

ST. JOHN LUTHERAN NEWSLETTER

February 2026



A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

A Note of Encouragement

This is an amazing congregation. Yes, I may still be in the “honeymoon phase” as your shepherd, but I don’t think I’m wrong. I want to share why I believe St. John is special, why I’m confident—by God’s grace—that we can do wonderful things together, and how we might build on the strong foundation God has already given us.

First, this church is special because she belongs to Christ. She has been washed in the blood of the Lamb, sanctified by Him, gathered by the Holy Spirit, and is held in the care of God the Father. Without this, we would indeed be spinning our wheels. God has formed this place, formed you as a congregation, and sustained you through many storms. Thanks be to God! Let us keep this truth before our eyes and never forget to give thanks.

Second, the people of St. John are caring and generous, with a genuine desire for their neighbors to share in the same riches they have received. You work hard to make this a warm and faithful congregation. When additions to the sanctuary were suggested, you responded with generosity and gratitude for the place where God gives His gifts. Thank you.

Continued on Page 2

OTHER NEWS

- Midweek Lenten Services with Soup Supper
- Voter’s Meeting & Potbless
- Valentine’s Day articles

Church office hours:
Wednesday
8:00am - 12:00pm

In need of pastoral care?

Pastor Sean McNeil is ready to serve you.

No need is too small. You are important to him.

You can schedule a meeting on the calendar located next to the greeter in the Narthex, via email (pastor@stjohnaugres.com), or by calling 231-750-2294



10-26
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www.stjohnaugres.com

"The two places we know we're always welcome are church and Grandma's house."

A Letter from the Pastor's Desk Cont.

Finally, you show up. Attendance has been strong, and I've greatly enjoyed getting to know you. God has given this congregation many people of deep faith. You love Christ, and you love one another—let's keep that up. When Sunday morning comes, and you're tempted to stay in bed, remember how wonderful it is to gather 70-80 voices in song and praise. Your presence is a gift to others, especially to guests or members returning after time away.

Now, we are all sinners—and I've been here long enough to see that, myself included. One way we can grow is by forgiving one another. And by forgiving, I mean saying the words: "I forgive you," and asking for forgiveness in return. We don't all need to be best friends, but we are called to love our fellow saints. Division and resentment leave us vulnerable; forgiveness strengthens us against the enemy's attacks, which are sure to come.

Second, we need to be in the Word. The more you dwell in God's living Word, the more it flows out into your children, grandchildren, neighbors, and fellow members. The Holy Spirit works through that Word. Much of this is my job—to preach, teach, and instruct—but I encourage you to ask questions and request studies. Soon, I'll be announcing opportunities to gather around topics that touch real parts of your daily lives.

These are simple, faithful ways to build on the sturdy foundation Christ has laid here at St. John. He is the builder, and we labor in vain without His blessing. Yet He has called us to forgive and invited us to feast on His Word. With Christ and His cross at the center, it's hard to imagine St. John failing to flourish.

I'm very much looking forward to the adventure ahead.

Pastor McNeil

P.S. This month's Catechism Corner is from the Book of Concord on confession and absolution, something we don't use a ton in this day and age. Please know that it is my job (and joy) to forgive your sins. You can come to me anytime to confess what is burdening you and be forgiven. The sins you confess will die in my ears.

"Even the darkest moments of the liturgy are filled with joy, and Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten fast, is a day of happiness, a Christian feast."

—Thomas Merton

Catechism Corner

Luther on Confession

The Smalcald Articles

The Third Part

Article VIII

Confession

[1] Absolution, or the Power of the Keys, is an aid against sin and a consolation for a bad conscience; it is ordained by Christ in the Gospel [Matthew 16:19]. Therefore, Confession and Absolution should by no means be abolished in the Church. This is especially for the sake of timid consciences and untrained young people, so they may be examined and instructed in Christian doctrine.

