

## **A Message from Pastor McNeil** **Say, 'Happy Mothers Day,' to Your Eternal Mother**

*There is a saying that has resonated through the centuries: He cannot have God as his Father who will not have the Church as his mother. Those words, attributed to Cyprian of Carthage, strike the modern ear as harsh. We live in an age suspicious of institutions, impatient with perceived failures, and quick to dismiss when disappointed. Yet Holy Scripture teaches us to speak of the Church not merely as an organization, or institution but as our mother.*

*St. Paul says of the heavenly Jerusalem, "She is our mother" (Galatians 4:26). The Church is the bride of Christ, yes, but she is also motherly toward us; through her ministry Christ begets children for God. Through the preaching of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Absolution, the Holy Communion, sinners are conceived and nourished unto eternal life. We do not create ourselves as Christians. We are born from above, and Christ promises to give that new birth and life through His Church.*

*This is why the Scriptures speak both tenderly and sternly about remaining among God's people. The believer does not stand alone--there is no such thing as a lone-ranger-Christian. He is planted in the courts of the Lord. He belongs to a household. He is a member of a body. He is a living stone built into a temple. Scripture doesn't use these images accidentally. They teach us that Christianity is not a self-centered case of "me and Jesus," but Christ gathering, forgiving, feeding, and preserving His people together in communion.*

*Our Book of Concord confesses this truth beautifully. In the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, Martin Luther writes: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." Left to ourselves, we do not climb into heaven. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel. And where does He do this? In the Church. Luther continues that the Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth." Holy Mother Church is not an optional add-on to faith. She is the place where the Spirit is promised to be at work through means.*

*The Augsburg Confession defines the Church as "the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely taught, and the Sacraments are rightly administered." This is for our comfort. The Church is not identified by worldly success, flawless administration, or outward prestige. She is known by the voice of her Bridegroom and by His gifts. Wherever Christ's Gospel sounds forth and His Sacraments are given according to His institution, there is your mother. There she feeds her children.*

*Continues on page 2*



The fathers of the Church spoke echo this truth. Augustine of Hippo often described the Church as the mother who bears believers through Word and sacrament. John Chrysostom urged Christians not to neglect the assembly, for there the Lord gives what cannot be had in isolation. They knew what we must relearn: the Christian cut off from the Church is like a coal removed from the fire. The ember of faith cools and dies quickly.

Now, everyone knows that mothers on earth are imperfect. The same goes for congregations. Pastors fail. Members disappointed. Decisions frustrate. Hypocrisy wounds. The devil will use the wounds that come from such failures to make staying harder than leaving. Yet we are not to remain because the Church is spotless in herself. We remain because Christ is faithful to His promise to be present for sinners there. We stay not because every member is lovely, but because our Lord loves the unlovely and is making them new.

Holy Mother Church still provides what no world system can give. She pours baptismal water that joins us to Christ's death and resurrection. She speaks God's absolution into guilty ears. She places into the hands of sinners the very body and blood of the Lord for forgiveness and strength. She surrounds the lonely with the prayers, encouragement, and mutual consolation of the brethren. She buries the dead in hope. She teaches the young. She steadies the old. She sings as a light shining in the darkness.

So, if you are weary, disappointed, or tempted to drift, hear this encouragement: stay with your mother. This Mother's Day, remember the Mother who Christ has given you to sustain you in the Faith. Stay where Christ serves you. Stay where the Scriptures are opened, where sins are forgiven, where the altar is set, where fellow Christians bear one another's burdens. The Church may look alien and messy to worldly eyes, but she is rich with heaven's treasures.

And if you have been absent, come home. Your mother's doors stand open. Her table is prepared. Her Lord still delights to receive His children.

## Hymn of the month "Built on the Rock"

- 1 Built on the Rock the Church shall stand  
Even when steeples are falling.  
Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land;  
Bells still are chiming and calling,  
Calling the young and old to rest,  
But above all the soul distressed,  
Longing for rest everlasting.
  
- 2 Surely in temples made with hands  
God, the Most High, is not dwelling;  
High above earth His temple stands,  
All earthly temples excelling.  
Yet He who dwells in heav'n above  
Chooses to live with us in love,  
Making our bodies His temple.
  
- 3 We are God's house of living stones,  
Built for His own habitation.  
He through baptismal grace us owns  
Heirs of His wondrous salvation.  
Were we but two His name to tell,  
Yet He would deign with us to dwell  
With all His grace and His favor.
  
- 4 Here stands the font before our eyes,  
Telling how God has received us.  
Th'altar recalls Christ's sacrifice  
And what His Supper here gives us.  
Here sound the Scriptures that proclaim  
Christ yesterday, today, the same,  
And evermore, our Redeemer.
  
