

Isaiah 40:1, 3-5

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The holiday season is about to get underway in our homes and at church. Advent begins Sunday, November 30th. Advent is a four-week season of anticipation and waiting, reminding us that a light is coming into the world—Jesus Christ.

During this time, we are reminded of the voice of John the Baptist. Hundreds of years before his birth, the prophet Isaiah foretold of his role, writing: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"

It seems that our world could use a voice in the wilderness and some light these days. The amount of violence around the world is scary, and many of us have personal stories that at times can feel soul-crushing. As some sing "I'll Be Home for Christmas," others are at home filled with anxiety and despair.

The reasons are personal: the grief of a lost loved one, a broken relationship, a worry over health or a job, or the fear of deportation. Whatever the reason, these feelings are real. This is why Advent begins with the word "Comfort."

This is why the prophet Isaiah writes: "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain." For us

today, that means the valleys of despair are being lifted, and the mountains of anxiety are being made low.

Jesus Christ came to the world for you: for those who mourn, for those who are outcasts, for those whose lives are hard, and for those who are scared. December is a dark month with the shortest day of the year. It is into this darkness that John prepares the way for Jesus, the light of the world, to enter. Into the darkness of despair, the Messiah, our savior, is born.

Many use the time of Advent to reflect and sit in quiet solitude to center themselves in prayer. Lighting a candle in a dark room can be a reminder of the light that is coming to you, to help lift your burdens, and to be in unity with you. We will be lighting the Advent wreath candles during December for these same reasons.

In the Gospel according to John, he writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (*John 1:1-5, 14*)

This is the light we wait for in our darkness. May this season of Advent be a time when you allow that coming Light to level your own rough places. May this season of Advent and ultimately Christmas bring comfort and light into your world. Amen.

Peace,



Stormy Weather Approaching

How will you know if St. John's is closed for worship services and Sunday School? You can call the church office (608-643-2439) after 7:00am; the answering machine message will state the times of service or the news that the church is closed. You can also look at our Facebook page. If you have any doubt about road conditions and your ability to maneuver, don't risk a fall or an accident. Please stay home and join us via ZOOM.



Parish Planning Council Members:

Executive Director	Nancy Passehl	(608) 219-1936
Assistant Exec Director	Marv Hupp	(608) 370-2657
Secretary	Audrey Luetscher	(608) 332-6665
Treasurer	John Brennan	(608) 469-8786
Evangelism Board	Gwen Ringelstetter	(608) 643-6922
Fellowship Board	Cathy McAlexander	(402) 689-5196
Lay Ministry Board	Josie Fentress	(608) 963-8662
Member-at-Large	Mary Weeks	(608) 370-4999
Parish Education Board	James Newman	(608) 512-7623
Properties Board	John Ballweg	(608) 220-3894
PR and Social Concerns	Melani Wheeler	(608) 963-9540
Stewardship Board	Anne Klinkner	(608) 393-6453
Women of ELCA	Eunice Yanke	(608) 643-8289
Youth Board	Charlie Kruchten	(608) 604-5875
Youth Member-at-Large	Kendra Frey	(608) 370-3915

The Staff:

Please call the church office first when possible **(608) 643-2439**

Pastor: Tom Kreis tom@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Pastor: Sally Williams sally@stjohnssaukprairie.org

608-643-7810 **(home)**

Director of Music: Ruellene Seymour

ruellene@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Youth Director: Penny Johnson penny@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Custodian: John Hines john@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Office Staff: Aletha Ballweg, Jackie Frosch

aletha@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Financial Secretary: Bruce Fritsch bruce@stjohnssaukprairie.org

Sunday School Superintendent: Dale Clason

sundayschool@stjohnssaukprairie.org

St. John's Lutheran Church: (608) 643-2439

www.stjohnssaukprairie.org

Like us on Facebook at St Johns Lutheran Sauk Prairie

*Mission Statement: Christ, our strength and refuge,
calling us to serve*

St. John's Lutheran Church
100 Oak Street
Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin 53578



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Sauk Prairie Area Food Pantry

Food, paper products and cleaning supplies may be brought to the table in the gathering area at any time. These items are distributed to many families in the Sauk Prairie community. The food pantry always needs:

- Toilet paper
- Condiments (especially ketchup and mayonnaise, jelly)
- Baking mixes (such as muffins and pancakes)
- Box meals (e.g., Hamburger Helper)
- Canned meals (e.g., spaghetti, ravioli, etc.)
- Baking supplies (white and brown sugar, flour, oil)
- Diapers – sizes 4, 5 and 6

Thank you for sharing with others.