[2] But the listing of sins should be free to everyone, as to what a person wishes to list or not to list. For as long as we are in the flesh, we will not lie when we say, "I am a poor man, full of sin"; "I see in my members another law"; and such (Romans 7:23). Since private Absolution originates in the Office of the Keys, it should not be despised, but greatly and highly esteemed, along with all other offices of the Christian Church.

[3] In issues relating to the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word [Galatians 3:2, 5]. This protects us from the enthusiasts (i.e., souls who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word). They judge Scripture or the spoken Word and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Münzer did. Many still do this

today, wanting to be sharp judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet they do not know what they are saying [2 Corinthians 3:6]. [4] Actually, the papacy too is nothing but sheer enthusiasm. The pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart. Whatever he decides and commands within his church is from the Spirit and is right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word.

[5] All this is the old devil and old serpent [Revelation 12:9], who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts. He led them away from God's outward Word to spiritualizing and self-pride [Genesis 3:2-5]. And yet, he did this through other outward words. [6] In the same way, our enthusiasts today condemn the outward Word. Yet they themselves are not silent. They fill the world with their babbling and writings, as if the Spirit could not come through the apostles' writings and spoken Word, but has to come through their writings and words. Why don't they leave out their own sermons and writings and let the Spirit Himself come to people without their writings before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures? We do not have time now to argue about this in more detail. We have treated this well enough elsewhere.

[7] For even those who believe before being baptized, or become believing in Baptism, believe through the outward Word, which came first. For example, adults who have come to reason must first have heard "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" [Mark 16:16], even though they are at

Cont. next page

Catechism Corner Cont.

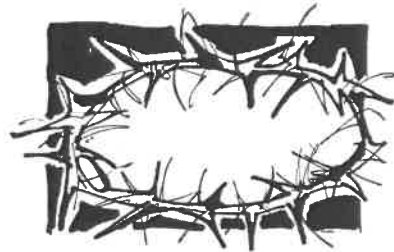
first unbelieving and receive the Spirit and Baptism ten years afterward. [8] Cornelius, living among the Jews, had heard long before about the coming Messiah, through whom he was righteous before God (Acts 10:1-2). In such faith, his prayers and alms were acceptable to God (since Luke calls him devout and God-fearing). Without the Word coming first and without hearing it, he could not have believed or been righteous [Romans 10:17]. St. Peter, though, had to reveal to him that the Messiah (in whom he had previously believed as one who would come in the future) now had come, lest his faith in the coming Messiah hold him captive among the Jewish people, who were hardened and unbelieving. He must now know that he is saved by the present Messiah and must not, with the Jewish people, deny or persecute Him.

[9] In a word, enthusiasm dwells in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world. Its venom has been implanted and infused into them by the old serpent. It is the origin, power, and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the papacy and Muhammad. [10] Therefore, we must constantly maintain this point: God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit—without the Word and Sacraments—is the devil himself. [11] God wanted to appear even to Moses through the burning bush and spoken Word [Exodus 3:2-15]. No prophet, neither Elijah nor Elisha, received the Spirit without the Ten Commandments <or the spoken Word>. [12] John the Baptist was not conceived without the word of Gabriel coming first, nor did he leap in his mother's womb without Mary's voice [Luke 1:11-20, 41]. [13] Peter says, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy

Spirit" [2 Peter 1:21]. Without the outward Word, however they were not holy. Much less would the Holy Spirit have moved them to speak when they were still unholy. They were holy, says he, since the Holy Spirit spoke through them.

From "Article VIII. Confession" in The Smalcald Articles, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Pocket Edition. © 2005, 2006 Concordia Publishing House.

Source:https://bookofconcord.cph.org/en/smalcald-articles/third_part/article_viii/



LENTEN SERVICE

Ash Wednesday - February 18

Lenten Midweek 2 - February 25

Lenten Midweek 3 - March 4

Lenten Midweek 4 - March 11

Lenten Midweek 5 - March 18

Lenten Midweek 6 - March 25

Wednesday Soup Supper & Worship
Serving at 5:15pm/worship at 6:30pm

Starting Ash Wednesday all throughout Lent, for six weeks. If you wish to host a soup supper, a sign-up sheet is on the table in the multi-purpose room.

