



CONNECTIONS

January/February 2026

St. John's Lutheran Newsletter

NEW SERMON SERIES! STARTING FEBRUARY 21ST

"YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE"




Ash Wednesday
February 18
5:30
soup & salad potluck
6:30
worship

2026 Governing Board Members

Jeff VanValkenburg, Chairman
jeffvanvalkenburg@gmail.com

Dave Timmerman, Vice Chairman
dtimmfarms@gmail.com

Russ Becker, Secretary
hkp440@gmail.com

Rick Heine, Board Member
rheine@foxvalley.net

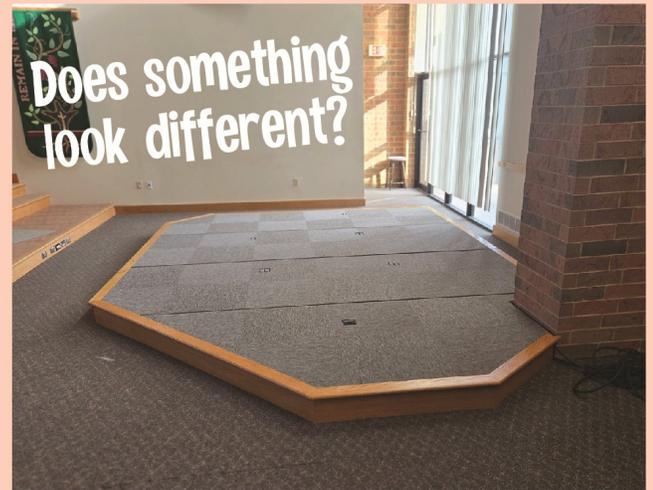
Vicki Hughes, Board Member
vickihughes65@gmail.com

Gordy Gotsch, Board Member
ggotsch4@gmail.com

Stephanie Pucci, Board Member
volleyball11@comcast.net

What's Inside...

Kids Krew.....	p 2
Youth Group.....	p 3
Christmas Activities.....	p 4-7
Children's Christmas.....	p 8
Bible Studies.....	p 9
Secret Servants.....	p 10
JOY.....	p 10
Calendar.....	p 11



Yes! Something is most definitely different - we have a stage! A designated area for our band has been added to the sanctuary. This will help us to better define areas for Holy Communion and the band, make it more convenient for speaker and amplifier placement, allow the congregation to better see the band, and will most likely eliminate the potential tripping hazard presented by electrical and extension cords. Thank you to Rob Rosemann, Doug Borhart, and Jim Johnson for all of their work on this project.

During the month of December, Kids Krew members did a great job of enhancing our Advent services with bell ringing, singing and even some skits. The fifth graders have been honing their skills at ringing bells and have actually become quite good at it, while the rest of the kids love to sing praises to Jesus!

Kids Krew took a minor sabbatical during the Christmas and New Year holidays but started up full force again on January 7th, and by the grace of God, continues to grow! New kids register every week, according to DCE Chloe, bringing the current roster to over one hundred kiddos! It's so incredible to see the Holy Spirit working throughout our community as these children with hearts on fire for Jesus continue to invite their friends to join them on Wednesday nights!

As you could imagine, more kids means more assistance is needed with games, Bible story, crafts and serving dinner. If you're interested in helping out with this growing mission, let DCE Chloe know and she can find a spot for you!

KIDS KREW



YOUTH GROUPS!



**SUNDAYS
6-7:30**

Freezing cold temperatures were not the best friend of the youth groupers at the beginning of December, which put a bit of a hindrance on some of their planned activities. Although it was very chilly, nativity sets were delivered but Noel-o-grams had to be postponed to a later date. Later in the month, however, they did enjoy their Christmas parties, complete with a “ginger-bread” (aka graham cracker) house building contest that included, per usual, the consumption of an excessive amount of items that were supposed to be used for decorating. They also raced to unwrap a giant ball of saran wrap while wearing oven mitts to cash in on small prizes, candy and trinkets as they flew everywhere!