- 5 Grant, then, O God, Your will be done,  
That, when the church bells are ringing,  
Many in saving faith may come  
Where Christ His message is bringing:  
"I know MY own; My own know Me.  
You, not the world, My face shall see.  
My peace I leave with you. Amen."

## What is Pastoral Care?

Modeled after a shepherd who cares for his flock, pastoral care provides spiritual guidance and support for individuals in need. A Shepherd feed and nourish their flock with God's Word and the sacraments.

Pastor McNeil desires to meet with you and walk with you through any need you may have, whether it is big or small.

You may schedule a meeting by signing up on the calendar in the Narthex, via email: [pastor@stjohnaugres.com](mailto:pastor@stjohnaugres.com) or by calling 231-750-2294



*St. John Lutheran Church received Landin Bender as a member on April 12th.*

---

*Paige Koenig was received by the rite of Holy Baptism on Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>.*

*Paige is the daughter of JR and Jarah Koenig  
granddaughter of John and Nancy Koenig.*

"For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations"  
Isaiah 61:11



# Good Stewardship

Being good stewards of the financial resources entrusted to our church means recognizing that these funds are not simply ours to spend, but gifts given with purpose and responsibility. It calls for careful planning, transparency, and prayerful decision-making so that every dollar supports the mission and values of the church. Wise stewardship involves meeting current needs while also preparing for the future and avoiding waste.

With members taking advantage of online giving, less members are using the envelopes we purchase each year. Please consider the following questions and let the office know your thoughts.

- Do you throw away the box of envelopes given to you each year, because you give electronically?
- Would it be a hardship for you to be assigned a different number from what you have been using?
- Would you consider receiving your annual statement electronically?



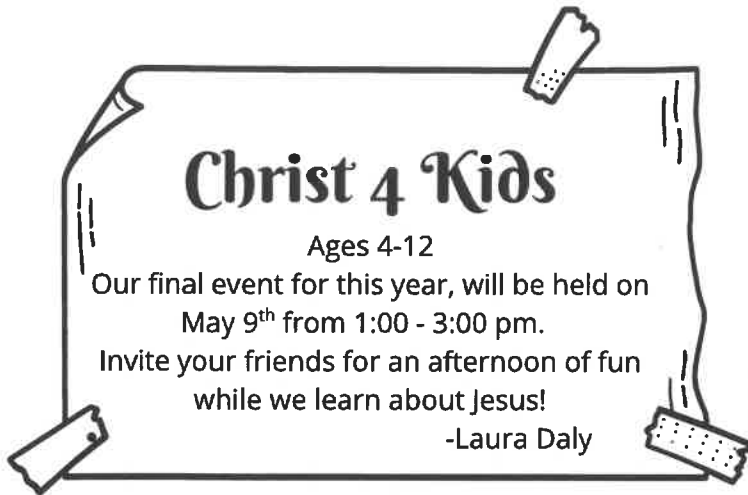
**Church Extension Fund**



**What A Feeling!**

With a Church Extension Fund investment, you feel good knowing your money is serving the Lord, while earning a competitive interest rate. It helps build facilities in which people can be nurtured in the faith of Jesus Christ. Current rates are posted on the bulletin board in the multipurpose room. For more information, contact call 800-242-3944.





## Christ 4 Kids

Ages 4-12

Our final event for this year, will be held on May 9<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 - 3:00 pm.

Invite your friends for an afternoon of fun while we learn about Jesus!

-Laura Daly



## Weekend Backpack Program

Another successful program ends the school year at the end of May having served 24 children at Au Gres - Sims Elementary School. Many thanks to all who support this ministry to our local community children.

-Roxanne Klein



## Camp Concordia

located in Gowen, Michigan, is a place where children can grow in their faith while swimming, kayaking, riding horseback, learning to play guitar, as well as participating in team challenges. All activities are designed to be age appropriate.

Check out the poster on the bulletin board in the multi-purpose room for more details about the different camps that area available in the months of June and July.

# Vacation Bible School

"Tropical Trek: Jesus Comes to Seek and Save" will be held Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup> thru Friday, July 10<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 - 8:00 pm.

Planning is in full swing and we are looking for **VOLUNTEERS** to assist in making this a SUCCESSFUL and FUN event for the children to learn about JESUS and HIS LOVE for us!

Postcards were sent to children who attended our VBS last year.

