

St Columbanus

Ballyholme



Lent Course
MU's 70th Anniversary
Mission News
Praying Together



..On the way
together..

The Parishioner

January/February 2026

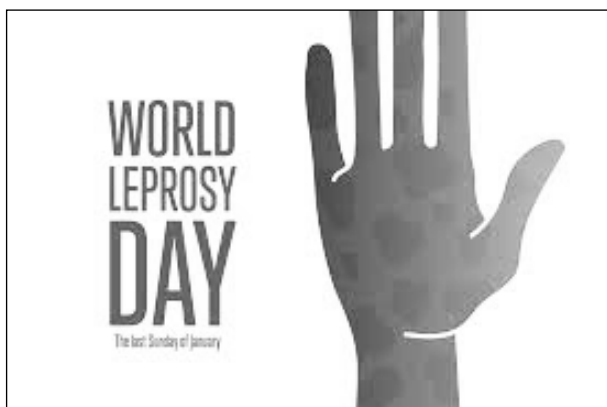
The Rambling Rector

Whatever 2026 holds for us, thank the Lord we don't have to toss and turn worrying about the roof over our heads or the possibility of being 'moved on' any time soon. Carl has been in my mind recently. Carl was the New Zealand-born skateboarder who on several Sundays last summer joined us for coffee on the church steps while rough-sleeping in the area. We haven't seen him since. Then there's the women and children residents of the Marine Court Hotel to whom we gave small gifts at Christmas – thanks to your response to the Missions Committee Advent Appeal. I'm so glad we were able to show them a little love, especially when some local politicians gleefully welcomed the imminent closure of their facility. "Foxes have holes and birds have nests," Jesus insisted famously in the Gospels, "but the Son of Man has nowhere on earth to lay his head". The Lord wasn't feeling hard done by or seeking sympathy here. But He was identifying wholly with those do find themselves in such hardship. To the rest of us, perhaps He was saying something like: feather your nests at your peril – you're only passing through. **SED**



Register of Vestry Members and Easter Vestry 2026

The Register of Vestry Members will be opened by the Select Vestry on Thursday 15 January and closed on revision on Thursday 19 February. This year's Easter Vestry will be on Sunday 22 March.



World Leprosy Day 2026

This year World Leprosy Day is on Sunday 26 January. The Leprosy Mission NI has a new Director, Joy Fleming. She recently joined the NI team having previously worked with The Leprosy Mission GB as a Deputy Head of Programmes. Joy has a background in research and we are looking forward to welcoming her as our guest speaker at the 10am and 11.30am services. We hope you will join us to hear from Joy and learn more about her experiences.

Trevor Smyth is our representative for The Leprosy Mission and he will provide an update about Joy's visit in the next issue of the magazine.



Easier Access for All

There are four designated accessible or disabled car park spaces in the lower car park, directly in front of the Parish Centre. These spaces are to support parishioners and visitors who require easier access due to mobility challenges.

When using an accessible parking bay in the church car park, please correctly display a valid Blue Badge. The front of the badge, showing the hologram, should face upwards on the dashboard where it can be clearly seen through the front windscreen.

On some occasions vehicles not displaying a Blue Badge have been parking in these spaces so we would like to remind everyone to remember to display their Blue Badge when parking in these bays. If you do not have a Blue Badge, you are not permitted to use these spaces.

We kindly ask all parishioners to comply with these parking rules to ensure that accessible facilities are available to those who need them most.

Please remember it might just be you needing to use one of these spaces in the future. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Praying Together

at the start
of
a new year



hosted by the
Clandeboye
Area Deanery

at Christ Church Primacy, Bangor, BT19 7PG

Tuesday 20th January
7:30pm – 9:00pm
Tea & Coffee from 7:00pm

'Meandering with Moses'

Charles Finney said, 'Nothing tends more to cement the hearts of Christians than praying together. Never do they love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer.'

Scripture speaks of the blessings and power when God's people meet to pray and worship together (Psalm 133). You are invited to join the nine churches of the Clandeboye Deanery for an evening of mutual encouragement as we worship and intercede for the needs of our churches, families and local communities.