Birthday Greetings

We hope you take a moment to send greetings to the following people who have birthdays in December. The day is in parentheses.

Sharon Krintz (5)
E8795 Hilltop Rd.
North Freedom, WI 53951

Marilyn Herschleb (12)
129 Washington St.
Sauk City, WI 53583

Neal Jessie (18)
380 Washington St.
Prairie du Sac, WI 53578

Karen Ballweg (22)
9389 Blackhawk Trail
Sauk City, WI 53583

Carol Anderson (31)
S10976 County Road C
Spring Green, WI 53588

	<u>Lydia Circle</u> Thursday, December 11, at Darlene Holl's, 418 Lueder's Rd., Apt. 9, Sauk City	1:00pm
	<u>Martha Circle</u> Thursday, December 4, at The Pines, Marilyn Larson's daughter, hostess	9:30am
	<u>Ruth Circle</u> Monday, December 8, at St. John's Library	9:00am
	<u>Sarah/Mary Circle</u> Tuesday, December 2, at St. John's Library	9:30am

In November there were 25 ladies who attended Circle Meetings . Darlene Holl, Mary Weeks, Marian DeGiovanni and Kathy Lester led the Bible Study. In December, the Study will be led by Darlene Holl , Patty Barritt, Cathy McAlexander, and Kathy Lester.

Our Thankoffering Service was on November 23rd. We will continue to collect for this until December 14th As we have said before, this is an opportunity to express our thankfulness to God for His many blessings The offering goes to the National WELCA organization and provides funds for World Hunger, global ministries and other very important programs. If you haven't given and you would like to contribute, just put your donation in an envelope marked THANKOFFERING and you can put it in the offering plate or hand it in at the office.

We will not have our regular individual meetings in January. Instead, all Circles will be meeting together on January 8th at 10:00 a.m. Of course we will FIRST HAVE SOME FOOD! Please bring what you would like to share....such as leftover Christmas cookies, cheese, fruit, chips...anything you have on hand. We are hoping for good weather and good attendance. Bring a guest! We have asked Pastor Tom to lead the Bible study.

After that we will have our very special Candlelight Memorial Service, honoring all members of St. John's who have passed away during 2025. ALSO, any members who have lost loved ones during 2025 are invited to light a candle for their loved ones even if they were not members of St. John's. We hope to see you there...so mark your calendars now and plan to attend. This is always a very moving and impressive service.

Christmas Cheer recommendations: Hope House and Special Olympics - \$200 each.

Our Pennies for Poverty Fund will go to 6:8. We will leave the jar on the Name Tag Table until December 28th so you still have the opportunity to donate until then.

Ruth Circle has been visiting Special Friends during October and November. Martha Circle will visit them in December and January.

Remember to read the Special Prayer found in this Visitor on December 20th.



St. John's Prayer Chain

St. John's has an email Prayer Chain that is open to all. If you would like to have prayers for yourself or a loved one, please let the office know of your need. We use first names only in prayer requests. If you would like to be a Prayer Partner let Aletha know, aletha@stjohnssaukprairie.org or 608-643-2439, to add your email address to the group.

SPECIAL PRAYER

We invite you to join us in prayer on the 20th day of December.

God, our Creator, we offer this humble prayer at Christmas time. We come to worship with a song of thanks in our hearts—a song of redemption, a song of hope and renewal. We pray for joy in our hearts, hope in our God, love to forgive, and peace upon the earth. We ask for the salvation of all our family members and friends, and we pray your blessings on all people. May there be bread for the hungry, love for the unlovable, healing for the sick, protection for our children, and wisdom for our youth. We pray for the forgiveness of sinners and abundant life in Christ. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and power. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

—Rev. Lia Icaza Willetts



Milestone Ministry: Baptism Anniversary

All children of God who were baptized in 2025 are invited to take part in a special Baptism Anniversary celebration on Sunday, January 11 at either service. Please mark your calendars and invite your congregational sponsors to attend worship with you and your children that day. A letter of invitation will be sent home soon. We look forward to celebrating with you!



