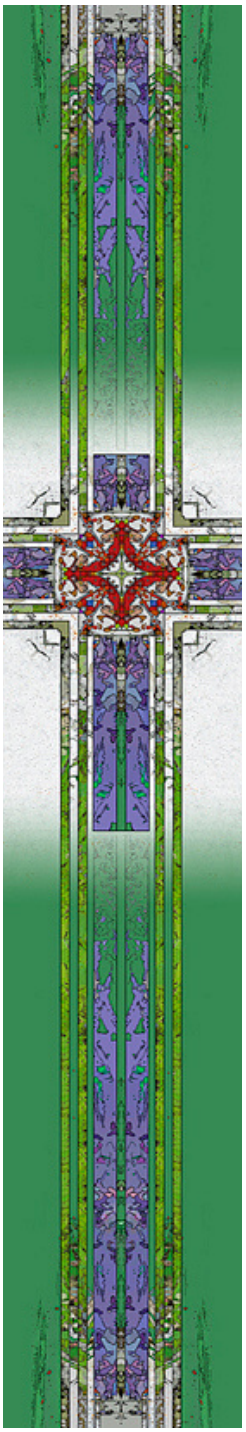
Saint John News

Proclaiming and Practicing the Love of Christ

From the desk of … Pastor Rempfer

November 2026

St. John: A **List**less Congregation



Pease read that title as a compliment! Let me explain. The dictionary defines listless as: Lacking energy or disinclined to exert effort; lethargic OR: Characterized by a lack of energy or interest.

My title is NOT using those definitions. In fact, coming on the heels of Pastor Appreciation Month, I suggest that we call November, "Congregation Appreciation Month." The opposite of "listless" is "active", "involved", "energetic", and we could easily fill the days of November with example after example, occasion after occasion where you guys and gals have stepped up with willingness and joy to be the living models of those adjectives. I even have times when my phone rings with members who are asking, "Pastor is there anything I can do, any way I can serve?" Servant hearts at St. John are alive and well. God bless you!

So, back to the title. I may have made up a new word or at least a new definition of a word. Describing St. John as a listless congregation, I mean listless in the same way that shoeless means you have no shoes. Dear members of St. John, we have no lists.

Now just in case I have really lost you, let me explain by going to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who were praying in the temple. The Pharisee offered a prayer that included these words, "Thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers. I fast twice a week; I give tithes (10%) of all that I get." See what he thought? Oh, to gain God's favor, he needs a resume of my life. "Here Lord, check out my list! That's worth something, right?"

Having a "list" faith is, by far, the most common religious error, past and present. Each of us are infected with the notion that what's on the "list" of what we avoid or what we accomplish is needed or at least helpful in gaining God's favor. Martin Luther put it this way, "Our nature leans that way. Our hearts are so used to it that we can't stop thinking that way."

With that being the case, it helps us understand why the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." That's why we just celebrated the Reformation and how, through it, God brought us to confess, "Grace Alone."

Continued on next page

In this issue …

- From the desk of... Pastor Rempfer
- Anniversaries
- Campaign Information
- The Attitude is Gratitude
- Pecans - Alaska Missions
- Growing in Thankfulness CDC
- School News
- Godparent Groups
- Middle School Youth Gathering
- Seminarian Update
- Set Apart to Serve
- Mission Moments
- Thanksgiving Dinner
- Official Acts

From the desk of... Anniversaries

From the desk of ... continued

That's why carved in the pulpit at St. John are words that the preacher can't miss, "Sir, we would see Jesus." All of Scripture, all of our Lutheran doctrine, all of our sermons are geared to the goal that St. John will be a listless congregation.

Jesus himself emphasized it as his parable continued. He included the prayer of the tax collector standing off by himself in the shadows. "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." No list. Just humility and faith that pleaded for mercy. And Jesus put his exclamation point on his parable saying, THIS MAN went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

We don't worship a God whose favor is in any way triggered or based upon our list of accomplishments. In fact, we worship a God who invites just the opposite. We are invited to come to him with our list of the ways we have messed up, with our guilty feelings, with our deepest regrets. And then, God has a list for us.