On the evening of Tuesday, 20th January 2026 at Christ Church Primacy, we will 'Meander with Moses', drawing on Moses' life experience and raw encounters with God as a basis for our prayers. The evening will include worship and opportunities to pray in small groups, in silence, or at prayer stations.

There will be something to suit everyone's style of praying, for as Paul reminds us, we are to '...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests' (Eph 6: 18). Whether you can make the whole event or just a part of the evening, we would love to see you, as we make our petitions and requests with thanksgiving to the Lord.

Beautiful Flower Arrangements



More photos of the flower arrangements created by Elma at the MU December 2025 meeting.

She gave the members lots of helpful tips to make lovely decorations. In one vase she poured cranberries into the water and they floated to the top creating an unusual effect. She used foliage and spray-painted fine branches to complement the blooms and highlight the colours.



As 2026 begins, I look forward to another year of praying this ancient Bible prayer and calling down God's blessing in your homes, nursing homes and at your hospital bedsides. Thank you for your continued faithfulness to the worship and witness of St Columbanus.

SED

St Columbanus Festival

Dear Simon

On behalf of the Friends of Columbanus Bangor, I would like to thank you and Rev Jonny Watson for hosting the Ecumenical Service at St Columbanus CoI, Ballyholme. Also, a big thank you to the choir and the ladies who served tea after the service. It was a lovely programme and very fitting for the Feast Day of Columbanus. We were delighted to welcome Bishop Denis Nulty and Fr. Thomas O'Byrne who travelled from Carlow to Bangor to take part in our Columbanus commemorations.

Thank you for your continued support. It means a lot to those of us who are working hard to keep the memory and legacy of Columbanus alive, not just in Bangor but throughout the island of Ireland and continental Europe.

Happy Christmas to you and family!

Kindest regards

Deborah

Deborah Girvan

Chair, Friends of Columbanus Bangor

Food – Film - Chat ALPHA - You're Invited



We are about to embark on another ALPHA course, our 5th in recent years, beginning on 14th January, 2026 in the parish centre.

Once again, you are invited!

ALPHA is an 11-week course, that explores the Christian faith. It could be summarised simply as Life, Faith and Jesus.

It is a programme that is designed to help people explore their faith a little deeper, or to explore faith for the first time.

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We will meet on Wednesday evenings in the Kajiado Room, beginning at 7.30 and finishing promptly at 9.00.

The structure of the evening will be relax, have a chat, have some food, watch a film from the Alpha team about the Christian faith, and then discuss the film in small groups. You can join in the discussion, or say nothing at all. It's totally up to you. And everyone has a seat at the table. No matter what your background or belief, you're all welcome.



"I may not be able to make all sessions", no problem, we can provide a link to allow you to catch up.

"I might be late", no problem, just slip in, or slip out.

If you are new to the parish, this is a great opportunity to meet others in a very relaxed environment.

If you are interested, look out for the invitations which will be around the church, or fill in your contact details on the registration sheet which will be at the back of the church, or speak to Simon, Jonny, Michelle Savage or Don Todd, or contact the parish office. No excuses, lots of contact points.

Or you can just come along to the 1st session which is a taster session.

We look forward to seeing you, and don't forget to bring a friend!

Don Todd

Photos from the St Columbanus Festival Service



Sadly, another of Ballyholme's former curates died over recent months. We thank God as a parish for the life and ministry of Canon Dr Billy Marshall who died on 26 September 2025.

Billy had the honour of being Ballyholme's first curate and was appointed by Canon Mercer in 1959. The two former colleagues always kept up their friendship which had been based on a ministry of building and growing St Columbanus through the earliest days of its life. Billy's final visit to Ballyholme was to attend Canon Mercer's funeral in 2015.

Billy's ministry touched countless lives both locally and internationally. Originally from Co Tyrone, after serving in Ballyholme he dedicated a decade to missionary work in Chota Nagpur, India, with the Dublin University Mission. On his return to Ireland, he served as Assistant Chaplain at Trinity College Dublin between 1973–76. He became Incumbent of Rathmichael in 1976, the same year he completed his doctoral studies.

