CHURCH of the BELLS
IMMANUEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Immanuel Family News

July/August 2026

PASTOR'S PONDERINGS

Dear Beloved family of Immanuel UMC,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is with great joy and humility that I write to you for the first time as your pastor. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to begin this new journey of faith alongside you. While there is excitement in meeting one another and discovering what God has in store for us I also recognize that every church has a story a history of faithful people, meaningful traditions, and countless moments where God's love has been shared.

Throughout my life, I have loved hearing and telling stories. One of my cherished formative memories is sitting and listening to my mother dramatically read J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" to me. I have always been drawn to the way great stories reveal courage, hope, sacrifice, and the unexpected ways that ordinary people can become part of something much larger than themselves.

That is why I hold tightly to the beautiful truth that our living God has been weaving an incredible story in the life of Immanuel UMC and in each of you. I look forward to hearing the chapters that have already been written and, by God's grace, becoming part of the chapters yet to come. As our time together begins, I find myself returning to one of my favorite passages of Scripture, John 13:34–35. In this Gospel text Jesus having just demonstrated servant-hearted love by washing the disciples' feet, a task typically reserved for the lowest servant, teaches them that this is how the world will recognize His followers. The defining mark of a disciple is the love of Christ reflected in the way we love one another. As Jesus prepares for the ultimate expression of that love on the cross, He calls us to live in that same self-giving love toward the world around us.

My prayer is that we will continue to be a people who trust in the God who gives life, who tells a story of redemption and renewal, and who calls us to love God, love one another, and love our neighbors. There will be much for us to celebrate, much for us to learn, and perhaps even challenges that will help us grow stronger in faith. Through it all, I pray we will continually seek Christ's guidance and trust where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

My wife Alyssa, our five fur babies, and I are excited to become part of this beloved community. We look forward to worshiping with you, serving alongside you, sharing meals and conversations, and building relationships that reflect the grace and joy of Christ.

Please know that my door and my heart are open. I would love to hear your stories, learn what you cherish about this church, and dream with you about the future God is preparing for us. Thank you for welcoming us into your church family. I am eager to see what God will do through us together.

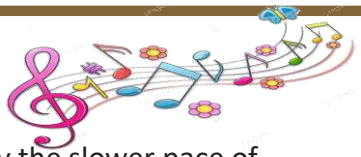
Blessings and peace, *Pastor Benjamin Lalka*

INSIDE…

Youth/ Family News
Ministries News

Welcome Pastor Ben and Alyssa!

Youth/Family



Music News: As we enjoy the slower pace of summer and look ahead to the fall, Immanuel stands at the beginning of an exciting new chapter. We eagerly welcome Pastor Ben to our church family and look forward to the energy, ideas, and spiritual leadership he will bring to our congregation. New seasons often invite us to reflect on where we've been and consider how God may be calling us forward together.

As I think about the future of music ministry at Immanuel, my first thought is one of gratitude. I am continually thankful for the dedicated members of our choir and music ministry who faithfully share their gifts throughout the year. Their commitment, enthusiasm, and willingness to serve help create meaningful worship experiences that inspire our congregation and glorify God. Their ministry is truly a blessing to our church.

At the same time, new beginnings offer opportunities for growth. As we prepare for the fall season and welcome Pastor Ben, I would love to see our music ministry grow alongside the rest of our congregation. Like many church choirs, we are in need of additional voices to help ensure the continued strength and vitality of this important ministry.

If you have ever thought about singing in the choir, this could be the perfect time to join us. No previous experience is required. You do not need to read music, and you do not need to have sung in a choir before. All that is needed is a willingness to learn, participate, and share your voice in worship.

The commitment is often less demanding than people imagine. The choir rehearses for just 45 minutes to one hour each Thursday evening, and we sing at the 10:00 a.m. worship service only twice each month. On the weeks we are not singing, choir members can worship alongside their families in the sanctuary or attend the 8:30 a.m. service.

If you have any interest in learning more, please speak with me or any member of the choir as soon as possible. I would be happy to answer questions, discuss the commitment, and help you determine whether choir might be a good fit for you.

Music News con't.

Whether you are a lifelong singer or someone who simply enjoys music, there is a place for you in this ministry.

As we begin this new season together, I am grateful for those who have faithfully carried our music ministry forward and hopeful for those who may feel called to join us. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for Immanuel in the months ahead. ~Colin Keating, Music Director/Accompanist

Kidz Club wrapped up the 2025/2026 school year with a busy last day. We had youth play music and participate in two skits for all to enjoy at the 10am service. This was followed by our 2nd annual youth carwash during the Church Picnic. We had donations totaling slightly over $1,000 that will be split between Golisano Children's Hospital and Devin's Rec Room. Of course the money donated to "spray Jeff" was a big part of this total! (Thanks Jeff for being a "good sport".) Thank you everyone for your generous donations.