Jesus Christ, his beloved son:

- Born in human flesh to take our place under the 10 Commandments
- Obeyed those 10 Commandments perfectly and credits it to us
- Resisted perfectly every temptation as our substitute
- Suffered the punishment of hell that should have been ours
- Shed his innocent blood for every sin on our list
- Rose from the grave and shares that victory with us
- Ascended into heaven and intercedes to the Father on our behalf

It is THAT list that makes St. John listless. We don't need to, nor can we add anything it. Believe it! Enjoy it! It's all for you so that you go home from God's house hearing him assure you that you are justified. No lists. No boasting. Only grace. Only Jesus.

Pastor Rempfer



Monthly Anniversaries

In each newsletter we list the members of the church, school, and Child Development Center whose start date was in the current month.

Catherine Brase



Campaign Information

Bridge the Gap to Break Ground

By Adrienne and Matt Geidel

Thanks be to God – we have passed the $10,000,000 mark! What an amazing milestone! Thank you to the 33 families and individuals who have joined us in extending their pledges & gifts so far.

Fundraising continues for the capital campaign as building plans and project costs near completion. Currently, there is still $2.9 million to be raised in order to reach the projected cost of Phase 1 and be able to break ground. Praise be to God for the generosity of so many who have contributed so far! This building project is an important step in St. John's ministry and commitment to Christ-centered education.

Our Capital Campaign Committee aims to reduce this $2.9 million gap as much as possible by February 2027.

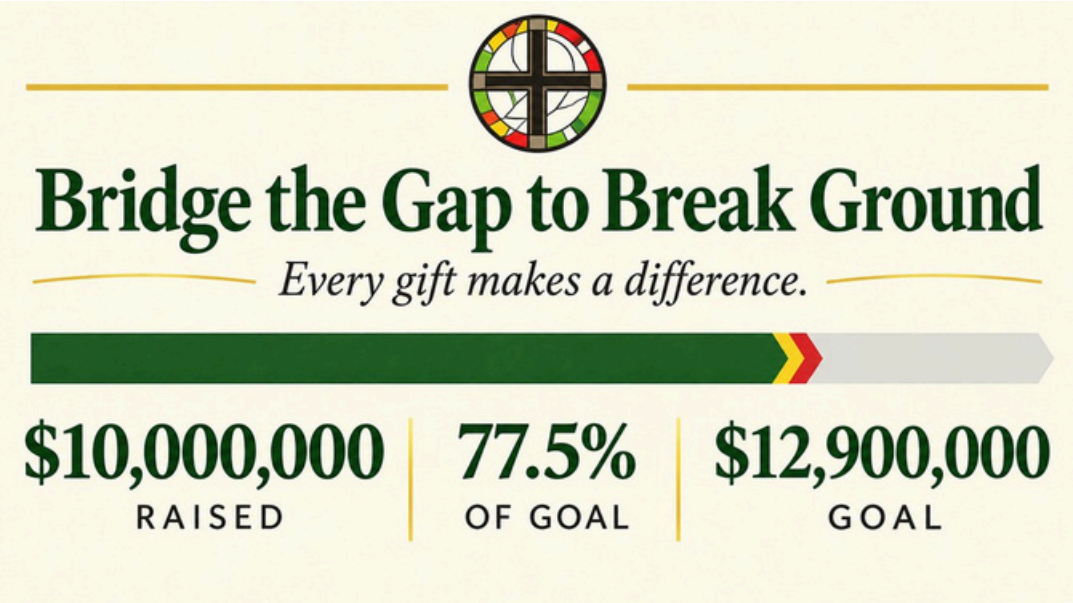
Lord willing, adequately reducing the gap will allow the Ministry Operations Board to present the building and funding plans to the congregation to review building and funding plans in early 2027 for their approval. If approved by the Voting Assembly, in a Voting Assembly, we could then schedule a spring 2027 groundbreaking could happen in spring of 2027.