Christmas Eve and Christmas Morning Service Times

Christmas Eve Candlelight services take place at 1:00, 3:00, 5:00 and 7:30pm. The 1:00pm and 5:00pm services will be available live on Zoom.

Christmas Day we will celebrate with **one** morning worship service at 9:00am. This service will also be available on Zoom.

On December 28, we will have worship services at 8:00am and 10:30am as usual. There will NOT be Sunday School or Adult Education that day.



St. John's is a proud supporter of Just Bakery of Dane County. By purchasing baked goods through Just Bakery, we are supporting the neighbor in need of hope. Look for the Just Bakery representative to be at St. John's on December 21 in the fellowship hall between services with their wonderful baked goods.



Wanted: Mobile Meals Delivery Volunteers!

St. John's has committed to delivering meals the weeks of January 19-23 and January 26-30. We need two volunteers every weekday. One should plan to drive his/her car on the route, and one should plan to "run" the meals to the houses. Meals are ready for pickup at the Sauk Prairie Hospital near the employee entrance (**see the new map on the kiosk) between 11:20 and 11:30 a.m. Total delivery time is usually one hour. Routing and delivery instructions are provided when you pick up the meals. This is a very rewarding volunteer experience.

If you are available to help, please add your name and phone number to the schedule on the kiosk.



New Member Exploration

Are you ready to make St. John's your church home? We invite all visitors and those interested in membership to join our upcoming orientation class! If you know someone looking for a new church home, please pass this invitation along.

We have set the following dates for our new member process:

- New Member Orientation Class: Sunday, January 25th, at 9:15 AM (between worship services).
- New Member Welcome Sunday: Sunday, February 1st, at the 8:00 AM worship service, followed by a reception in their honor.

Look for more detailed class information soon! Please contact Pastor Tom if you are interested in joining, simply learning more about the possibility of joining, or are unable to attend class on the 25th - tom@stjohnssaukprairie.org or 608-643-2439.



With Sincere Sympathy

We offer our condolences to Brenda Schweitzer, Joshua and Jacob on the death of Brenda's mother and the boys' grandmother, Caroline Morrow.

We also grieve with the family of Sherry Anderson . She is survived by her mother, Janet Anderson, and her sisters Sheila Anderson, Shawn Anderson, and Shanlee Carden and extended family.

Baptisms

We welcomed a brother and sister into the family of Christ through baptism during the month of November.



Charles Maurice Troeller, son of Brady and Sydney (Bancroft-Hart) Troeller was baptized on November 2, 2025. His sponsors are Olivia Bancroft-Hart and Cory Cameron.

Morgan Rose Jones, daughter of Jacob and Tabatha Jones was baptized on November 9, 2025. Morgan's sponsors are Jami Brimeyer and Ethan Jones.

Please keep them in your prayers as they begin their journey in faith.



Dear Friends in Christ,

Many of you heard at our annual meeting that I will be taking an extended vacation/mini leave for four weeks beginning January 20 through February 16. This is an opportunity for me to rest and recharge. I am very grateful to our Executive Board for the gift of this time away.

Often when a pastor steps away for an extended period anxiety goes up, and rumors fly about their impending departure. Or that they have severe health concerns that are being kept secret. Neither of these are the case. Please pass around the rumor that I am looking forward to some time away from the sacred intensity of my position AND I am looking forward to returning to our ministry together.

Pastor Tom will handle all the pastoral duties, and I am working ahead so things like adult education will continue in my absence.

I hope you might join me throughout those weeks in some intentional slowing down. Yes, school activities, work responsibilities, and relationship needs all continue regardless of how badly we want a break, but we remain in control of so much more than we realize. Say no. Set boundaries. Get that hot cup of coffee and drink it while it is hot. Let the laundry sit for an extra day. Breathe.

It will be different for everyone, but it is vital for everyone to find those ways to rest. Sometimes when we can push out all that noise from the bustle of our daily lives, we can start to hear the whisper of the Spirit:

You belong to God. You are enough. You are loved. You were created with purpose.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

I know it is a funny time of year to be told to slow down, but as everything in the world speeds up, maybe it's precisely the time that God's people settle in for the season of waiting and hope of Advent.

