, *We walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)* True, we cannot see all we would like to see for the coming year, but as Scripture reminds us, *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)*



A Note of Thanks from the Miracle Food Network

Traditionally CPC has used its Christmas Eve offering to assist an organization that is helping our community. CPC's Session has chosen to send this year's offering (which was \$1,230) to the Miracle Food Network (MFN), the source of food for our weekly Cordata Food Pantry. Here is the response from Doug Robertson, President of MFN, that was received before Christmas Eve.

Thank you so much for this wonderful note—and please extend my sincere gratitude to the entire Cordata Presbyterian Church community.

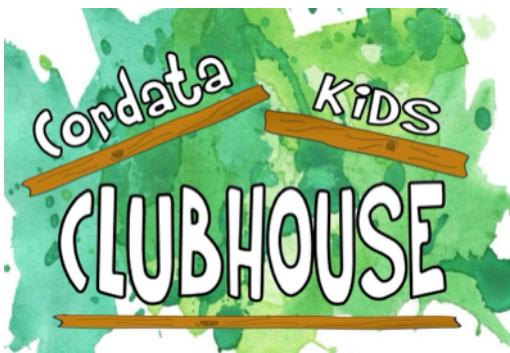
We are deeply honored that MFN has been selected again as the recipient of your Christmas Eve service offering. Your continued trust and generosity mean a great deal to us. This support directly helps us meet very real food needs here in our community, and just as importantly, it reminds our volunteers and staff that this work is rooted in compassion, dignity, and love for our neighbors.

Christmas is a season that calls us to look outward, and Cordata's commitment to sharing the love of Christ in such tangible ways is truly inspiring. We are grateful to walk alongside you in this shared purpose.

Wishing you and the Cordata congregation a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year.

With heartfelt thanks,

Doug Robertson
President
Miracle Food Network



CPC Kids Clubhouse Catch Up

CPC Kids Clubhouse - Before the Advent season we had been learning about King Saul. Because he didn't obey God, his reign would soon be over. Our pause in the curriculum allowed us to learn about the one true and perfect king - KING JESUS!

All of December, our weekly Christmas story lessons included making tree ornaments that represent each part of the story

as well as an in-depth devotional time around Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love with lighting advent (battery/flameless) candles.

We begin the New Year by resuming our study plan learning about King David in 1st and 2nd Samuel.

Key Passage: Jeremiah 10:6-7a

Big Picture Question: Is anything or anyone greater than God?

Answer: No, God is greater than everything and everyone.

January Lessons: David Defeated Goliath (1 Samuel 17), David Showed Mercy (1 Samuel 24), David Became King (2 Samuel 5; 7), David Sinned and Was Restored



Clubs 4 Kids (C4K) - C4K resumes Tuesday, January 6th, with winter-themed crafts, snacks, and games. We've been getting a large group of kids coming regularly and realize we really could use more leaders to help with passing out snacks and other supportive tasks. Club meets for one hour every Tuesday and Thursday from 4:30-5:30p. If you are looking for a way to make a difference in the lives of children and youth, please consider joining the C4K fun. Contact Bonnie Hollingsworth (BonnieH@cordatachurch.org) for more information.

Speaking of needing extra help, the end of December had us running on a "skeleton crew" which meant we couldn't break into small groups to have our usual "roses & thorns" time - sharing the best/worst part of our day/week time. We thought the kids would appreciate the break since they sometimes act like they don't want to participate. However, to our surprise, many of the kids expressed disappointment in not having the sharing time. It appears they appreciate the opportunity to be heard and the care we provide.

"Thank You" Barb Mills DeSpain and Melissa Huang for helping at Club when Bonnie Hollingsworth was out due to hip surgery and while Ministry Assistant Evangeline Bentley was gone for Christmas break. We could not have done it without you!

Christmas Eve Service Recap - Huge "Thank You" goes to Elyon Ballis, Emery Snyder, and Gemma and Sandra Gonzales (and their families) for their reading of the Christmas Story in our annual One Small Child presentation on Christmas Eve. There is a lot of pressure when reading in front of a large crowd, let alone the fact that they were telling the most important story ever.



These kids did a wonderful job!