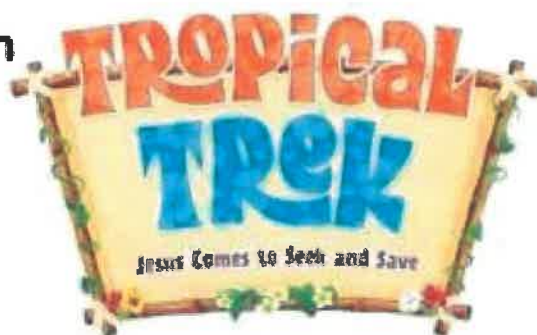
Registration forms are available in the office, table in the Narthex,, newsletter, and website. The completed forms can be mailed to the church or left in the office.

Volunteer registration can be found in the church bulletins and the multi-purpose room.

Any questions, contact  
Carol Britt, 989-876-7940 or  
email: [Carolanneb1@hotmail.com](mailto:Carolanneb1@hotmail.com)

29

**St. John Lutheran Church**  
**Vacation Bible School**  
**July 6 – 10, 2026**  
**6 pm – 8 pm**  
**4 yrs of age to teens**



MAIL COMPLETED FORM TO: PO Box 763; Au Gres, MI 48703

<b>Name:</b>
<b>Street Address:</b>
<b>City, State, Zip code</b>
<b>Contact Phone:</b>
<b>Emergency Contact Name &amp; Phone:</b>
<b>I will allow photos to be taken of my child: Yes or No</b>

**Children from this household to be registered**

<b>Child Name</b>	<b>D.O.B.</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Entering Grade</b>	<b>Allergies/special needs</b>



## The Sandhill crane: trusting God

The Sandhill Crane is an amazing bird that has one of the longest migration journeys of any bird on earth. Many of them travel from northern Mexico to northern Alaska and back every year. Some of these cranes live over 40 years and they mate for life. Every year from late February to early April, over 500,000 Sandhill cranes arrive in the Platte River valley near Kearney, Nebraska to rest and fatten up for the long journey north.

These birds are amazing in that they depend on God's provision all along the way. God designed them with a tall light body and a massive six to seven foot wingspan. Watching them in flight is something to behold as they seem to rise effortlessly into the sky. Although they are completely at the mercy of the weather on their journey, God provides for them with food, resting areas, and thermal air currents that allow them to fly fast and high. They can travel up to 400 miles per

day and some birds have been seen flying at altitudes of over 29,000 feet. An amazing journey which is only possible because of an amazing God.

There are some similarities between the migration of the Sandhill Crane and the struggles we face in life. The current Covid 19 pandemic reminds me that I don't have as much control as I think I have. We, like the Sandhill Crane, seem to be at the mercy of something that is completely out of our control, yet these birds teach us what it means to trust our God and Creator with each day of our lives while living on this earth. The writer of Job said it well:

Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you. . . .The life of every living thing is in His hand, as well as the breath of all mankind. Job 12:7,10

Craig Jentink  
Blog post 3/23/2021

## Mission Opportunities



- Take what you need. Give what you can. That's what The Closet Exchange is all about. We provide clothing at no cost for kids 18 and under in Arenac County — made possible by the generosity of this community.
- Some give. Some receive. Many do both. However you're able to be part of it, you are welcome here.
- Open Fridays & Saturdays | 9 AM - 1 PM

Are you looking for a way to give back some of the blessing God has given you? Following is a list of mission projects that are near and dear to the heart of St. John.

- LWML Mites: collected the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of each month
- Au Gres Christian Charities Food Pantry: hygiene and non-perishable items can be placed in the shopping cart in the fellowship hall
- Pennies for Seminary Students
- Can Tabs: for St. Jude Children's Hospital

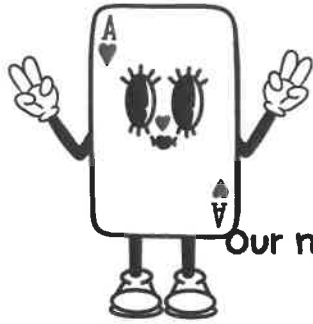
### May Mission of the Month:

**Mission Statement:** In loving response to Christ, the Servant, the Orphan Grain Train movement encourages and enables God's people to share personal and material resources in bringing Christ's name and character to needy people both far and near. Sometimes that character expresses itself as a word well spoken, sometimes as a bandage well applied, and sometimes as a child well fed.



**What is Orphan Grain Train?** Orphan Grain Train is a Nonprofit Christian volunteer network that shares personal and material resources with needy people in America and around the world. Grain Train volunteers gather donations of clothing, medical supplies, food, Christian literature, and other aid to meet real needs. The Orphan Grain Train movement is a loving response to Jesus Christ's example as a servant and His love for us.