In Stillness,

Fellowship News

Thank you to everyone who has contributed goodies for our Sunday coffee time. If you want to add to what is being served, feel free to bring your item and add it to what is being served. If you would like to donate all of the treats for a Sunday (whether homemade or purchased) please contact Cathy McAlexander (402-689-5196) so that we can plan accordingly.

We made the switch from Styrofoam cups to paper coffee cups earlier this year in an effort to reduce our carbon footprint (at a cost of \$100 per 1000 paper cups as opposed to \$40 per 1000 Styrofoam cups). Thank you for your continued generous donations during the fellowship hour that help offset this added expense. We continue to invite church members to bring their reusable /travel coffee cups to use during coffee time.

Looking ahead to Christmas, please remember that you can share your excess cookies, candies and other goodies with your church family on December 28 during coffee time.

The sign up for 2026 to volunteer to serve our church family during coffee/ fellowship time can be found on the kiosk . What a wonderful way to demonstrate to your children the gift of caring for others.



Offering Envelopes

The 2026 offering envelopes are ready for you to take home. If you give your offering electronically you will not have envelopes on the tables. If you want envelopes, or if your name was missed, please call the church office (643-2439) or email aletha@stjohnssaukprairie.org and we will gladly give you envelopes.



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Special thanks to Kim Diehl for the capelets made to honor those of us who celebrated our 90+ birthdays in 2025. ~ Ruth Dresser



H.E.L.P.—Red Sled Project

Help Excite Little People will be collecting new and gently used toys and items for teens this holiday season. The program is based out of the First United Church of Christ, Sauk City, but has become a community-wide project. All donated items are distributed to children/teens in the Sauk Prairie area.

Items should be taken to the Washington Avenue doors and placed in or near the large bins to the left of the doors or placed in the decorated box in St. John's west hallway (behind the library).

The deadline for donations to St. John's **December 7th**. Items may be dropped off at the First UCC until December 12th.



Sauk Prairie Area Caring Tree

St. John's is part of the Caring Tree community-wide effort to reach out to those in need during the Christmas season. Members may pick a tag from the Caring Tree set up in the gathering area. Most tags have ideas for hoped-for gifts for a particular child identified only by a number, age, gender, and size. You may purchase this gift and return it unwrapped with the tag attached and leave it under the tree.

Other tags ask for gift cards for local restaurants or more general "stocking stuffer" items that are appropriate for children, teens, or adults.

The Caring Tree also accepts financial gifts to allow volunteer shoppers to purchase gifts. Watch for the marked envelopes on the tree.

The deadline for returning gifts to St. John's is Sunday, December 7.

Adult Education

Please join us on Sundays in December and part of January as we learn more about Revelation, an often confusing and sometimes scary book of the Bible. We will explore how this book reveals who Jesus is and who we are called to be in response. **We will not meet on December 28.**

Sunday School News

Sunday School Christmas Program

Join our Sunday School students in celebrating the birth of Jesus through scripture and song on Sunday, December 14 during the 10:30am worship service in the sanctuary. We hope to see you there!

Thank you to Dave Sweeney, JoAnnah Sorg, Dale Clason, and Penny Johnson for organizing and teaching us the Christmas Program. We appreciate you.

We encourage families to bring non-perishable items for the food pantry as a means of supporting our students' in their offering project (see next article).

Sunday School Offering Project

Our offering for the 2025-2026 Sunday School year is being designated for Sauk Prairie Area Food Pantry. A nutritious diet is important to a child's health. Foods high in protein and vitamins help keep tummies full and immune systems strong.

Offering and items will be collected every Sunday we have Sunday School. Students are welcome to give each week or as they are able. EVERY gift counts. It's not the amount we give, but the reason we give we are God's Helping Hands. There will be a basket to put donations in by the Children's Library.

Christmas Break

There will be no Sunday School Classes Sunday December 21st or December 28th due to Christmas Break.

Middle and High School News

Caring Tree Shopping

On Wednesday, December 3, St. John's Confirmation students and adults are invited to go shopping for the Sauk Prairie Caring Tree. We'll leave St. John's after confirmation class (6:45pm), shop at Walmart in Baraboo, and return to St. John's around 8:00pm.

Registration is required, and we need drivers! Sign up before Noon on Monday, December 1, <https://tinyurl.com/CaringShopping>.