We were blessed by the enthusiastic participation in the tree decorating segment of the service. We prepared an additional 21 ornament packets (126 ornaments) in preparation for the service, and it's a good thing we did. All but one of the total 42 packets (252 total ornaments) were used to decorate the large tree on stage! So much meaningful fun was had by church members and visitors alike. For more photos, see pages 9 and 10.

Youth Group Meals

Isn't it wonderful that more than twenty middle-school youth are gathering at our church each week to share in fun, fellowship, and a sense of belonging? We are truly living into our mission to serve our community—opening our building, sharing our faith, and offering a safe, nurturing space for these 5th–9th graders to grow.

One of the things they enjoy most is the meal we provide each week. In fact, they consistently rank the food as their favorite part of Youth Group. Preparing a weekly meal is a significant commitment, but as the saying goes, many hands make light work. We currently have five volunteers signed up, which is wonderful, but we still need a few more helping hands to sustain this ministry.

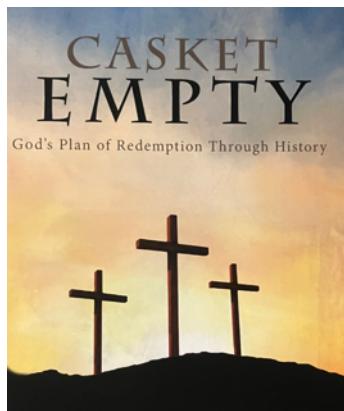
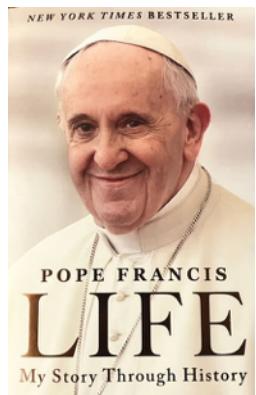
Would you consider providing a meal? The youth enjoy simple, familiar foods—nothing fancy required. Dishes like mac & cheese or sloppy joes are always a hit. If you're able to help, please contact Julie Farrow at jmfsucceed@gmail.com. Your participation will be a blessing to the youth, and I'm confident you'll find joy and fulfillment in serving them as well.

Booklovers to Meet Friday, January 23rd

Booklovers will meet at Carol Lawrence's house at 1p on Friday, January 23rd, for a conversation about the book *Life: My Story Through History*, by Pope Francis with Fabio Marchese Ragona. Born in Argentina in 1936 of Italian immigrant parents, Francis reflects on the Holocaust, the Cold War, moon landing, Argentina's 1976 coup, the fall of the Berlin Wall, September 11th, the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, and his own time as Pope.

If you'd like to get an early start on the book for February, it will be *Finding Hagar* by CPC's own Mike Kuhn. It is available at the library.

For more information, contact Carol Lawrence by email at cmlawren@gmail.com



Adult Education Class for 2026 Begins January 11th

As we begin the new year, many of us will be making resolutions. Why not resolve that 2026 will be the year you finally dig into the Old Testament? Beginning on January 11th, a new Adult Education class will break down the Old Testament into six sections dealing with Creation, Abraham, Sinai, Kings, Exile, and Temple. Each class session will open with a brief video and then focus on discussion of Scriptures that link the Old and New Testaments, led by Gordon Terpstra and Carol Lawrence. Books for the class, and a signup sheet can be found on the information table in the church foyer. Join us at 9a in the Chapel!

Join the Fellowship Team - You'll Be Glad You Did!

I hope that in your New Year's Resolution list there is a commitment to joining one of the teams at CPC to help us be all that God wants us to be. And I have a good idea for you. How about signing up to serve coffee and cookies for one of the months ahead? Carol Anderson will show you how it's done. Or join the Fellowship Team and get to rub elbows with the people who share their love of God with everybody in CPC and our guests. You'll have fun and be happy; I guarantee it.

Love and Joy to you in 2026!

Carol Anderson, Elder for Fellowship

Resilient Church Initiative

The Resilient Church Initiative leadership team continues to meet and refine recommendations to **strengthen CPC for future generations**. We're currently working on two broad areas.