**For more ways you can help:** go to Orphan Grain Train's website: [www.ogt.org](http://www.ogt.org) Select Michigan (Sebewaing) from the Branch Locations. From there you can view the current Wish List for the Michigan branch.



## Ladies Card Party

Get out of the house and  
have some fun!

Our next card/board game party is  
Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup> from 1-4 pm.

Fun, Fellowship, Snacks & Beverage provided.



## Coffee Hour

We all enjoy the coffee and snacks following worship each Sunday. Thank you to those who have provided snacks and assisted in set up and clean up each Sunday. If you would be willing to help in any way, please contact our May Hostess:

Jane Bourdeau and  
Vicki Huber

## *It Takes a Mother*

It takes a mother's love to make a house a home,  
A place to be remembered, no matter where we roam.  
it takes a mother's patience to bring a child up right  
and her courage and her cheerfulness to make a dark day bright.

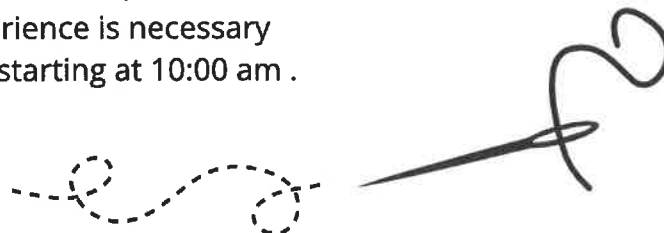
it takes a mother's kindness to forgive us when we err,  
to sympathize in trouble and obw her head in prayer,  
it takes a mother's wisdom to recognize our needs  
and give us reassurance by her loving words and deeds.

it takes a mother's endless faith, her confidence and trust,  
to guide us through the pitfalls of selfishness and lust.  
and that is why in all this world there can never be another  
who will fulfill God's purposes as completely as a mother.

-Author unknown

## Quilting

Come 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 on May 21<sup>st</sup> starting at 10:00 am .



A primary Sunday school teacher showed her class a magnet and how it drew things to itself. Later, to test their listening ability she asked, "My name starts with m and I pick up things. What am I?" A chorus of children hollered out, "Mother!"

Samaritan's Purse sends gift-filled Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to children in need around the world together with the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



### Recommended Items

- School supplies: pencils, pens, notebooks, crayons, coloring books, solar calculators
- Hygiene items: toothbrush, bars of soap (individually wrapped), combs, washcloths, nail clippers, hair ties, Solid non-medicated lip balms and deodorants are acceptable.
- Clothing/Accessories: T-shirts, underwear, socks, hats, sunglasses.
- Misc. small puzzles
- WOW items: an example is doll/Barbies or matchbox car  
A WOW item is simply the special gift that stands out when a child opens their box.  
Size needs to be shoebox-friendly.

### DON'TS (prohibited)

- NO Food/candy (chocolate, gum, seeds, etc)
- NO liquids/lotions (toothpaste, liquid glue, shampoo, lip gloss, bubbles, hand sanitizer)
- NO war-related items (toy guns, knives, military figures, or camouflage clothing)
- NO fragile items (glass, mirrors, or breakable snow globes)
- NO medication (vitamins, ointments, medicated chap stick, bandages, etc.)
- NO dangerous items (matches, fire starters, or sharp items)
- NO used items – EVERYTHING MUST BE NEW

Quick reminder as you shop: everything needs to be small enough to fit inside a standard shoe box (13 x 7 ½ x 4.7). Compact and easy to pack is the goal.

Thank you for helping us make these boxes meaningful and fun for the kiddos who receive them. As we gather these items, we're reminded of Jesus' words: "Let the little children come to me" Matthew 19:14

If you have any questions reach out to  
Laura Daly 989-213-3359 or Pat Metzger 989-867-4734.

# What Grace Is

Missouri Synod Blog post April 9, 2026

A dump was dumped.

Someone left a broken-down mess of a trailer here at the District office. Driving in on a Monday morning we all saw it. In a little turnaround in the driveway sat a 32-foot trailer. A dump. Shabby. Old. Ratty. A wreck.

Dumped.

Obviously, someone wanted to get rid of this mess of a trailer. And that person decided to just dump it here at the District office figuring that "the Church" would take care of that mess.

And we did. We called the authorities to see what was up. Then we called the tow truck. Ultimately, we paid to have it towed away. That person's problem was paid for by us.

Someone else's mess. We paid.

You see where this is going? Isn't this the story of the founder of our Church? We have nothing but a dump of a life to drop at the feet of Jesus. Through sin our lives are shabby, old, ratty, often a real wreck. But Jesus paid the price. He stood before the authorities on our behalf and then paid the cost of what it takes to remove what's wrong.