**JUNIOR
HIGH!** GRADES
5-7



**SENIOR
HIGH!** GRADES
8-12



After a three week sabbatical over Christmas break, Youth Group resumed. However, it has undergone some changes. Instead of both the junior high and senior high groups meeting every Sunday, they are now going to alternate meeting on Sundays until further notice. This includes a time change as well for the junior high group. The junior high meeting time will move from 3:30-5:00 on Sundays to the later slot of 6:00-7:30. Note: the groups will **not** be meeting on the same night unless a special event is occurring. In addition, a light snack will be served every night moving forward.

This new schedule took effect on January 11 with the junior high group meeting first. They played sardines and other indoor games which allowed them to run around and burn off energy (their favorite thing to do). The senior high group met the following weekend to hang out and play games in the upstairs youth room (their favorite thing to do). Upcoming events include Nerf wars, card games, “grog” and a trip to a Chicago Steel hockey game.

HOLIDAY HOUSEWALK



The Marengo-Union Holiday Housewalk took place on Saturday, December 6th, and for the second year in a row, included a stop at our church. We hosted thirteen other crafters in our gym as well as establishing our own craft booth. We also opened our kitchen for a light breakfast and provided a delicious home-made soup and sandwich lunch. In addition, there were greeters waiting in Fellowship Hall in order to tell all visitors about everything that is St. John's.



This endeavor required a great deal of preparation by numerous people and also a number of people to make things run smoothly on Saturday. So, a HUGE shout out and THANK YOU to everyone and anyone who helped to prepare crafts or food, or donated crafts, crafting items, cookies, or soup. THANK YOU to the lovely greeters for making our church a welcoming location, to the awesome kitchen crew for serving food all day, to the craft booth team who were able to chat with our guests and to the set up and clean up crews! None of this could have been done without you, and through your efforts, over \$2100 was raised to support the Tuition Assistance Fund! Thank you!!



Fundraising

NATIVITY SETS

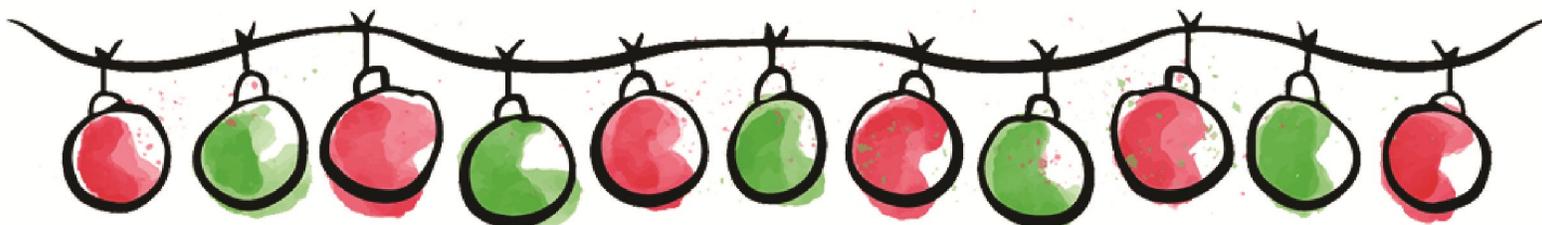
Also on December 6th, the youth and several adult helpers delivered and set up nativity sets throughout Marengo-Union and neighboring areas. This fundraiser brought in approximately \$3900 for the youth group! Thanks to everyone who helped to make this a possibility by their hard work behind the scenes creating, preparing, painting and gluing the sets together. The youth are certainly blessed by your faithful partnership! Stay tuned for next year when you can complete your set with wisemen and camels!



Noel-o-grams

Due to scheduling issues, a myriad of other holiday activities and subzero temperatures, finding a date to deliver Noel-o-grams this season proved to be quite the challenge. However, on Monday, December 22, a small troop of carolers was able to gather together and head out. With small numbers and a limited time frame, they unfortunately could not get to every name on the list, but the mighty band of singers traveled to twelve different houses in Marengo and Union to spread Christmas joy! Along their merry adventure the group actually sang to a few “RING” doorbells and even hauled in a recliner from a front porch. Regardless of the circumstances, all agreed they were blessed to be a blessing!