- **Pathway for Discipleship.** Providing a more structured and easily understandable “roadmap” for people to learn about CPC, grow in their faith, and use their spiritual gifts to build up the church. We’re considering organizing this pathway around a framework of the “4 E’s.” There will be more specifics coming, but here’s a general overview:
 - **Explore** – learning about Cordata, our beliefs and our ministries; next steps for newcomers.
 - **Equip** – discovering your spiritual gifts; helping find your place in our ministries; further developing your knowledge and skills for service.
 - **Engage** – participating in at least one church ministry; being part of a small group; outreach and service to our neighborhood.
 - **Enrich** – continuing Bible study, more in-depth studies, participating in spiritual disciplines such as praying, fasting, tithing.
- **Communications for the Next Generation.** Developing and maintaining effective outreach communications especially to reach younger families and singles, many who may not have a church background. We recognize that many people’s first contact with a church is through its website. This initiative would include:
 - Engaging a communications consultant and web designer (using grant funds).
 - Updating our website and keeping it current.
 - Expanding our social media presence.
 - Establishing a communications committee and developing a communications plan to put the needed focus on both internal and external communications.

We'll evaluate the feasibility of these initiatives using **three “screening questions”**:

1. How are the congregation, leadership, and staff responding to this idea?
2. What current obligations does our church have that will impact the implementation of this idea?
3. What is the talent level and passion for this idea?

Given these questions, we invite—and welcome—thoughts and recommendations from the entire congregation as we continue developing our plans.

Please contact any of the leadership team: Dan Sanford, Sue Wright, Rich Emerson, Stephanie Kuhn, Barbara Sanford, Mike Langey, and Pastor Greg Ellis.

2026 English as a Second Language Classes to Start January 13th

CPC will offer a winter session of English as a Second Language (ESL) on Tuesdays at 5p in the Cedar Room from January 13th to March 3rd. Since our previous teacher, Sharon Chang, is taking continuing education classes and is not available, we've asked our new teacher, Leslie Drury, to introduce herself to you.



“My name is Leslie Drury. My husband Charlie and I live in Lynden, WA. I retired from the Blaine School District in 2022 after a 40-year teaching career, working in both an elementary school and a parent partnership program with students K - high school. Currently I offer language arts workshops to homeschooled students.

My ESL journey began years ago when I took classes to learn Spanish. I recognized how important it is to learn to communicate in another language, but also it is quite challenging. After retiring, I felt God calling me to work with the local immigrant population, and learning to communicate in English is key to many opportunities. In my search for an ESL Course to add to my credentials, I discovered that the Lynden YWAM base offered a TESOL certification course. I enrolled in the fall of 2024 and completed my certification, and then volunteered weekly with a group of English language learners. My desire is to meet students at their individual levels and to help them to feel comfortable in learning...no pressure! I love finding out about their personal journeys and interests, and laughing together in a safe and welcoming setting.”

Welcome, Leslie!

2025 - A Big Year for Missions & Outreach

by Dan Sanford, Elder for Missions & Outreach

2025 was remarkable for all of the ways God encouraged CPCers to extend our arms to neighbors and to continue prayer and financial support (utilizing 10% of our regular offering income) for our numerous partner ministries. As we sought to live Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves, our endeavors were surely plentiful.

On behalf of our Missions & Outreach team, I thought you might like to see the highlights of this past 12 months. Keep in mind these events are all in addition to many outreach events spearheaded by our wonderful staff leaders such as the Egg Hunt at Easter, CPC's booth at the Cordata Neighborhood Ice Cream Social in the Park, Fun in the Sun (with Child Evangelism Fellowship joining at times), Clubs 4 Kids, Youth Group, Fall Festival, Thanksgiving dinner boxes to 10 families, and the Christmas carol singing and tree lighting. Here are some highlights:

Launched Last year:

- Sharing Cart managed by Janet Moritz for our members to share food items (mostly) with one another.
- English as a Second Language classes re-launched in coordination with Meridian Schools by our members, Jackie Scoonover and Sharon Chang.
- Monthly Ministry Partner Prayer Focus shown overhead before worship and in Sunday bulletin (thanks Gregg Block and Brian MacKay).
- Team organized by Rich Emerson prepared meals at the Interfaith Coalition Community Meal (mostly for the homeless) at Thanksgiving time.
- Apparel sale to identify us as Cordata Church also arranged by Rich. Nearly 50 items distributed!
- Introduced the mobile book sharing cart for children and youth attending our after school programs (thanks Sandy Hiorns).
- Second offering of Financial Peace University coaching by leader Gregg Block.
- A total of 14 people committed to Guatemala mission trip in March of 2026.