His commitment to ecumenical dialogue and theological scholarship was evident throughout his life, notably in his doctoral work on the Church of North India and his leadership roles within the Church of Ireland, including Chancellor of Christ Church Cathedral and Vice-Principal of the Theological College. It was in this latter teaching and formation role that I came under his influence, along with a whole generation of trainee clergy. To us, he was a legendary figure.

Billy had an encyclopaedic knowledge of what we call 'the Church formularies' – basically our various Prayer Books and liturgies. But the Philosophy of Religion was also one of his subjects. I distinctly remember Billy's disappointment at being turned away from an appearance at the RDS by Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*. The event was full, and I always felt it had been a lucky escape for Professor Dawkins!

Billy's wife Margaret was a great hostess and regularly had groups of students for supper to their home in Churchtown. In terms of Ballyholme, my clearest memory was one visit Billy made in my early years. About to drive off, I was saying farewell to Billy on the Groomsport Road when along the opposite pavement walked the late Mrs Emily Bleakley of Godfrey Avenue.

As she saw who I was talking to, Emily was heard to utter "Dr Marshall". Catching his name and looking over, without hesitation Billy replied "Mrs Bleakley". For the few minutes they spent catching up with each other, 50 years of parish life just melted away.

SED

Shoe Box Appeal

On behalf of Samaritans Purse I would like to say a big thank you for all those people who returned their shoe boxes and those who gave donations. The total number of shoe boxes returned was 114 and £350 in donations. Overall, Northern Ireland has sent 29614 shoes and they have gone to Serbia, Belarus, and a container load went to the Middle East.

The pictures show the sorting centre which is in Comber, at the start of sorting, during sorting and the final cartons been loaded unto the lorry. This is carried out by volunteers who have sorted the 29614 shoe boxes in a week.

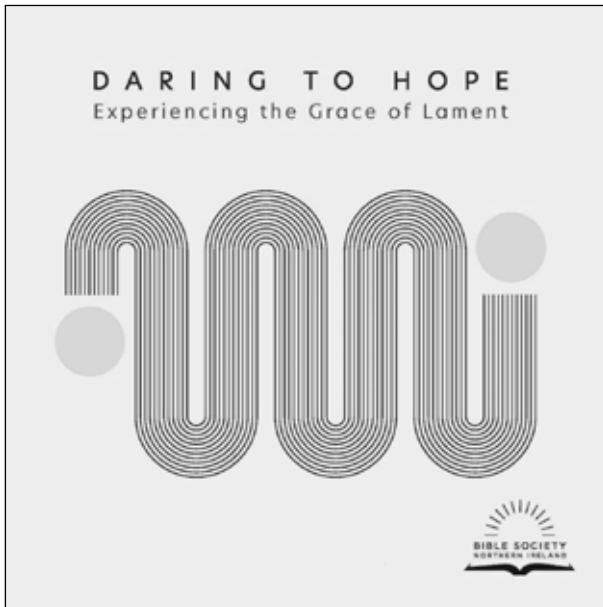
Once again thank you.

Geoff Hewitt

Photos at top of page 7



Lent Course: Daring to Hope



“Life is difficult.” With this simple line, Scott Peck begins his bestselling book *The Road Less Travelled*. Our parish is no different from any other because among us are those who carry burdens—grief that refuses to fade, fears we can’t quite articulate, loneliness that creeps in unnoticed, and seasons that shake our faith. Through lament, God offers us an honest path to bring every part of that pain to Him.

Nearly one-third of the Psalms—about fifty—are psalms of lament. This isn’t just a minor detail; it’s a key indicator. Lament has long been a vital part of God’s people’s prayers and is a core element of our Judeo-Christian tradition. This reassures me greatly, showing that sorrow and confusion are not barriers to God, but instead opportunities to

connect. They serve as reminders that we can turn to Him even when we feel broken or exhausted—and that He will listen.

When I was grieving the loss of my parents, the best advice I received was: Be brutally honest with God. He can handle your pain. That’s the heart of lament—being real before God. It resists the expectation that we must always “keep it together” and invites us toward honest conversation with God.