“THE BEST WAY TO SPREAD CHRISTMAS CHEER IS SINGING LOUD FOR ALL TO HEAR.”



PACKING GIFT BAGS FOR THE HOMELESS



Besides going to the Vineyard in Elgin on the third Wednesday of every month to serve the homeless a meal, at Christmas our “homeless mission crew” prepares gift bags for the people they serve. These gift bags include things such as socks, canned meats, crackers, toothbrushes, fruit cups, hand warmers, chapstick, kleenex, lotion, juice boxes and water bottles. This year the crew, with the help of some staff members, packed eighty bags to deliver to their friends at the Vineyard.

If you want to be part of the “homeless mission crew” that serves once a month, contact Jan Sherwin or stop by the office for more info. If you want to donate items to the bags next year, contact Jan Sherwin.



Christmas!

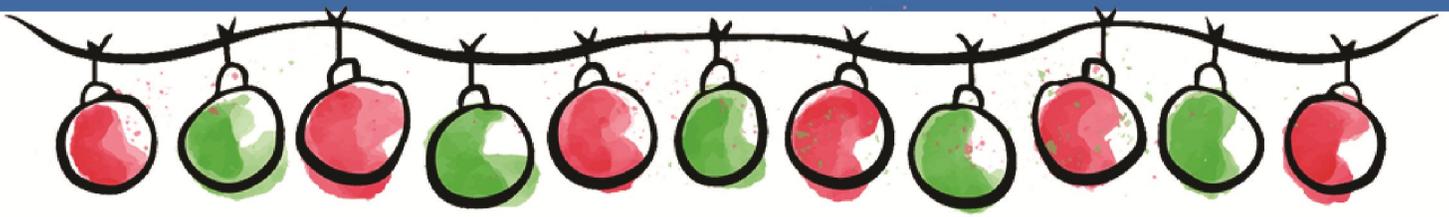
The season of Christmas is indeed a “most wonderful time of the year,” and Christmas at St. John’s is no exception! Such a variety of ways to celebrate with each other and share God’s tremendous blessings! Advent services, Operation Christmas Child, the holiday housewalk, Noel-o-grams, packing gift bags for the homeless, Christmas parties, delivering nativity sets, ringing bells, the giving tree, the children’s Christmas program, and of course, our Christmas Eve candlelight services and Christmas at the barn all help us to celebrate the birth of our Savior, as well as bring us closer together as a church community. As depicted in these photos, our generosity and love to others outside of our community and our love for each other is evident and alive in our church. We are indeed blessed as a church body. Continue to be a blessing in 2026!





Glory to the newborn King!





CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Few people can tell the story of Jesus' birth better than a group of children, especially the sweet ones that belong to us. DCE Chloe and her crew wrangled our little ones once a week for a few consecutive weekends and produced the most heartwarming retelling of the nativity story in McHenry County! It wasn't perfect. Some tears were shed. Some cues were missed. Performers even stumbled over their lines. A dad became part of the scenery. But...they were passionate, engaged, enthusiastic and LOUD! And everyone present was glued to their pews to watch this story unfold. What a most magnificent way to begin our Christmas journey - through the eyes of children in awe of their Savior's birth! Priceless.





BIBLE STUDY GROUPS



Thursday Morning Women's



The Thursday morning women's Bible class, to no one's surprise, meets every Thursday morning. Class typically begins at 9:15 with prayer requests, any business that needs to be addressed, a short devotion and prayer followed by Bible study beginning around 10:00 and continuing until 11:00. Many of the members then assemble for lunch together at Stonebaker's in Marengo following class for fellowship.

The Thursday morning class has been in existence for over 40 years with membership changing as women move in and out of the area and move on to be with our Lord. Many women join once they retire, but there is a variety of ages that participate, including young mothers. In the past year there has been a tremendous growth spurt with numbers going from ten to twelve

members to upwards of twenty-seven!