We ask that the Menu be kept simple: Soup crackers/breads, a simple dessert, and drinks.

Thanks in advance! -Ladies Aid

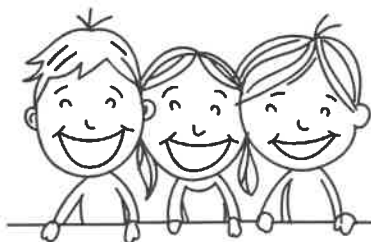
Kids Corner -----

Bible Who-Dunnits:

New Testament

See how many of these "who-dunnits" you can solve on your own. Then you can check the Bible references for any that are left. The idea is to match the "who" with the "dunnit" by putting the letter of the correct answer in the space. Ready? Answers on the next page.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| ___1. Denied/disowned Jesus even after he'd sworn never to do so. (Matthew 26:69-75) | a. Judas |
| ___2. Persecuted the Christians until he was struck down and blinded. (Acts 9:1-4) | b. Peter |
| ___3. Betrayed Jesus for money. (Luke 22:4-5) | c. Saul/Paul |
| ___4. Refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead until he had proof. (John 20:24-26) | d. Thomas |
| ___5. Tried to cheat by pretending to give a larger gift to the church than he really did. (Acts 5:1-4) | e. Herod |
| ___6. Gave Jesus up to be crucified even though he knew Jesus was innocent. (Matthew 27:24-26) | f. Ananias |
| ___7. Had John the Baptist beheaded to please Salome. | g. Simon of Cyrene |
| ___8. Carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. (Matthew 27:32) | h. Pilate |



Christ 4 Kids

Mark your calendars & invite friends
to our next event on
February 14th from 1-3pm.

Dates to Remember

Voter's Meeting & Potbless

Sunday, February 9

The meeting will begin after worship and coffee hour at approximately 10:15 am



Following the meeting will be our potbless. Bring a favorite dish to share with your church family.

-See YOU there!

NEW WINTER SPORTS



ICE HATING



NO-MOBILING

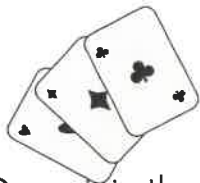


SNOW SHOO-ING

©Brian Gordon



CROSS-COUNTRY FLEEING



Ladies Card Party

February 27 from 1-4

Come join the fun and maybe learn a new game or two! Bring snacks to share.

Answers to "Bible Who-Dunnits"

1. Peter
2. Saul/Paul
3. Judas
4. Thomas
5. Ananias
6. Pilate
7. Herod
8. Simon of Cyrene

Women of the Word Bible Study

Mondays at 10:00 am

Ladies of any age are invited to join us as we study the Holy Word of God.

Quitting

Many hands make light work. Join us as we make quilts to bless those who have suffered disasters, in the US and around the world. NO experience is necessary. Join us February 19 at 10am. However, we invite you to come when you can and leave when you must!

Mission Opportunities

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. I Peter 4:10

Mission of the Month

Lutheran Hour Ministries

Lutheran Hour Ministries is a global mission organization that shares Christ's love in more than 60 countries, often bringing His message of hope to places where no other Christian organizations are present. When people experience the Gospel message through our programs, we then encourage them to respond by contacting our staff or volunteers. LHM then cultivates relationships with those who respond, ultimately facilitating a connection between them and a Christian community, thereby helping to grow the kingdom of God.



Add one or more the following items to your grocery list and place in the grocery cart in the Fellowship Hall. Hygiene items are especially in high demand.

Pantry items needed: Canned tuna or chicken, Mac n Cheese, dry cereal, chicken noodle soup, pancake mix, canned potatoes

The Closet Exchange

Thanks to a VILLAGE of volunteers, we are excited to share that we were able to reopen at our new location (St. Paul Lutheran Church).