Kidz Club will take a break for the summer and will start up again after Labor Day.

Don't forget to sign up for Vacation Bible School to be held every Wednesday evening for the month of August. The program this year is "Snowball Mountain Challenge" see the Church website for more information and registration form.

Have a great Summer!

Lorlie Wood, Faith Formation Leader

Congratulations confirmands!

Chair Yoga Our class continues through the summer at 9:30 on Tuesdays. We focus on gentle exercises to improve flexibility, balance and strength, with some nutrition nuggets to discuss, laughter, and support for one another. There is no charge and everyone is welcome. If you want to participate, wear comfortable clothing, bring water and hand weights if you have them.

Questions? Call Barb Merckel

Ministry News

SPRC updates…

We are continuing to look for a Sunday morning nursery provider. Please keep your eyes open for anyone you think might be a good fit for this important position. If you know someone who enjoys working with children and would be interested in serving in this role, please let us know.

Originally, we had planned a staff appreciation event for June. However, with the pastoral transition and everything taking place during that time, we decided to postpone the event until later this summer. We look forward to celebrating and showing our appreciation for our staff soon.

The SPRC will also serve as a transition committee to help welcome our new pastor. In the coming weeks, we will be setting up opportunities for small group "Meet and Greets" so that everyone will have a chance to speak with Pastor Ben in an informal, small group setting. When the time comes, make sure to sign up so you have a chance to spend some time with our new pastor! ~Julie Bills, SPRC chairperson

Annual Church picnic

June 14th we celebrated Flag Day and another enjoyable and delicious picnic, for 80 plus attendees. Unfortunately Mother Nature chased us inside, but warm feelings were shared, as we had one last opportunity to share the day with Pastor Jack.

Thanks to the many folks who worked to make it a success. Sam Paventi procured and cooked hot dogs, hamburgers, pulled pork and the fixings, assisted by Denise Sabattis who helped implement the set up and Flag Day theme. Fellowship team members Jan Robinson, Jane Monnell and myself served food and worked the clean up. Jerry Sabattis Warren Robinson and Joe Kondratowicz did table/chair set up and take down. And thanks to everyone who brought side dishes and desserts. Chris Paoli was available to help with the corn hole games. We fed our teen car washers early so they could get the car wash fund raiser going. All in all, it was a good time with good fellowship.

~Barb Merckel

GARAGE SALE

Immanuel's annual garage sale was held on 4/30 & 5/1 with the very popular $5.00 bag sale on 5/2. Many people added to the success of the sale by helping in so many ways by setting up & taking down tables, moving items from the garage sale room up to the fellowship hall (shout out to the Confirmands and their families who helped), pricing the items, serving as a cashier, straightening the tables & clothes racks, packing up unsold items, delivering unsold items to the Rescue Mission or Goodwill. Chef Sam with the help of Fryer Dan sold fried dough on Thursday and Friday morning.

Unsold items were given to the following non-profit organizations: Ralph the Shoe Guy, Save The Animals Thrift Shop, an Auburn Foster care Agency, a group that makes quilts for In My Fathers Kitchen, Rescue Mission and Goodwill. So not only did we make money for the church to help pay our insurance premium, but we were able to help several local missions.
Our profit this year was a record $6,543.87 and my thanks to all who helped. ~Shelley Dawson Smith

Outhouse Project

Starting July 12th and for the following 2 Sundays in July the Mission Team is again collecting not only toilet paper but other items that can't be purchased with SNAP.

Items that are needed: ***Toilet paper, paper towels, tissues, toothpaste, bar soap, liquid laundry soap, dish soap, shampoo, conditioner, bodywash and deodorant (men's & women's).***

The items donated to the Outhouse Project will be given to St. Joseph's Food Pantry who will give them to our friends in Memphis, Warner and Camillus and items will also be given to our friends at the West Side Food Pantry located at Brown memorial Church.

Last July we collected 843 items; let's see if we can do that again! ~Shelley Dawson Smith, Mission Team

M2 Report

April 2026 Donations

Total Donated	$7,313.00	
Missions	$2,437.67	33.33%
Maintenance/Trustees	$4,875.33	66.66%

May 2026 Donations

Total Donated	$8,159.00	
Missions	$2,719.67	33.33%
Maintenance/Trustees	$5,439.33	66.66%

Any questions ask Shelley Dawson Smith

Immanuel United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 335
Camillus NY 13031
Electronic Service Requested

Our Mission

"To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

July/Aug. 2026

We wish to be good stewards of both financial and environmental resources. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please email us at churchofthebells@gmail.com and request removal.

Pastor	Pastor Ben Lalka
Phone	(315) 487-1171
Email	office@churchofthebells.org
Website	www.churchofthebells.org
Worship	Sundays at 9 am (summer)
	*Facebook Live during 9 am
Office Hours	Monday-Thursday 9 am – 3 pm
Handicapped accessible	

Please join us!