That dumped trailer turned out to be an amusing and ultimately not that expensive of a lesson about the grace of God in Jesus. Our mess. He paid.

But let's extend that lesson beyond Jesus and us and beyond this little event at the District office. Let's extend it to your congregation and your community.

I bet there are any number of people in and

*around your congregation who have made a mess of their lives. You might say a lot of dumpster fires on two feet. Often in the church we inadvertently give off signals that such people are not really welcome. We think about love for all, but we really like the people who come to us already pretty cleaned up. Their sex life, their language, their relationship with money, their taste in music, are already in pretty good order.*

*We don't want to go through the time and expense, the effort of relationship building and bearing with one another's failings, to be patient enough for the Holy Spirit to bring them into faith. It can cost a lot to love other people. They have made a mess of their lives, and we don't want to "pay for it."*

*And yet, that is exactly what Jesus calls us to do as his Body in the world. He calls us to seek and save the lost. That would be not just to suffer through someone dumping a dump of a trailer in the parking lot, but putting up signs that say "Dump your junk here. We're glad to get rid of it for you."*

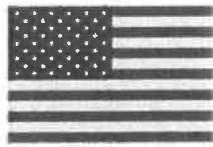
*This time of year, people do a lot of cleaning and throwing out of stuff. I know for a fact that often neighbors will drive by a church that has a big dumpster and dump their stuff there. And I know for a fact that that irritates people in the church. "Hey, why do we have to pay for getting rid of their trash?"*

*Next time that happens, instead of being annoyed, be reminded that, as beneficiaries of Jesus, the one who has paid to take all our "stuff" away, we should bear the "cost" of connecting with the wrecks of lives in our midst and serve them, bless them, share Jesus with them. Even if we have to pay for it.*

*Try this on your church sign: "Dump your stuff here."*

# St. John Lutheran Server Schedule May 2026

	Service	SOS/Pianist	Elder	Greeter	Usher	Altar Care	Attendance
May 3 9 am	W/HC	Charlie A	Eric S	Sheri C	Duane P	Marilyn W	W- Bible St - WOW -
May 6 6:30pm	Midweek W/HC						
May 10 9 am	W/HC	M Stafford	Denny K	Roxanne K	Charlie A	Cheryl A	W - Bible St - WOW -
May 13 6:30pm	Midweek W/HC						
May 17 9 am	W/HC	Diana P	Denny K	Paulette P	Duane P	Sharon V	W - Bible St - WOW -
May 20 6:30pm	Midweek W/HC						
May 24 9 am	W	M Stafford	Bob B	Veronica H	---	---	W - Bible St - WOW -
May 27 6:30pm	Midweek W/HC						
May 31 9 am	W/HC	Linda B	Bob B	Pat M	Charlie A	Vicki H	W- Bible St - WOW -



★ ★ ★ HAPPY ★ ★ ★  
**MEMORIAL DAY**  
 REMEMBER AND HONOR  
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

There is a cemetery in Okinawa where many American military men are buried. Near the entrance to the burial ground, visitors find a thought-provoking statement that we might recall on Memorial Day. The sign reads: "We gave our todays in order that you might have your tomorrows."

-Albert L Zobell in  
"Speaker's Handbook"

## St. John Lutheran Au Gres Newest Members

On April 12<sup>th</sup> Landin Bender was received as a member at St. John.

We also welcomed Paige Koenig by the rite of Holy Baptism on Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. Paige is the daughter of JR and Jarah Koenig and granddaughter of John and Nancy Koenig.



St. John Lutheran Church  
206 North Court St.  
P.O. Box 763  
Au Gres, MI 48703

#### Letter from the editor

Last month I was taking a walk and noticed a muskrat along the edge of the ditch. I stopped walking and watched him busily collecting twigs and blades of dry grass. He was oblivious to my presence for quite awhile, but something made him look up and as soon as he saw me, he dove into the water. I watched, hoping maybe I would be able to see some sign of his whereabouts. But as the water continued to flow along, I soon began walking and smiled as I thought about Mr. Muskrat.

I pictured him swimming rapidly to his burrow, somewhere along Tonkey Rd. I hoped he was successful in getting his handful of twigs and grass into his nest. I wondered if he told his wife about the "danger" he had just escaped?

Then it got me thinking. The moment Mr. Muskrat perceived danger, he did what God had created him to do. He escaped into the safety of water.

I began pondering. Do I do what God tells me to do when I perceive the danger that temptation to sin brings? Do I stay around, oblivious to the presence of temptation or do I escape to God's throne? "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." James 4:7 (ESV). Oh, that we would all follow the example of Mr. Muskrat.

*Sandra Jantzi*