The Closet Exchange provides clothing, at no cost, to children 18 and under. There are no financial qualifications. We say, "If you have a kid, you have a need." We also say, "Take what you need and give what you can." This means that we ask that you only take for children 18 and under, not for adults. And, we ask that you only take what you need and not take in excess. We want to make sure we have enough of all sizes to make sure any child that comes in can get what they need also.

We accept clothing donations and post each month what sizes we are accepting or in greatest need of.

We do accept financial donations, to cover the expenses of operating a building and to help with purchasing new socks and underwear and clothing when stock gets critically low or a special need arises that we don't have in stock.

All our volunteers and board members are volunteers and are not paid. Giving of their time, and often funds as well, is a blessing to our organization and our community. Please thank them, when you see them, for making this organization possible.

Ladies Aid Meeting January 2026

Opening prayer by Pat Metzger.

Six ladies present.

Correspondence: Asking for donations were Lutherans for Life, Bay Area Women's Center, Rescue Missions of Saginaw, Lutheran Heritage Foundation, and God's Children of Haiti.

Reports: Secretary's report read and approved. Treasurer's report: \$8,229.19 in checking.

LWML: Our timberline Zone President Kay Kernstock must resign her position because of health issues. We need to have a replacement or our zone may have to dissolve.

Mites brought in \$669.42 this year.

We will send \$250. each to The Au Gres Closet Exchange and Au Gres Food Pantry (Bazaar 10% monies).

New Business:

- Soup Suppers for Lent: The ladies will do the Ash Wednesday soup supper February 18. Bringing soups are Jane, Vicki and Roxanne. Marilyn will supply bread and crackers. Pat and Veronica will bring a dessert.
- A sign-up sheet will be in the multi-purpose room for the next five Wednesdays of Lent. Please consider helping with these suppers. Needed are two soups, crackers and bread. Dessert if you chose.
- Mission of the month: God's Children of Haiti.
- Quilting: Feb. 19, 10am
- Cards: Feb. 27, 1pm
- February hostesses for Ladies Aid meeting are Jane and Pat.
- Sunday fellowship coordinators are Jane and Vicki.

Motion to adjourn by Marilyn Williamson. Meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully submitted by, Vicki Huber

Silent Breakfast Everyone is Welcome!!! Men & Women

Where: Faith Lutheran church, Henderson Lake Rd; Prescott, MI

When: Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 9:00 am



Plan to attend Faith's Annual Silent Breakfast. A morning to experience the presence of the Lord as you worship and read His word while enjoying a continental breakfast with others. A short devotion and receiving of ashes (optional) will follow breakfast by Pastor Meyer to signify we are sealed with Jesus.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

TO THE GLORY OF GOD,
the church received the following gift
in memory of: John & Betty Huber
and Ross Huber

Altar Fund by John & Karen Huber



What is Charity?

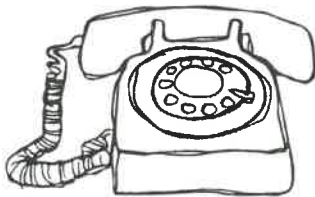
It is Silence
when your words could hurt.
It is Patience
when your neighbor's curt
It is Deafness
when a scandal flows
It is Thoughtfulness
for others' woes.
It is Promptness
when stern duty calls.
It is Courage
when misfortune falls.

The Beacon
Wood River, IL

Welcome

We welcome our newest members to St. John:

The Elders officially welcomed
Michael Reid and Jacob Rogers
into membership at the January Elder's Meeting.



Phone Directory

Preparation for an updated directory for St. John has begun. Please take time to check the information we have for you in the current 2024/25 Directory and let the office know if there are corrections or additions to be made.



The Meaning of Love



February 14 is Valentine's Day. So, let's talk about love. There's a great little book by C.S. Lewis called "The Four Loves".

First published in 1960, the book makes a distinction on the outset between "gift-love" and "need-love." "Gift-love" is God's love, a love that's not transactional. "Need-love" is the love we're born to desire and to give.

As C.S. Lewis puts it, "We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious, we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually: we need the if we are to know anything, even ourselves.

This was a great distinction for me when I read this as a teenager. Teenagers are needy! They're in a developmental stage that requires love and a feeling of safety as they weather the storm of understanding who they are.