Now is the time to bridge the gap! As we reignite our fundraising efforts this campaign, we want to place a faithful challenge before all of us.

In light of the blessings you have received from God, we ask you to prayerfully consider how you might help. Would you consider joining, repeating, or extending your pledge to help bridge the gap?

As campaign co-chairs, we believe this project will help St. John to continue living out God's mission in this world for generations to come. We are honored to be on this journey with you and look forward to seeing what God will accomplish as we work, serve and give together.

To extend your pledge or make a gift to the campaign contact Brenda in the church office.



The Attitude Is Gratitude

by Dr. Paul Vasconcellos

Since November is the month we celebrate our National Day of Thanksgiving, the Wholistic Wellness Team selected this theme—"The Attitude Is Gratitude." This is most appropriate, especially when we consider the significant role gratitude (thanks, thankfulness, thanksgiving, appreciation) plays in both Holy Scripture and our Lutheran faith and life. It is a virtue all Christians, hopefully, cultivate. It is a virtue which yields many positive benefits. It is a virtue that changes life experiences.

First of all consider this. There is nothing we have that we did not receive from God. The starting point for gratitude is not what we are able to offer God, but what God does for us. Foremost is the unasked for, unmerited gift of our salvation through and because of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died on the cross and rose again for us. Through Him alone we have the forgiveness of our sins and a new life now and for eternity. In other words, all we Christians have to say about gratitude starts here. As people of faith, we can only say with St. Paul, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Cor. 5:19). Whether we read the Old Testament or the New Testament, we find that Holy Scripture is filled with expressions of gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise.

Here are just a few examples. The Psalms are filled with expressions of gratitude, with songs of thanksgiving. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps. 103:2). Benefits? Blessings? See, for example, Psalms 103, 104, 105, 107. No wonder he says, "O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples!" (Ps. 105:1). Again, "Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Ps. 106:1). And again, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to thy holy name and glory in thy praise" (Ps. 106:47). Yes, the attitude is gratitude.

Remember in the New Testament the story of Jesus healing the ten lepers (Lk.17:11-19)? Only one of them returned to thank him. "Then said Jesus, 'Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' And he said to him 'Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.'"(Vs. 17-19). This should say something to all of us concerning Jesus' assessment of the role of gratitude.

Here are some examples from St. Paul. "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thess. 5:16-18). Again, "… be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph. 5:18-20). And again, "Rejoice in the Lord always; … Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7). Yes, the attitude is gratitude.

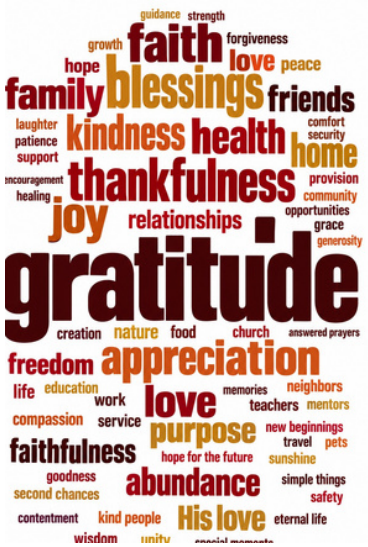
The Attitude Is Gratitude … continued

Martin Luther whole-heartedly agreed. In his Lecture on Romans, Luther considered gratitude as the first step in the worship of God. Gratitude "…keeps the heart for God and holds the heart directed toward him. …. Thankfulness is a virtue characteristic of real Christians; it is the worship of God at its best. They thank God and do it with all their hearts." Further, talk about "forget not all His benefits," consider Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism. After listing all the gifts (benefits, blessings) that have come to us from our Creator, he concludes: "And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all! For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. The is most certainly true." (Book of Concord, 2000), 354-355). The attitude is gratitude because it is a response to life as a gift from God.