Regular Annual Drives:

- Dozen's of Christmas Shoeboxes packed and sent off globally as gifts to poor children through Samaritan's Purse.
- Coat drive for distribution by Interfaith Coalition.

Financial support: In addition to 14 partner ministries we give to monthly, we were able to make special gifts to others, including:

- Missionaries to north Africa, Jessica and Zac Gosda.
- Our Children's Ministry Assistant Evangeline Bentley for summer mission in Alaska.
- Support for high schooler Felix Kasozi through Lynden-based Childcare Worldwide.

Visits by Mission Partners: Coming to see us:

Together Tuesday - Don Shire, whose organization helps orphanages in crisis areas and conducts evangelism with musical programs

Chapel Visits:

- Guatemalan Hope of the Pokomchi leaders
- Karen Erickson, educator returning from Jordan
- Bryan and Thandi Whitlock, WYAM based in South Africa

Regular member in Early Birds--Melodie Richards in Morocco

Speakers at Men's Breakfast:

- Geoff Mumley and Jeff Jenkins, Campus Christian Fellowship (CCF)
- Doug Robertson, Miracle Food Network
- Eric Young, Childcare Worldwide
- Robbie Watson, World Relief in Whatcom County

WOW! What a year of travel following Jesus in his mission!

2026 Finance Ideas by Gregg Block

The new year is upon us. Many take the time to reflect on the past year and what the new year will bring. Here's some ideas around finances for 2026 drawn from Ramsey Solutions material and my financial coaching experiences. I will look to expand on each idea in future Beacon articles. CPC has some reduced-price subscriptions to Ramsey Solution studies and apps. Reach out to me if you can use one.

1. **Budgeting** – Do you budget? “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time” – quote from Zig Ziglar, author and motivational speaker. Give budgeting a try. It will improve your aim. Even if you choose not to budget, get a software app to link your bank accounts and track your spending. You will be amazed on how fast many of our “little” expenditures add up. There are many great tools out there. One of them is Ramsey Solution’s EveryDollar app.
2. **Debt** – Are you carrying credit card balances and paying high interest rates? Make 2026 the year to get out of debt. The *Bible* teaches **Avoid Debt**: Debt is seen as a form of slavery to the lender. **Proverbs 22:7**: *The borrower is slave to the lender.* Use the **debt snowball method** to pay off debt. Debt Snowball is a debt repayment strategy where you pay off your debts in order from the smallest balance to the largest, regardless of their interest rates. Pay minimums on all but the smallest debt, and pay as much as you can on the smallest debt. Once one debt is paid you “snowball” that payment onto the next debt. The core idea is to build **motivation** and **momentum** through quick wins (paying off small debts fast), which helps you stick with the plan until all debts are cleared.
3. **Do you get stressed by unexpected bills?** Life happens. **Paraphrasing Proverbs 21:20** tells us - The wise store up resources; fools spend everything. We all should have a rainy day or emergency fund of 3 to 6 months of living expenses. It is important to live within our means and to set aside a portion of our income or resources for future use, creating a buffer against unforeseen events. Put that money in a separate account.
4. **Credit Card, Debit Card, or Cash.** Dave Ramsey likes to say that winning with money is 80% behavior and 20% head knowledge. Behavior beats math: Studies show people spend 12–18% more when using credit cards versus cash. If you want to limit your impulse purchases, try using cash and an old-fashioned envelope system.
5. **You may have heard “Money is the root of all evil”**. Well, per the *Bible*, that's not correct.¹ **TIMOTHY 6:10** (NIV) says, *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.* Money is an inanimate object. It's like a brick that can be used to build a building or thrown at a window to destroy it. It's how we use it. God calls us to be stewards. Take some time to think about how can we be the stewards God call us to be.
6. **Do you have a will?** Most do not. When you die without a will, state law, rather than your personal wishes, dictates how your assets are distributed and the care of any minor children. This can result in many unintended consequences. Many folks could create their will with an online service. Ramsey Solutions has a tool that helps you decide if an online will could work for you. Everyone 18 and over should have a will.
7. **Do you have an IRA?** If you are at least 70½ years old and have a qualified retirement plan like a traditional IRA, you can give money tax free directly to a qualified charity. This can be done even if you are not required to take minimum distributions (RMD). There are specific rules like the funds must be sent directly to the qualified charity, and there is an annual limit. If you need to take a RMD, a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) can be part or all of that amount.
8. **Be Generous.** The act of generosity brings a greater sense of happiness and fulfillment than the act of receiving. God wants us to give freely and happily, not under pressure. That's because giving is more about the condition of our heart than the amount we give. We should want to give to show our love not only for our fellow humans and our church family but also for God and the generosity He has shown us. Giving is part of God's character. The God of the *Bible* is a generous God. He loves us with a love we can't even fathom. Our generosity is a reflection of God's generosity. And He set the example by being generous to us first.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV).