But guess what? You and I are still needy! We need to know that we're loved as we weather any change, any challenge, any loss. We thank God that He needed nothing from us to show His great "gift-love", a love that does not ask for anything in advance.

We hold on to Bible verses such as Romans 5:8 that remind us that, "God shows his love us us in that while we were still sinners, Christ dies for us."

The sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross was love. A love that didn't wait for us to have it all figured out or to be close to perfect. Not only that, Ephesians 2:8 reminds us that the Spirit then give us a gift of faith.

God keeps giving and giving, which is exactly what we need, because we continue to hunger and thirst for the love that only He can give.

As you reflect on Valentine's Day, take some time to think about the gifts God gives you today. He doesn't try to woo us with chocolate or diamonds; He gives freely the comfort and peace we so desperately need in His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

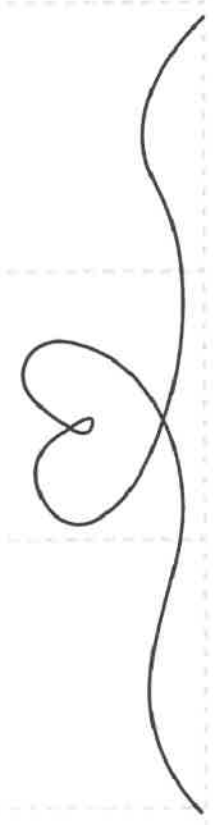
May His love overflow in you to offer others a love that's not transactional, but points to the One who we can say is Himself, love.

By Thomas Moll

FEBRUARY 2026



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 W/HC - 9am Mites Collected Bible Study 10:15am	2 Women of the Word Bible Study 10:00 am	3	4 W/HC- 6:30 pm	5	6	7 Baptism for Linda Daly's Great-granddaughter, Neveah - 11am
8 W/HC - 9am Blood Pressure Clinic Voter's Meeting 10:15am Potbless - following.	9 Women of the Word Bible Study 10:00 am	10	11 W/HC- 6:30 pm	12	13	14 Christ 4 Kids 1-3pm
15 W/HC - 9am Bible Study 10:15am	16 Women of the Word Bible Study 10:00 am	17 Ladies Aid - 1 pm	18 Ash Wednesday W/HC- 6:30 pm	19 Quilting - 10am Elders Mtg - 6pm Council Mtg - 7pm	20	21
22 W - 9am Bible Study 10:15am	23 Women of the Word Bible Study 10:00 am	24 Newsletter Deadline	25 Lenten Service 6:30 pm	26	27 Ladies Cards - 1pm	28





St. John Lutheran Church
PO Box 763
Au Gres, MI 48703

Letter from the Editor

Do you remember your Elementary School Year Valentine's Day parties? Decorating a shoe box with the anticipation of receiving cards and treats from friends? (Especially the treats!) I'm assuming girls enjoyed the decorating more than the boys. I would spend countless evenings cutting, glueing, and coloring my box. There was one year I forgot to bring my box to school with me and I was heartbroken to have to carry my treasures home in a grocery sack. Many tears were shed!

My husband and I joke about Valentine's Day being a holiday created by Hallmark or the candy companies and long ago I told him not to buy me cards, expensive flowers, or even candy. Yesterday I was chatting with my 3-year-old granddaughter while she ate a snack and she brought up Valentines. She was so excited about making cards for her friends. Listing off all the friends she wanted to make a card for and what picture she would draw on the front, a picture of something she knew they liked.

That conversation reminded me of the days before cynicism took over my view of this holiday. It reminded me of the enjoyment I had choosing which card I would give each classmate before marking them off the class list, provided by my teacher. I remember conversations with my mother about the importance of being kind and giving a card to everyone, regardless of my like or dislike of them at the moment. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"!

I doubt I will start buying Valentine Cards to hand out again, but I am challenged to take the time to let my friends and anyone else who cross my path, of their importance to me and to Our Heavenly Father.

Sandra Jantzi