As we further consider the attitude of gratitude, let's look at this from another perspective, the perspective and findings of psychological research. The research that has been conducted over the last three decades by positive psychologists has abundantly verified the beneficial impact the attitude of gratitude has on our mental, physical, and spiritual health and well-being.

Dr. Stefani Yorges, a psychologist, describes positive psychology as "a science that seeks to understand the factors that allow people to flourish, and gratitude has become a major focus of psychological research." Drawing from articles on gratitude from six different journals of psychology, she presents an excellent and concise summary of what research psychologists have discovered concerning the effect of developing the attitude of gratitude in our daily living. She writes: "A large body of recent research suggests that gratitude is the key to living life well. Grateful people are happier, less depressed, less stressed, and more satisfied with their lives and social relationships. Grateful people have higher levels of personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Grateful people have more positive ways of coping with difficulties they experience in life and rely less on dysfunctional strategies, such as avoiding or denying the problem, blaming themselves, or coping through substance abuse. Grateful people even sleep better."

The research has also shown that the attitude of gratitude has a positive effect on marital life. In troubled marriages couples express a significantly greater number of complaints rather than expressing their blessings and appreciation. In happier marriages couples recognize and express a significantly greater number of blessings and appreciation rather than complaints (about five blessings to one complaint). Gratitude builds positive healthy selves and relationships.



The Attitude Is Gratitude ... continued

Gratitude moves us toward happiness and marital success. Developing the attitude of gratitude doesn't just happen. We have to make a daily decision to practice it so it becomes a core part of our life. It is a conscious effort. In essence, gratitude involves our thinking (we recognize the goodness), our will (we choose to respond to the goodness), and our emotions (expressing our appreciation, gratitude, thanks).

Here are a few suggestions that could help one practice the attitude of gratitude. When you awake in the morning say to yourself: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24). You might follow this by praying Luther's Morning Prayer (Small Catechism).

In fact you can utilize the entire Section II. Notice how often Luther uses "thank(s)." Reading The Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise are a wonderful resource for the practice of gratitude.

Our hymnal, Lutheran Service Book, is a treasure chest for inspiring, supporting, and expressing gratitude. This in itself deserves a series of articles. For this article, however, here are just two things. Note the title Divine Service. These Services include The Lord's Supper which, historically, has been referred to as "Eucharist"—that is—"Thanksgiving."

Further, be sure to read the wonderful Introduction to The Lutheran Service Book, pp. viii-ix. Yes, the attitude is gratitude.

Finally, what frequently occurs in the literature on gratitude is advice by numerous psychological researchers to keep a "gratitude journal." In fact, Dr. Yorges advises this. She writes: "The task is simple enough. At the end of your day, think of at least three things that you are grateful for. The outcome of this exercise is astonishing. It has been shown to have a powerful effect of reducing the symptoms of depression and anxiety, while simultaneously increasing a sense of joy and well-being. In a recent study participant In a recent study participants completing this task for one week experienced those outcomes for six months! Why not give it a try for a week?" Excellent advice because the Attitude Is Gratitude!

Alaska Mission Team

Fresh Pecans Arriving Soon!

Fresh Georgia pecans will be available for sale in November before/after worship services in the west lobby. We will have pecan halves and pieces, as well as milk chocolate, dark chocolate caramel clusters, and cinnamon. Make plans to start your Christmas shopping early and support the Alaska Mission Team serving in Akiachak, AK. Please watch the Weekly Notes for an exact sale start date.



Growing in Thankfulness

by Tom Koffarnus

It truly is a great time to be thankful! The children here at St. John Child Development Center are hard at work learning through play every day. We continue to witness amazing growth from the children in our care. Whether it is building with Legos, playing in the dramatic play area, or coloring a picture, it all is about growth and development. Along with that growth and development our dedicated staff have worked diligently to gather assessments to provide families with updated information on their child's learning. The staff continues to partner with the parents as they discuss the progress being made during Parent-Teacher Conferences. We value our relationships with the parents as we work together to provide learning experiences for their children throughout the day.