This Lent, we’re offering a course titled “Daring to Hope: Experiencing the Grace of Lament.” Lent offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on lament. On Sundays, the Lectionary brings us the penitential psalms—psalms that begin in sorrow yet gradually move toward hope. Through these psalms, we walk with Jesus through His own moments of darkness, leading ultimately to the joy of the resurrection. Each session blends Bible study, video teaching, group discussion, and time for personal reflection. Whether you’re struggling, searching, or simply curious, you are warmly invited to join us.

Lent Course: Daring to Hope

Tuesdays at 10.30am & 7.30pm

7, 24 February & 3, 10, & 24 March

Bishop Lindsay Urwin OGS (Oratory of the Good Shepherd)

After a whirlwind few days at the end of November, and the sharing of lots of embarrassing stories about your Rector, Advent 2025 got off to a memorable and, for many, moving start, with our 'Word is Near' parish weekend.

Our guest and my former boss the retired Bishop of Horsham in West Sussex was celebrating his thirty-second anniversary of ordination as a Bishop. He threw himself into everything and was thrilled to get to meet so many of you. Most of you had never met anyone quite like him.

Both Bishop Lindsay and former Chichester Diocesan Secretary Jonathan Prichard were a big part of my life between 2001 and 2004. I can't tell you how much I had looked forward to their visit. Frankly, it felt like Christmas had come early.

Sunday evening was probably the most powerful Service of Remembering we have ever had. If you weren't among the more than 90 people who did brave it out to Church that wet evening, please go and find it on our Ballyholme Parish Church YouTube channel.

Our thanks to Ross Hamilton and the Bonus Bingo team for the Friday night, to Trudi and the Saturday brunch team for a lavish breakfast banquet, to the Home Group that hosted and compered our Saturday Gameshow Night and to those who served the tea on Sunday evening.

Over recent years, few visiting speakers have left as powerful an impression as Bishop Lindsay Urwin for sheer energy and impact. It was what the parish needed and, to be perfectly honest, it was what I needed.

By special request, here's the song from Cameroon he taught us on the Sunday morning:

*"Prayer is the key, prayer is the key, prayer is the Master's key.
Jesus started with prayer, He ended with prayer: prayer is the master key."*

Photos from the Gameshow Night during the Word is Near Parish Weekend



Since we last reported, the Mission Committee has met and carefully considered the future of our partnership with Kajiado Diocese. We have decided to have a new friendship partnership which will continue our close relationship but will not involve a yearly financial donation. There will be specific financial needs which may arise in the future and we will always be responsive.

However, working with CMSI we want to help financially other Christian start-up communities in Africa and indeed elsewhere in Asia and the Far East. We will be guided by CMSI as to the best use of our funds. We are very much aware that we are working on behalf of the entire congregation and that Kajiado means so much to us all. However as a diocese it is now much more self supporting, whereas smaller Christian communities in many parts of the world are really struggling for support. We hope this will inspire lots of new connections with many brothers and sisters in Christ around the World.

The Committee is delighted to report that the recent Smartie Tubes Campaign was a resounding success. As I write this ,tubes are still coming in and we are likely to have a final figure that is one of the best ever.

Geoff Hewitt's Shoebox appeal was likewise a superb effort on the part of everyone who contributed. All the boxes were taken and all returned.

The Harvest lunch raised much more than we had hoped for. Thank you to everyone involved and for the very generous donations.

By the time you read this we will have completed our Christmas appeal on behalf of the Somali women in the Marine Court. We need to show compassion to strangers in our midst.

Our next big event is the Church Quiz on Saturday 24th January. Separate announcements to come. Thank you on behalf of the committee for all your support.

PS. As we go to press the final Smartie Tube figure after deduction of cost of the tubes is £1173. Well done. One of our best ever totals.

IH.

Never Assume — Help Us Reach You When You're in Hospital

It is one of the deepest joys of parish ministry to visit you, pray with you, and offer support whenever you are in the hospital. However, it's important to know that hospitals do not always inform us when one of our parishioners is admitted. This is entirely an issue at the hospital end, and sadly, it means we are often left unaware that you are there. Nothing disappoints us more than hearing that you were expecting a visit, but we didn't come— simply because we were never told.