Caroling at Maplewood

St. John's Confirmation students will skip class on Wednesday, December 10, and go caroling! We have jingle bells, songs, and good cheer to share. Half the group will go to Maplewood Nursing Home, and half the group will go to The Pines Assisted Living Residence. Adults are encouraged to join us for caroling, and we also need drivers. We'll leave church about 6:00pm and return about 6:45pm. If you can help transport students, please email penny@stjohnssaukprairie.org.

Thanksgiving Success

Thank you to all of the St. John's youth and adults who helped peel potatoes for the Sauk Prairie Community Thanksgiving Meal! During this act of giving, confirmation families spent the afternoon preparing pounds and pounds of potatoes for the meal. We are grateful to everyone who took the time out of their day to share God's love.

Thank You to Food Pantry Volunteers

We give a great big "Thank You!" to the volunteers who helped serve our community members in need, by working at the Sauk Prairie Food Pantry this past October. Sauk Prairie Food Pantry is a critical resource for our neighbors in the villages of Prairie du Sac, Sauk City, Merrimac, and the Bluffview Community. Thank you to Henry Dean, Willie Pickett, Charlie Lueck, Ken Lueck, Robin Lueck, Kiptyn Suchla, and Nellie Kaderavek for their hard work and awesome service to others.

Christmas Eve Worship Assistants

Ushers

1:00pm Rob Richard, Doug Pape, Landon Pape

3:00pm Dale Haroldson

5:00pm

7:30pm

Candlelighters

1:00pm Nellie Kaderavek, William Leith, Will Sandberg

3:00pm Charlie Lueck, Henry Dean, Kiptyn Suchla, William Leith

5:00pm William Leith

7:30pm William Leith

Readers

1:00pm Carrie Richard

3:00pm

5:00pm Denny Dederich

7:30pm Cathy Yanke

Greeters

1:00pm (Front) Todd & Gina Wytttenbach (Side) Parker & Landon Pape

3:00pm (Side) Dale & Dana Haroldson

5:00pm

7:30pm

Communion Set-up/Clean-up

1:00pm Linda Michaels

3:00pm Marilyn Herschleb

5:00pm

7:30pm

Communion Assistants

1:00pm Nadine Lauer, Linda Michael

3:00pm Kris Frey, Marilyn Herschleb

5:00pm Roxanne Zick

7:30pm

Technology Team:

1:00pm Sandberg family, Reid Hart

5:00pm Ellen Jorgensen

Stewards

1:00pm Nancy Passehl

3:00pm Gwen Ringelstetter

5:00pm Gwen Ringelstetter

7:30pm John Ballweg

Christmas Day Worship Assistants

Ushers: Todd & Gina Wytttenbach

Reader: Marilyn Herschleb

Communion Set-up/Clean-up: Joe & Alice Chenoweth

Communion Assistant: Roxanne Zick

Technology: Lisa Davis

Steward: Audrey Luetscher

All Saints Sunday



On November 2 we gave thanks for the lives of those who have been gathered into our heavenly home since All Saints Day of 2024. Those we miss are:

Janice Carlson
Dick Dobrzynski
Ellen Hamlin
Wanda Kohlman
Caroline Morrow
Almay Nelson
Betty Page
Diane Tenley

Roger Clason
Betty Fisher
Judy Kahl
Rev. Duane Lokken
Eugene "Gino" Mowitz
Betty Risley
Jim Weeks
Deane Yanke

Please keep the families of these loved ones in your prayers this holiday season.



PASTORS NOTES

Dear St. John's Family,

I'm sharing this now because our next newsletter won't be until the 1st of January. Even as we look toward the 25th, I pray you find time in the four weeks of Advent to pause, reflect, and prepare your heart for the Light that is coming."

As much as pastors around the country try to encourage their congregations not to skip Advent and move right from Thanksgiving to Christmas, I must admit it can even be difficult for me! Since I was a kid, I couldn't wait for Christmas Day. Even though I'm much older now, I still find it hard to resist moving right to the celebration.

Whatever your plans are for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, God bless you. Some of you will be here with us, others may be traveling to visit family, while others might just not have the strength to venture out for various reasons.

Wherever you are during this special season, and at all times, remember that you are a beloved child of God. You and all that surrounds you are the reason Jesus Christ came into this world. It is indeed special that our God chose to come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. We are not on this journey alone.

This will be Karen's and my first Christmas season with you, and we are eternally grateful to be here. Part of the excitement that already builds up inside me is the chance to worship with you all during this season.