The children have enjoyed some of the cooler weather by being sure to spend plenty of time playing outside. We can learn and stay healthy by getting that outdoor fresh air. It really is a blessing to see growth in the children from things such as being able to throw and catch a ball to pedaling a trike around the path.
Each day gives the children a new opportunity to grow and learn something new.

These little artists put in a lot of work growing this skill, and we are excited to show it to the families and St. John community. This month we are looking forward to our Art Walk which will be on Monday, November 23, from 6:15pm-7:15pm. This is a chance to show how we use art in our learning and proudly display works the children have created. Feel free to stop by to say hello and check out what the children have been making on November 23. It truly is a great time to give thanks to God!





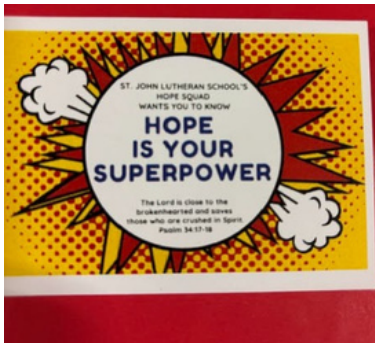


St. John Hope Squad Shares Hope at Scare at the Fair

By Katherine Steffen

Students from the St. John Hope Squad hosted a booth at Scare at the Fair, a Seward community event that draws children and families for a Halloween - themed event. Scare at the Fair is sponsored by Southeast Nebraska CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) and held at the Seward County fairgrounds. This year, the event had a record - breaking turnout of 430 kids who attended.

The St. John Hope Squad handed out candy and hope



to those in attendance, including cards with Bible verses.

The Hope Squad is made up of seventh and eighth graders selected by Mrs. Brashear and their peers.

These students are trained in identifying warning signs of mental health concerns including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) which is an emergency intervention to interupt a mental health crisis and direct a person to the proper care. Throughout the year the Hope Squad leads a variety of events and activities to educate, support and encourage peers in a positive mental health journey. Scare at the Fair was a new event added this year.



MANY THANKS TO ALL THE FAMILIES WHO DONATED CANDY TO SUPPORT THE HOPE SQUAD AT SCARE AT THE FAIR!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT. GOD BLESS THIS NOVEMBER!

Godparent Groups Smash Pumpkins

By Tim Oberdieck

Have you ever wondered how far a pumpkin would splatter if our Youth Director threw it off the gym roof into the parking lot? Wonder no more, we've tested it! While the spectacle is underwhelming, the buildup is exhilarating! This past October we led our first "Multi-level event" where the Godparents team led multiple events simultaneously. Around 50 high school students joined Tim Oberdieck in the fellowship hall at 7 p.m. for a devotion while Cayla Freeman led our large group team and parent volunteers in the gym as they set up for our Pumpkin Drop event.

At 7:30 pm students raced into the gym to compete in a variety of carnival games, all with the goal of winning supplies to protect their group's pumpkin from its upcoming skydive. Simultaneously, Marty Kohlwey led what we're calling Godparent Support in the Heritage Room to provide our Godparent leaders with some pampering (chips/salsa, chocolates, and delicious n/a drinks), time to process the first month of leadership, and continued education, all meant to sustain, support, and grow these dedicated and battle-trodden volunteers.We can't say enough about how thankful we are for the partnership of our 18 Godparent leaders, as well as our team-leads Marty Kohlwey and Cayla Freeman. twelve parents and other volunteers joined us to set up the night, lead carnival games, and help with event clean up! Thank you, parents, volunteers, and all who support our high school youth!





Smash Pumpkins ... continued







Upcoming Middle School Youth Gathering

This November, keep an eye out for information about our upcoming retreats! Our Middle School Youth Gathering team continues to grow! We'll be taking the four school vans and two parent minivans to Kearney, along with 41 students, up from 32 last year!

Our valiant six chaperones are excited for the challenge.