So please, never assume we have been informed. If you or someone you know is in hospital, we warmly ask that you ring the office on 028 9127 4912 and let us know directly. A quick call ensures we can come to your ward as soon as possible.

We truly want to be there for you. Your call helps make that possible.

Rev. Jonny Watson and Canon Simon Doogan

World Day of Prayer

Friday 6th March 2026 at 11.00am



The World Day of Prayer service for 2026 for our group of Churches will be held in Ballycrochan Presbyterian Church on Friday 6th March 2026 at 11.00am. Refreshments will be served from 10.30am.

This service was prepared by an ecumenical group of Christian women from Nigeria. As we take part in this service we join a great wave of prayer which encircles the globe, beginning in Samoa and

146 countries later, in American Samoa all praying with and for the country and people of Nigeria.

Parish Representatives - **Ruth Ruttle & Roberta Munnis**

Greetings to all our friends from MU. What a fantastic Autumn season we have enjoyed. In November we had the privilege of celebrating 70 years of MU in our St Columbanus Branch. We decided to invite guests to join with present-day members; celebrating in style with a Sunday Afternoon Tea!



Local branches from Holywood, Groomsport, Bangor Parish and Bangor Abbey were well represented. We also welcomed visitors from Diocesan headquarters & former clergy and clergy wives. The Main Hall in our Parish Centre was transformed into a glamorous venue, complete with cake stands, table runners, dainty china, befitting a “down-town hotel”! Dainty sandwiches, tasty savouries & scones along with tempting tray-bakes and apple-creams!



There was much news to share and many memories to enjoy. All in all it was a wonderful afternoon and very special to be part of. Many thanks must go to MU Committee members for “going that extra mile”, thanks very much Ladies. Everyone attending received a celebration cup-cake and a MU Prayer Card to take home.

Following the afternoon tea we proceeded to the Church for our Anniversary Service.



Many thanks must also go to Canon Simon and Rev Jonny Watson for their part in The Service and also to Ian Bell and his choir for the celebratory choice of music for the event. Thank you too for Mark, our in-house photographer; along with Geoff and Bobby who washed all the dishes while we were at the service.

For our final meeting of 2025 we welcomed Elma, a very creative flower "artist". Members drank mixed berry cordial and ate nibbles and sweets while she provided a relaxing evening creating 3 festive flower displays. A ballot was held and 3 lucky winners each took one display home with them!

A festive supper with mince pies, cupcakes and traybakes along with a mug of tea rounded off the evening very successfully!



Now in our 71st year we move on to share Christmas gifts with Senior members of our parish - thanks everyone for their help with distribution.

Now for some diary dates for 2026

Our New Year dinner will be on **Wednesday 14th January** at 7.00pm to eat at 7.30pm in Bangor Golf Club. If you have not yet booked please choose your menu and leave £25 in a named envelope to Parish Office by 7th January 2026.

The February meeting will be our Overseas evening. We will be collecting the usual "hospital toiletry bags" or donations of toiletries for Women's Aid.

Many Blessings for now from
Yvonne & Ballyholme MU Team.





October - Antrim Loughshore Trail and Antrim Castle Gardens

On the postponed October walk, twelve turned out for the Antrim Loughshore trail followed by the Antrim Castle Gardens. First time walkers Karen and David were welcomed to the group.



November - Whitehead to Blackhead Lighthouse

Eighteen members of the Columbanus walkers travelled to Whitehead by train and walked to Blackhead Lighthouse on a glorious late-autumn day. After walking along the coast, some walked up the zigzag path to the lighthouse while others took the path below the cliffs and climbed several steep flights of steps to get to the top. Returning to Whitehead most had lunch in the town's cafes before returning to Bangor by train.

Peter



December - A loop of 'Port Devine'

The Walkers visited 'Port Devine' (Donaghadee) for their Christmas Walk and did a loop of the town starting and finishing at the Shore Street Church, taking in the old Railway Walk to Killaughey Road, followed by the usual refreshments at the 'Commodore'.

The group then had a superb lunch at Bangor Golf Club.