These women not only participate in Bible study, but will often assist at funeral luncheons when needed, help out at VBS, serve Lenten and Advent dinners before church services and donate money to various causes as the need arises. They have also attended retreats and conferences together. In December, the group celebrated with their annual Christmas party, where they participated in an ornament exchange.

In past couple of years, they have studied the books of James and Mark and did a study on the Lord's Prayer, as well. Currently, they are using a video series to make their way through Philipians. New members are always welcome to join this Bible study family!

Friday Evening Post HS Young Adult

The Friday evening young adult Bible study, which was established a little over two years ago, consists basically of young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. This small group meets every other Friday evening in the Fellowship Hall beginning at 7:00 pm and has approximately ten members that attend regularly.

They have covered a wide variety of topics including the fruits of the Spirit, the armor of God, anger, lust, how to improve your faith life and what it means to be a Christian in society. They have also examined some books of the Bible including 1 John, Romans, Job, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, Genesis and parts of Daniel and Revelation. In addition, they have volunteered at Feed My Starving Children and are currently looking for more opportunities in which to serve within the

church as well as in the community. If you have any questions or are interested in joining this group, contact Justin Lechner @815-262-8265

Their upcoming study schedule is as follows:

February 13	March 27
February 27	April 10
March 13	April 24





Secret Servants

Counters

Did you know that every week the variety of offerings and gifts that are given and sent to the church need to be sorted, separated and counted? It's true! All offerings and donations need to be sorted, accounted for and allocated into the proper designations every week, and then deposited in the bank. Fortunately, we have an app for that (kind of).

Our "app" is aptly called "the counters" and includes a small group of volunteers who assemble weekly on a rotational basis to take care of business. All envelopes need to be opened and the contents documented, as well as all loose bills in the offering plate need to be accounted for. Loose checks need to be sorted and placed into the proper designated areas, and typically photocopied as well, to ensure the donor is credited. And, of course, everything needs to balance (this is indeed the important part).

Obviously all of this takes time, so we'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank "the counters." Many thanks to Kelly LaSota, Bob and Carol Swanson, Deb and Tim Clancy, Sandy Haber, Jan Sherwin, and Laurie Mathiesen, plus our substitutes Russ Becker and Renee Sass.

Giving online, of course, is not within the counters realm - just offering plate items. If you're interested in giving weekly online, check with Jenny Arevalo on how to sign up for that - she'd love to help you!

If you do use envelopes, there are a couple of things that would make the counters life a little easier. One, it would be helpful if you wrote the amount of your offering on the appropriate place on the outside of your envelope because the counters need to do it otherwise to keep accounting straight. Two, bills and checks do not need to be folded to fit inside the envelopes. Thanks for your help!

The Scoop ON JOY Group!



The JOY Group gathered for two events in December. One was a trip to dine out and then walk through Anderson

Japanese Gardens in Rockford to see the Christmas lights on a very cold night. However, much to their delight, none other than Jeremiah Schauer was on deck singing Christmas Carols with the Rockford Lutheran Choir! Later in the month, JOY traveled to Hawthorn Woods to experience the Quentin Road Baptist Church's extravagant Christmas Pageant, which boasts live camels and donkeys!

A well attended lunch planning meeting was held in January to nail down a schedule for the spring which includes several trips, including concerts, museums, an art show and other fun adventures. Please join us for fellowship, fun and new experiences! The Spring schedule is listed below. Watch the bulletin and screens at church for more information and a chance to sign-up!

Sunday, February 1 Brunch at Crandall's Hebron 12:00 pm	Sunday, March 15 Sister's Easter Catechism (comedy) Egyptian Theater 2:00 pm
Saturday, February 28 Joseph Musical Raue Center 2:00 pm	Friday, April 17 Confectionery Tour & Sock Monkey Museum Long Grove 8:30 am
Saturday, March 7 Neil Diamond Tribute Woodstock Opera House 3:00 pm	Friday, April 24 4th Fridays Art Show Dole Mansion 6:00 pm
Tuesday, March 10 Valparaiso Choir Rockford 7:00 pm	Tuesday, May 12 Mitchell Park Domes Milwaukee 9:00 am
	Wednesday, May 27 Ten Chimneys Museum Waukesha 9:00 am





