



Monthly Newsletter

ANCHORED IN CHRIST
through every season

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS TOGETHER

MAY 2026

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A HOUSE OF MERCY: HOSPITALITY IN THE CHURCH

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past eight months of serving among you at St. John's, I have heard something that is worth our careful reflection—not to shame, but to call us to repentance and to something better.

Some who have drifted away, both before and during the vacancy, have shared that they did not always experience our congregation as a place of warmth and hospitality. At times, words were spoken that felt harsh. At times, young families felt unwelcome because children were seen as a disruption rather than a gift. At times, those trying to serve were corrected sharply rather than encouraged.

That is difficult to hear. But it is also an opportunity—an opportunity for repentance, renewal, and growth in Christ.

The Church Is Not for the Perfect

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Mark 2:17)

The Church is not a gathering of the polished and put-together. It is a hospital for sinners. Every one of us—including you and me—comes with weaknesses, sins, blind spots, and rough edges. Christ receives sinners, and so we receive one another with patience and mercy.

Love Covers a Multitude of Sins

“Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” (1 Peter 4:8–9)

Christian love bears with one another patiently—choosing kindness over criticism, encouragement over complaint, and mercy over irritation.

Hospitality Without Grumbling

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”
(1 Peter 4:9)

Hospitality is not merely coffee and fellowship—it is a posture of the heart. We honor one another and make room for each other in love.



A Matter That Must Be Addressed

At some point, a note was left criticizing a child in our congregation—without a name attached to it.

This is inappropriate, cowardly, and not in keeping with the life Christ calls His Church to live.

Our Lord instructs us in Matthew 18 to speak directly, humbly, and in love—not anonymously or behind one another's backs.

Anonymous criticism avoids repentance and reconciliation. It wounds families and undermines unity.

In addition to this, I have recently learned that others have received anonymous criticisms regarding matters such as dress, church attendance, and other personal concerns. This is not a small or isolated issue. It is inappropriate, it is cowardly, and it is sin. It stands in direct contradiction to our Lord's command to speak to one another truthfully, directly, and in love (Matthew 18). Anonymous criticism avoids accountability, avoids repentance, and harms the neighbor rather than serving them. This is not how Christians are called to live.

Children are not interruptions to the Church—they are evidence that the Church is alive. And we will bear with one another in love, just as others bear with us.

Serving by Grace

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10)

Everything we do flows from grace. We serve not out of pride, but out of love.

A Better Way Forward

Imagine a congregation where parents are relieved, visitors feel welcomed, volunteers are encouraged, and members speak well of one another.

“That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 4:11)

Conclusion

Let us repent where we have failed, forgive freely, and strive—by God's grace—to be a congregation marked by love and hospitality.

For Christ has welcomed us. Let us welcome one another.

In Christ,

Pastor Ben Hollingsead





ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

YOUTH NEWS



BEAUTIFUL PALM SUNDAY TRADITION

Thank you to our adult choir members for partnering with our Sunday School children to sing "Hosanna to the King." This has become a cherished Palm Sunday tradition, and we are so grateful for this beautiful collaboration between young and older members as they come together to share Jesus's love through song and praise.



SS CELEBRATES END OF YEAR

We're excited to wrap up another wonderful year of Sunday School with a **special celebration on Sunday, May 17!** During worship, we'll recognize our students with awards, they will sing, and then we will follow worship with a fun-filled morning of "last day" activities.

We're also planning a lunch and would love for the entire congregation to join us. More details will be shared soon.

Come celebrate our youth and all they've learned and shared throughout the year. We hope to see you there!



RECOGNIZING GRADUATES

Each year, St. John's sends off our graduating seniors with Aitkin Gobbler colored quilts as a symbol of our love and support. This year, we will present quilts during worship on Sunday, May 17, to Braden Bartel-Wagner and Noah Rose. Please join us as we celebrate these two young men, give thanks for God's presence in their lives, and send them forward with our prayers. May they feel God's guidance in every step of their journey and know that their church family will continue to lift them up in prayer along the way.

Kids are invited to
**St. John's
VBS**

Answers **VBS**
**EMERALD
CROSSING**

An Irish Adventure
Through Psalm 23

**JULY
27-31**

9:00^{am} to Noon

**Ages 4 yrs to
6th grade in
fall 2026**

Register at www.stjohnaitkin.org

Grab your shepherd's crook and join the fun! Our Irish-themed VBS kicks off July 27th through July 31st and you're invited. From 9:00 am to 12:00 pm daily we'll explore the green pastures of Psalm 23. Come discover the heart of the Good Shepherd and the lesson David lived by, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Register at www.stjohnaitkin.org today! All lads and lassies age 4 through 6th grade are invited on our Emerald Crossing Adventure through Psalm 23. See you there!