Our lineup for the high school "Pure Freedom" and "Bravehearts" retreats is stellar this year. Our teams continue to grow with St John members, along with members from Our Redeemer and the Rock.

These retreats are e a blessing to our students as well as our community partnership with our sister LCMS churches. We're excited to host young women at "Pure Freedom "on November 14th and young men at "Bravehearts" on November 15th.

You can sign up your student with this QR code

A Seminarian Update

To our brothers and sisters at St. John Lutheran,

Yet again, many transitions have occurred since I last wrote to you. My vicarage at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Kearney, Nebraska, finished at the end of July, and Clara, Elijah, and I moved back to Affton, Missouri, so I can continue my final year at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

I don't remember if I mentioned this in my last letter in the spring; Clara is expecting our second child, a little boy in December. Elijah was born on the 23rd, and now our second boy is expected on the 21st. Christmas time is going to be very busy for the Carlson household from now on if things go as planned. We are so excited for this new chapter of our lives and are grateful that baby number two is coming during Christmas break. God is so good, and I think He even has a bit of a sense of humor about these things.

This Fall at Concordia, I'm taking courses on the Gospel of John and the Book of Psalms as my Greek and Hebrew heavy hitters. One of the classes I've been most excited about is Rev. Dr. David Schmitt's advanced class on sermon structures. Preaching was one of the highlights of vicarage, and I truly enjoy honing this craft as I seek to bring God's Word to His people. Thank you for affording this opportunity for me and other students.

I've been told that this last year goes by quickly, and at least as of now, it seems to be. I couldn't get through this effort without the help of God and of His Church, as well as your generous financial aid. I thank God every day for all the support, prayers, and encouragement that you and so many others have been sending my way these four years of seminary. I look forward to writing to you again.

In Christ,
Aaron Carlson, fourth-year seminarian



Day by Day

By Ron Bork

Whenever you study God's Word or hear it at church, expect the Lord to change your life and strengthen your faith, for He desires to change your heart and mind by grace.
It is not enough to teach and instruct alone. There is also need for daily encouragement. (Luther's Large Catechism)

One of the real benefits in teaching in a Lutheran school is the daily Jesus time, religion class, confirmation class, devotion time and prayer time. What a blessing to be able to share your faith daily, to approach the challenges and the joys each day from a Christ-centered focus.

That's the blessing that our children in St. John School and Child Development Center experience on a day by day basis.

That doesn't happen by mistake or by chance. Our teachers are prepared for that in their training at one of our Lutheran colleges or universities. They see it modeled in their field experiences and in their student teaching as they prepare to become Lutheran teachers. And when they have their own classroom and students, they plan for those times to share the love of Jesus confidently and often.
And day by day we can pray for our school and CDC staff. Day by day we can pray for our young people who are preparing to be teachers. Day by day we can pray that other young, and maybe not so young people will answer God's call to enter full-time churchwork. Share the good news!
Day by day God is calling some to say yes to serving in His kingdom. Day by day God is calling all of us to pray for our current and future servants in the church. Join me day by day in prayer.

Ron Bork
SAS Congregational Representative
ronbork48@gmail.com

Sharing Jesus with Neighbors in Northwest Kenya

Submitted by Julie Johnston Hermann

This story by Mary Henrichs and photography by Erik M. Lunsford appeared in the Fall 2026 Engage magazine. Please go to engage.lcms.org to read the entire article.

The Holy Spirit is at work in refugee camps and other towns in northwest Kenya, bringing saving faith in Christ the Redeemer to all people.

In early 2025, the number of refugees living in the Kakuma and Kalobeyei refugee camps in northwest Kenya surpassed 300,000 for the first time. More than half are children. Many have witnessed unspeakable violence in the countries they have fled. Many are separated from the people they love, not knowing when or if they will ever be able to return to their homelands.

Sharing Jesus ... continued

Many have been living in these conditions for well over 10 years. Many are Lutheran.

Refugees from over 20 countries — primarily South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia — live under a scorching sun in a landscape of dust and thorns. Temperatures regularly soar to over 100 degrees. Shade is a rare commodity.

