



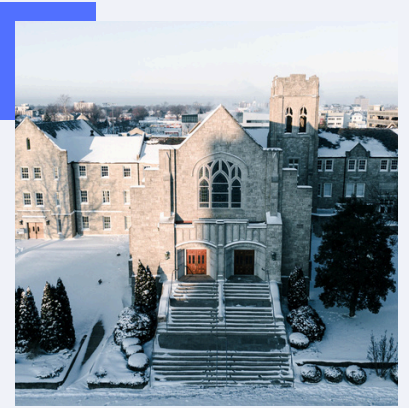
WINTER AT FIRST & CALVARY



A SEASON OF WAITING,
WONDER, AND WHAT
COMES NEXT

Winter at First & Calvary

A Season of Waiting, Wonder, and What Comes Next



Winter has a way of doing two things at once: slowing everything down and speeding everything up. The days get shorter. The calendar somehow doesn't.

But somewhere in the middle of all of it, through the Advent waiting, the Christmas celebrations, the candlelight and carols, the turning of a new year, something keeps showing up. Community. Purpose. The quiet, persistent sense that we're part of something bigger than any single season.

This winter, First & Calvary showed up for each other. Through youth events and college gatherings, missions work and musical offerings, New Year reflections and everything in between, we lived the season together. Here's a look back at what that looked like.

Celebrate While We Wait

There's something about Advent that makes you want to slow down, and on December 6, that's exactly what we did. Families gathered for Celebrate While We Wait, and the building filled up quickly with the kind of noise that's actually good for the soul. Ornaments were made, cookies decorated, cocoa poured, carols sung with appropriate enthusiasm. And somewhere in the middle of all of it, families paused to remember the joy of anticipating Jesus. The whole point of the season, right there at the craft table.

But underneath all of it was something quieter. A reminder that waiting doesn't have to be passive. That the promises of God are worth sitting with, worth celebrating even before they're fully realized. From toddlers to elementary-aged kids, and the adults who showed up right alongside them, it was a gift to watch faith being nurtured through something as simple as shared time.



93rd Annual Candlelight Musical Service

On December 7, the church held its 93rd Annual Candlelight Musical Service. The sanctuary glowed with candlelight, beautifully arranged by Brenda Bauer, Janese Barnhardt, Kelvin and Ellen VanOsdol, and Rick Uffmann. Just before the service, the Chancel Choir met in the McClung room to pray, while Cindy Miles and her faithful team prepared the Children's Choir to begin the service. The community gathered to wrap themselves in the words and music of the Christmas story once again.

The sanctuary was full. Friends, families, neighbors, people who maybe hadn't been in a while, and people who never miss it. The choir in their robes, the handbells, the children's voices, candles burning against the dark. Scripture woven through it all. And at the center of everything, the same story it's always been: a God who showed up in the most unexpected way imaginable.

Afterward, the fellowship hall filled up with cookies and conversation, the kind of easy, unhurried laughter that happens when people aren't in a hurry to leave. Which felt right. Some evenings deserve a slow ending.



The Christmas Story of Isaiah

This Advent, we commissioned our Resident Composer, Faith Zimmer, to write a new extended work for choir and string orchestra: The Christmas Story of Isaiah. It was written to complement our Advent sermon series, Foretold and Fulfilled, which explored the divine drama of Christ's birth through the ancient words of the prophets inspired by God and their fulfillment in the Gospels.



With luminous strings, ringing bells, and vibrant choral writing, the work takes listeners right to the heart of that drama. The full piece remains available on our Youtube channel, on December 14 at 11:00.

Christmas Eve Services

Christmas Eve at the end of 2025 was a glorious night here at First & Calvary. The unusually warm, balmy weather outside the sanctuary may not have felt very "Christmas-y", but inside we were in full-on Christmas mode!

Over 400 people came to either the 4:00PM or 7:00PM services where we kicked off with Joy to the World led by brass players. There's something about worshipping God surrounded by believers and cheered on by trumpets that helps stubborn hearts like my own warm up in a hurry.

Pastor Jamie and I co-presented the sermon that night - using classic props from the nativity scene to help us hear, anew, the classic Christmas text from Luke 2. I suppose it didn't feel "like a sermon" (one person commented to me on their way out how much they liked "the skit"), but that was part of the point. Sometimes we need to be creative to help counterbalance the way familiar texts can "lull us" into not really hearing God's word.



My favorite part of the night, as usual, was the lighting of the candles while singing Silent Night. There's just something about that moment in the church year that grounds me and refreshes me and reaches deep places within me. On a side note: I'm working on a novel right now and I have the opening chapter take place at a Christmas Eve service, culminating with the lighting of the candles and singing of Silent Night. That's how special this night always is for me!

Growing Deeper & Wider | 2026 Focus

Every year, First & Calvary steps into January with a shared sense of direction, a focus that shapes how we worship, serve, and grow together. This year, that focus is Growing Deeper & Wider.

The prayer behind it is simple: may God deepen our delight in him, and widen our welcome of others. Two directions. One body moving together.



Pastor Don and Pastor Jamie led us through a four-week sermon series to start the year, rooting these ideas in Scripture. Isaiah 2, the Great Commandment in Mark 12, and Romans 12 — each week building on the last. If you missed any of it, or just want to revisit, the full series is on our YouTube page. The through-line: the deeper our delight in God, the more naturally our welcome of others widens. Same movement, growing together.

Youth Events

Winter's dark, cold nights are no fun! So, we decided to infuse some life into them for the youth of First & Calvary by having several fun events over the winter. Two of those events were laser tag and bowling. Laser tag ended in an all-out battle between youth vs. "adults." Who won? Depends on who you ask. What mattered was that it was an opportunity for multi-generational fun and relationship building! Bowling was a great time as well, with this being the first time for many of our youth to go bowling. Luckily, we had someone who was in a bowling league once upon a time to help us out! Overall, there were many gutter balls, a few strikes, and a lot of laughs!



Open Art Morning

At February's Open Studio Morning, F&C Kids enjoyed a meaningful time of creative worship as we thought about how pausing in our routines to spend time with God can help us reflect His light in the world. Our young artists created sculptures, paintings, mixed-media collages, and posters, and they also added to our collaborative weaving project. Many of these pieces were featured in the South Atrium exhibit of our March Artwalk event, giving our children an opportunity to be involved in widening our welcome to the Springfield community.