ACT finished the season of Lent and entered the joy of Easter. With warmer weather lifting everyone's spirits, we've been able to enjoy some time outdoors. During Lent, attended midweek services together, encouraging the teens to sit as a group. It's a meaningful way to grow in faith together with a shared focus on Christ.

After Lent, we returned to our regular Wednesday schedule and spent time in devotions on Holy Week and Hosea. We look forward to studying the minor Prophets in the coming weeks.

We attended the MN State Bible Bowl at Concordia University in St. Paul. Teens representing St. John's were Jace Novotny, James Flerlage, and Addison Hollingsead, along with leaders Steven Burma, Tony Flerlage, and Pastor Ben.

Seven teams competed. After an opening devotion, our team played first on the main stage. Though we lost both matches in the double-elimination tournament, the teens competed well and learned a lot. They also noted how much easier it is to answer questions from the back of the room when there was less pressure.

In the individual written test, James earned third place after a tiebreaker! Congrats to James for his impressive accomplishment. The group then stayed to watch the remaining matches, help with event roles, and enjoy the fellowship of the day.

On the way home, we stopped for ice cream, played a couple games of bowling, and had dinner together before arriving back at church around 8 p.m. It was a long but rewarding day.

The Bible Bowl provided a great opportunity to dive deeply into the Gospel of John. We're thankful for the learning, teamwork, and faith strengthened through this experience, and we pray the teens continue to carry God's Word with them in the years ahead.





UPCOMING EVENTS

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

WE INVITE YOU TO CONFIRMATION SUNDAY

Come celebrate with us on Sunday, **May 3**, as Parker Espeseth, James Flerlage, Paityn Hawkins, Finn Nelson, Henry Nicko, Evy Olson, and Isabel Spicer publicly profess their faith in Jesus as their Savior and are confirmed. **The service will begin at 9:00 am.**



Let us rejoice with these confirmands as they affirm the faith into which they were baptized. The Lord who has called them by the Gospel continues to strengthen them through His Word and Sacraments, equipping them to live each day in His grace. As they grow in faith, may they take courage in knowing that God Himself is with them, guiding their steps and holding them firmly in His promises.



ACT RUMMAGE SALE

ACT is holding a rummage sale Thursday & Friday, June 11 & 12. They are accepting gently used items as donations. Please reach out to Lisa Flerlage or Kara Crowther if you would like to donate items. Watch for more information coming soon. We hope you are able to attend and find some treasures!



LUTHERAN ISLAND CAMP

CAMPERSHIPS AVAILABLE

St. John's is providing \$100.00 or one half of the cost of camp (whichever is greater) for any of our children that would like to attend a summer program at Lutheran Island Camp. You can go online to the camp website (www.islandcamp.org) to check on the summer camp possibilities. If you have any questions, you can call Debbie Schultz, 218-839-4322.

If you would like to donate toward this, please place your gift in an envelope marked: "LIC Camperships" and place the envelope in the offering plate.



Celebrating 100 years together

UPDATES / NEEDS



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO CREATE A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SLIDESHOW

We are looking for creative types who enjoy documenting St. John's history through pictures in a slide show presentation.

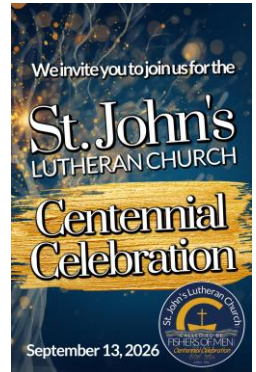
If you would be willing to help with the slideshow or would like more information, please contact Debbie or Joy for photo albums and Greta for digital photos.

INVITES FOR FAMILY AND FORMER MEMBERS

We realize that some of our members may have family or know former members who would enjoy attending our Centennial Celebration but may not be receiving our Monthly Newsletter updates. Please feel free to invite them. We would love to reconnect and catch up!

Invitations are available in the Narthex under the bulletin board. Take what you need, address them, add a stamp, and send them out.

Thank you for helping bring together our entire church family, past and present, as we celebrate our first 100 years!



CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

Don't forget to mark your calendars. Continue to watch for more details.



NEW DEACONS IN PLACE

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce the full Deacon team at St. John's, as there have been some recent changes. We encourage you to take a moment to get to know them, introduce yourself, and reach out with any questions or concerns you may have.