For the refugees trapped in a cycle of dependence and endless waiting, "the temptation to hopelessness is powerful,"
said the Rev. Shauen Trump, regional director for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Africa. (St. John Lutheran supports Rev Trump and his family with annual mission funding.)

This June, Trump visited Kakuma and Kalobeyei with a short-term mission team from Living Faith Lutheran Church in Clive, Iowa. Living Faith has sent a team to Kenya almost every year since 2012, and they've witnessed the despair in the camps up close.

"I had seen poverty before [visiting the camps]," recalled team member Joanne Diehl. "But I had never seen poverty of spirit like this. It's tempting even for the Living Faith team to hit a point of despair because of how little can be done to care for the physical needs they encounter. However, the team has also been able to witness some positive changes over the years — particularly in the Lutheran congregations they visit.

In the 2010s, the displaced Lutheran refugees living in Kakuma and Kalobeyei did not have pastors of their own, meaning that they would only receive Holy Communion when they were visited by a minister from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) or an LCMS missionary. Given the arduous, dirt-road journey needed to reach them, congregations could go months without receiving these holy, faith-sustaining gifts. One trip by LCMS missionaries in 2019 revealed a congregation that had not received the Lord's Supper in five years. Today, five refugees serve as pastors to the five Lutheran congregations in the camps, with more attending seminary to help ensure that the Lutheran refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyei will never again suffer a drought of Word and Sacrament ministry.





Official Acts

FUNERALS/COMMITALS

October 16, 2026, Judy LaRue Chloupek at the age of 85 years, 8 months and 7 days (non-member)

MARRIAGES

October 10, 2026, Blake A. Von Essen and Erin E. Pankoke (non-member)

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

TRANSFERS IN

(M/M) Keegan & Anna Bloomfield and Elliot, Blair & Clara
Alexander ”Alec” Johnston
(M/M) Joshua & Kelsey Maurer and Hallie & Calvin
Neal Patron
(M/M) Lucas & Rachel Smith and Tobias, Theodore, Phoebe, Eden & Georgiana
(M/M) Preston & Leah Sunderman

TRANSFERS OUT

(Rev/M) John & Teddie Genter and Zoe, Eliana, Emmet & Benjamin to Timothy Lutheran Church, St. Louis, MO

RELEASES

Allison “Allie” L. Kadavy
Tom Kadavy

The Ministry of St.John Lutheran Church

www.stjohnseward.org

Church

919 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434
402 643 2983
sjcstaff@stjohnseward.org

School

877 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434
402 643 4535
school@stjohnseward.org

Child Development Center

1053 North Columbia Avenue
Seward, Nebraska 68434
402 643 3122
cdc@stjohnseward.org

Newsletter staff

Editors
Katherine Steffen
Jeanette Niemann

Staff Writers
Sara Endorf
Jack Swanson
Katherine Steffen
Ron Bork

Deadline for the December newsletter is November 25, 5:00 p.m.
Email: newsletter@stjohnseward.org

To contact us:

Scott Bruick, Pastoral Leader
scott.bruick@stjohnseward.org

Nathan Scheck, Associate Pastor
nathan.scheck@stjohnseward.org

Jeri Morrison, Deaconess
jeri.morrison@stjohnseward.org

Tim Oberdieck, Director of Christian Education
tim.oberdieck@stjohnseward.org

David Rempfer, Pastor for Visitation and Pastoral Care
david.rempfer@stjohnseward.org

Paul Soulek, Director of Parish and School Music
paul.soulek@stjohnseward.org

Barb Mertens, Principal of St. John School
barb.mertens@stjohnseward.org

Tom Koffarnus, Director of Child Development Center
tom.koffarnus@stjohnseward.org

Cathy Brase, Business Manager
cathy.brase@stjohnseward.org

Ron Aring, Facilities Manager
ron.aring@stjohnseward.org

Please visit stjohnseward.org for additional staff contact information.