Betty



More Photos from the MU's 70th Anniversary



Our meeting in November started with some craftwork using dried flowers and foliage. The ladies busily set to work to create individually designed bookmarks. This was followed by our usual tea and treats. The draw this month was won by Agnes Officer.



As is usual in December, we met for a light lunch, and were so delighted to welcome Santa who provided us with great entertainment before distributing presents from his large red sack!

We will meet again on the 7th of January at 2.00PM and everyone is welcome.

The Wednesday Club Team



YOUTH-NEWS

youth [youth] (youths) news [nooz]



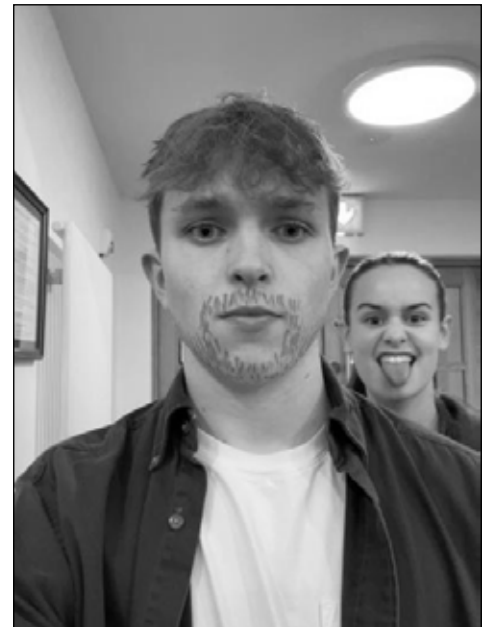
It's hard to believe that, at the time of writing this, 2025 is almost over. The last few months have gone so quickly, and the weekly cycles of Bible studies, drop-in, Emerge and YF fly by so quickly that it's Christmas before you know it.

Things have been great the last few months, with all of the above activities continuing on as normal. At Emerge we've been working our way through some big bible stories, covering things like the siege of Jericho and the book of Judges. Those mornings have been great, with pancakes and orange juice being a nice little brunch! Or breakfast for the ones who don't get up in time for breakfast before church...

At YF we've had a range of leaders speaking – Annika, Bella, Charlotte, Elliott – and sharing ways that Jesus has had a big impact on their lives. That's been wonderful to hear, and I'm sure is very encouraging for the young people to hear, especially with these leaders still being very close in age to the young people.

Right now we're gearing up for Christmas, and looking ahead to our annual youth weekend in February. We're really excited for what's in store for 2026, and as ever appreciate your prayers and support!

Andrew



JANUARY 2026**Sunday 4th January Christmas 2**

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Cafe Church - Parish Centre
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 7th January

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 11th January Epiphany 1

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Good News at Ten & Children's Church
 11.30 Parish Communion
 6.30 United Service Ballyholme Presbyterian

Wednesday 14th January

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 18th January Epiphany 2

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Prayer & Praise & Children's Church
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 21st January

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 25th January Epiphany 3

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Parish Communion & Children's Church
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 28th January

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

FEBRUARY 2026**Sunday 1st February Epiphany 4**

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Cafe Church - Parish Centre
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 4th February

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 8th February**The 2nd Sunday before Lent**

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Good News at Ten & Children's Church
 11.30 Parish Communion
 6.30 United Service - Ballyholme Parish

Wednesday 11th February

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 15th February**The Sunday before Lent**

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Prayer & Praise & Children's Church
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 18th February

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

Sunday 22nd February Lent 1

8.30 Holy Communion
 10.00 Parish Communion & Children's Church
 11.30 Morning Prayer

Wednesday 25th February

10.30 Holy Communion - Kajiado Room

FUNERALS**October**

16th: Cecil Walsh - late of Montgomery Manor

November

11th: Dennis Patrick McMorris - late of Towerview Avenue

21st: Matthew (Matt) Gillan - late of Ward Avenue

December

8th: Sarah Service Beckett - late of Downshire Road

**January 2026**

4th Jacqui Devlin

11th Susan Stockton

18th Agnes Officer

25th Jenny Kelly

February 2026

1st Angie Latimer

8th Cathy Body

15th Ann McMurray

22nd Lillian Finch