- Scott Bartz:** 763-614-4760
- Greg Neutz:** 651-964-8136
- Gene Pagels:** 218-731-6687
- Mike Quale:** 218-838-8587
- Tony Flerlage:** 785-317-1815



MAY BIRTHDAYS

Blessings on your special day!

Sampson Perrine	May 02	Carol Shields	May 08	Mike Quale	May 21
Kailey Plekkenpol	May 02	Brandon Wold	May 08	John Bender	May 23
Bill Thompson	May 02	Gene Pagels	May 11	Muriel Kingsley	May 24
Christina Burman	May 03	Amber Hollingsead	May 12	Cassa Ruschmeier	May 25
Monica Moore	May 04	Roy Van Horn	May 12	Jim Shirilla	May 28
Mark Splittstoser	May 04	Ron Ladwig	May 13	David Wilke	May 28
Ken Nelson	May 05	Trevor Borseth	May 15	Jason Wold	May 28
Quinten Crowther	May 07	Kyla Haugly	May 15	Clara Flerlage	May 29
Chris Wold	May 07	Isabel Spicer	May 16	Steve Wold	May 30
Ashley Gibbons	May 08	Stephani Nelson	May 17	Rodney Larson	May 31
Cooper Neutz	May 08	Tracie Becker	May 20		

**The birthdays listed are from our church records. Any mistakes are unintentional. Please notify the office of any mistakes, deletions, or if you do not want your birthday listed.*

THANK YOU FROM THE ST. JOHN'S CIRCLE

The St. John's Circle extends our sincere gratitude to everyone who helped make our Spring Luncheon such a success. Whether you brought a salad or a pan of bars, served, cleaned up, or simply joined us for the meal, your support truly meant a great deal.

It was a joy to gather as a community, and the wonderful variety of delicious food made the event even more special. Thanks to your generosity and participation, we raised approximately \$950. These funds will go toward additional silverware and help support the new furnace/AC unit in the parsonage.



The Circle would also like to share that Kara Crowther & Paige Beaufeaux will be leading Group Three. Thank you to both for stepping in to fill those positions.

A Good Reminder for all of Us



WHAT IS THE VALUE OF MY LIFE?

As we get ready to celebrate the confirmation of Evy, Finn, Henry, Isabel, James, Paityn, & Parker, it is fitting to share this story. It's a good reminder for all of us, both young and old.

A boy asked his father, "What is the value of my life?" Instead of answering, his father placed a small stone into his hand. It was ordinary-looking and nothing that caught the eye. "Take this to the marketplace," his father said. "If anyone asks its price, raise two fingers, but say nothing."

At the market, a woman stopped him. "How much for the stone?" The boy raised two fingers. "Two dollars?" she said. "I'll take it. It would look nice in my garden."

The boy went home confused and told his father what happened. His father nodded and said, "Now take the stone to the museum." The curator studied the stone carefully. "How much are you asking?" Again, the boy raised two fingers. "Two hundred dollars?" the curator replied. "We would be honored to have it."

Now amazed, the boy rushed home. But his father wasn't finished. "There's one more place," he said. "Take it to a jeweler." The jeweler examined the stone under bright light, his hands trembling. "This is one of the rarest stones I've ever seen," he said. "Its value is beyond measure. How much do you want for it?" The boy raised two fingers. "Two hundred thousand?" the jeweler whispered. "I'll take it."

The boy ran home, breathless. His father looked at him and asked gently, "Do you understand the value of your life now?" You see, the stone never changed. Only the eyes looking at it did.

In the same way, our worth has never been determined by the marketplace of human opinion. Some people see us and assign us a price based on our past, our failures, our background, or our wounds. They see only what is common. Others see potential. But only God sees us fully. Exactly as we are and exactly as He created us to be.

From the very beginning, God declared our value. Not with words alone, but with a plan. When the world saw us as disposable, God saw us as worth redeeming.

When sin fractured humanity, the price was paid when Jesus Christ, God's own Son, stretched out His arms on the cross and declared once and for all what we are worth. Not \$2. Not \$200. Not even \$200,000. But the life of the Son of God.

The cross is the ultimate appraisal of your life. Your value is not found in what others say about you. It is not found in your success or your mistakes. It is found in the One who created you, pursued you, and chose to die for you.

You were never meant to be displayed in the wrong places, surrounded by voices that cannot recognize your worth. God calls you into His presence, into His purpose, into the truth of who you are in Him. You are not a mistake. You are not cheap. You are not overlooked. You are deeply loved, intentionally created, and eternally valuable. Proved not by human opinion, but by the cross of Jesus Christ.