The above material is general in nature. Please contact a tax or financial advisor for personalized financial information.

2025 End of Year Report for The Little Library

By Sandy Hiorns

The Little Library was built and installed by Bob Hiorns in 2022, and I began monitoring the number of books given away beginning on March 30, 2022. In 2022 with only 9 months to account for, we gave away 409 children's books and 152 adult books.

Here are the totals for other years:

2023	we gave away 760 children's books and 266 adult books
2024	we gave away 871 children's books and 264 adult books
2025	we gave away 567 children's books and 176 adult books

Totals March 2022 through 2025 = 2607 children's books and 858 adult books



This year (2025) was the first year with major vandalism. After 3 incidents in less than a week at the beginning of August, I emptied the Little Library to let things settle down. The good news is that by the time of our Block Party on 9/7/25, I stocked it once again with no more incidents for the rest of 2025. We have had many positive conversations with neighbors about how they appreciate our Little Library and are glad we are able to continue to keep it running.

We accept donations of books from our congregation as well as from the community. I also go 3 times a year to the Friends of the Bellingham Public Library sale. Sometimes we even win books from *Good Morning America* and/or publishers. If you have books to donate, please put them in the box under the sign-up table near the coat rack. We accept both adult and children's books with the children's books being most needed. New or gently used books are greatly appreciated.

We have been "blessed to be a blessing"!

Guatemala Mission Trip One Step Closer

Thanks to all of you for your support of our wreath fundraiser! The team went out to sell to their neighbors and friends as well as selling at church. We were able to make a profit of \$3100 which is amazing! We couldn't have done it without those of you who trimmed your bushes in the downpouring rain to provide us the greenery, people who tied bows and donated ribbon, and those who came to help us make 80 wreaths, 38 swags, and 13 centerpieces—assembling them all in one (very long) day!

We appreciate all you've done to help us get one step closer to going to Guatemala in March for the Hope of the Pokomchi! Thanks so much!

Cordata Scene

Hope of the Pokomchi Visitors



Rebekah Welsh, Glenda Mo Coy, Sebastian Suram Cal and his daughter Juanita



Family Friendly Matinee - The Best Christmas Pageant Ever



Special Music for Advent



Christmas at CPC



Save the Date

Sunday, January 11th, After Worship, Table Game Day, Foyer

Saturday, January 17th, 8a, Men's Breakfast, Palm Room

Monday, January 19th, Office is Closed, MLK Jr. Holiday

Friday, January 23rd, 1p, Book Lovers, Carol Lawrence's Home - See page 4.

Sunday, January 25th, After Worship, Annual Congregational Meeting & Lunch, Foyer

Regularly Occurring Events

Sundays - 9a, Adult Education Class, Chapel
 10:30a, Worship, Worship Center
 10:45a, CPC Kids Clubhouse/Sunday School - See page 3.
 After Worship, Coffee Fellowship, Foyer

Mondays - 2p, Tai Chi Exercise Class, Chapel

Tuesdays - 4:30p, Clubs 4 Kids, Church Foyer - See page 3.
 5p, English as a Second Language - Starts weekly January 13th; see page 5.
 7p, The Chosen Series, Chapel

Wednesdays - 9a, Weekly Prayer Group, Zoom -
 Contact Admin@cordatachurch.org for link.
 2p, Tai Chi Exercise Class, Chapel
 5:30p, Youth Group (5th to 8th Grade) - Starts weekly January 14th.
 7p, Choir Rehearsal, Chapel

Thursdays - 4:30p, Clubs 4 Kids, Church Foyer - See page 3.

Fridays - 2:30p, Free Groceries - Miracle Food Network, Foyer
 5p, CCF Talk Time, Family Life Center - January 9th and 23rd.

Cordata Beacon - a publication of:
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