FEBRUARY 2026 CALENDAR



WEEKLY RECURRING EVENTS:

SUNDAYS:

7:45 am Traditional Worship, Sanctuary
8:45 am Fellowship, Fellowship Hall
9:15 am Sunday School, North Classrooms
Adult Bible Class, Room 110
Confirmation, Room 103
Teen Bible Class, Teen Room
10:30 am Contemporary Worship, Sanctuary
1:00 pm Pickleball, Gym
6:00 pm Youth Group, Gym

MONDAYS:

8:00 am Pickleball, Gym
9:00 am Quilters, Room 110

TUESDAYS:

8:00 am Pickleball, Gym
7:00 pm AA Meeting, Room 110

WEDNESDAYS:

8:00 am Pickleball, Gym
5:30 pm Kids Krew & Dinner
6:00 pm Adult Bible Study, Room 103
6:00 pm ESL Classes, Zion Marengo

THURSDAYS:

8:00 am Pickleball, Gym
9:15 am Women's Bible Study, Room 103
6:30 pm Pickleball, Gym

FRIDAYS:

8:00 am Pickleball, Gym

SATURDAYS:

8:00 am Men's Bible Study, Room 103
5:30 pm Traditional Worship, Sanctuary

OTHER EVENTS & MEETINGS:

FEBRUARY 1 (SUNDAY)

12:00 pm JOY Brunch at Crandall's, Hebron
6:00 pm Senior High Youth Group, Gym

FEBRUARY 3 (TUESDAY)

7:00 pm Adult Information Class, Room 103

FEBRUARY 10 (TUESDAY)

7:00 pm Adult Information Class, Room 103

FEBRUARY 13 (FRIDAY)

7:00 pm Post HS Bible Study, Fellowship Hall

JANUARY 15 (SUNDAY)

1:30 pm Youth Group to Chicago Steel, Geneva

FEBRUARY 17 (TUESDAY)

10:00 am Food Prep for Homeless, Kitchen
7:00 pm Adult Information Class, Room 103

FEBRUARY 18 (WEDNESDAY)

6:00 am Homeless Mission, Elgin
6:00 pm Lenten dinner, Fellowship Hall
6:30 pm Ash Wednesday Service, Sanctuary

FEBRUARY 19 (THURSDAY)

6:30 pm Governing Board Meeting, Room 110

FEBRUARY 22 (SUNDAY)

6:00 pm Junior High Youth Group, Gym

FEBRUARY 24 (TUESDAY)

7:00 pm Adult Information Class, Room 103

FEBRUARY 25 (WEDNESDAY)

6:30 pm Lenten Service, Sanctuary

FEBRUARY 27 (FRIDAY)

7:00 pm Post HS Bible Study, Fellowship Hall

FEBRUARY 28 (SATURDAY)

1:00 pm JOY to Raue Center, Crystal Lake



FYI:



The Scoop ON JOY Group!
FEB 28
1:00 PM
RAVE CENTER

BELIZE MISSION TRIP
JUNE 13-20 2026!

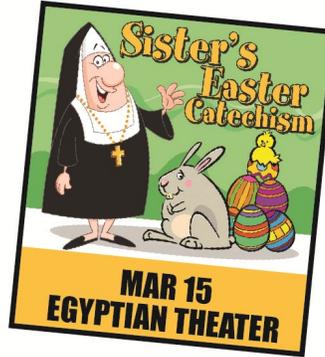


INTERESTED IN GOING? SEE PASTOR MARK.



Kids KREW
 meets Wednesdays
 from 5:30-7:00

JESUS LOVES YOU!



Sister's Easter Catechism
MAR 15
EGYPTIAN THEATER



UPWARD
COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
SEE CHLOE



UPWARD
OPEN TO GRADES PK4-5TH
SPRING SOCCER REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN!




RAINFOREST FALLS
 Exploring the Nature of God

SAVE THE DATE:
JUNE 15-19
VBS 2026!

St. John's Lutheran Church
6821 Main Street
Union, IL 60180