God bless you and keep you, now and forever. Amen. **Tom**

Dear St. John's Family,

I want to share an important update about how we manage the financial health of St. John's—a responsibility your church leadership takes very seriously.

We are beginning a new and necessary chapter in how we handle our day-to-day financial operations. For many years, we've relied on QuickBooks, but they recently announced two major changes, and we have learned a few things:

- Prices will increase significantly next year.
- They will no longer support the desktop version we currently use.
- It has come to our attention that QuickBooks works better with for-profit businesses.

After exploring alternatives, we discovered the best solution was already here: Icon Systems. We already use Icon for tracking giving and membership, so moving our general ledger and financial reporting into this system is a natural and efficient next step.

To strengthen our financial management even further, we will also partner with a local accounting firm. This professional team will handle daily tasks such as bill payment, payroll, taxes, and financial reporting. This change brings tremendous benefits—it ensures compliance with complex tax laws, provides deeper reporting, and streamlines processes for the future.

Our Treasurer, John Brennan, will continue in his role and work closely with the accounting firm to ensure everything is managed with care and integrity.

I also want to express heartfelt thanks to Bruce Fritch, our Financial Secretary, for his faithful service this past year. Bruce has been instrumental in helping us navigate this transition, and we are deeply grateful for his dedication. We will recognize Bruce officially in the near future.

Please know that your church leadership is confident this move to Icon Systems and a professional accounting partner is the right path forward. It will keep our financial management strong and secure for years to come.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Nancy Passehl, John Brennan, or me.

Peace,
Pastor Tom

Advent is the first season in the church year, comprising the four weeks before Christmas. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin, "to come," and the church has observed Advent as weeks of preparation since the fifth century with themes of watchfulness, preparation, and hope infusing this season. Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation for Christmas.

Meaning

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word for "to come". Advent is a time to look forward to the birth of Jesus and his second coming.

When it is

Advent is the first season of the church year and begins on the Sunday closest to St. Andrew's Day, which is usually around November 30. It lasts for four Sundays.

Themes

Advent is a time to reflect on themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. It is the anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ and his coming again.

Colors

The liturgical colors for Advent are typically blue, which represents hope.

Traditions

Advent traditions include:

- Advent wreaths: Wreaths made of evergreens in the shape of a circle to symbolize eternal life.
- Advent calendars: Calendars with a "window" for each day in December.
- Candle colors: Candle colors vary by denomination and congregation. Some traditions include three purple candles and one pink candle.
- Advent hymns: Hymns that help focus on the season.
- Bible readings: Bible readings about the coming of Jesus.
- Nativity scenes: Nativity scenes.
- Stars and candles: Stars and candles for decoration.

(From ELCA Archives – What is Advent)

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING November 9, 2025

(In building and via Zoom platform)

PPC Executive Director, Nancy Passehl, confirmed at least 50 members were present and called the meeting to order at 9:06 am. The purpose of the meeting is to approve the 2026 budget, vote on nominees for the Parish Planning Council, approve nominating committee members for PPC recruiting, and approve Synod Assembly volunteers.

The minutes of the November 2024, Congregational meeting were published in the November Visitor as well as in the October 26 and November 2, 2025 Sunday bulletins in lieu of reading them at the meeting. Motion to approve the minutes as provided was made by Janelle Hupp and 2nd by Donna Nelson. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Nancy described the 2026 budget changes that were printed and available for review in the bulletin. She pointed out the salary budgeted follows the synod guidelines for salary which is based on years of experience. There is a difference in the budget this year due to Pastor Tom and Karen living in the parsonage. There is also not a youth trip in 2025 so we do not have that budget concern. Our intent is to continue with an intern in June 2026 and therefore we budgeted for 1/2yr salary and ½ yr living expenses if needed for the intern. The total budget is down by 8%. John Brennan is here if you have specific questions. A motion to approve the budget was made by Bob Nelson and 2nd by Melani Wheeler. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Nancy thanked our outgoing board chairs (Tracy Pape, Sean Jager, Gina Varley, Roger Seymour, Todd Wyttenbach, and Cathy Yanke) for their years of service. She then moved on to list nominees of Audrey Luetscher--Secretary, Anne Klinkner--Stewardship, Mary Weeks--Member at large, Josie Fentress--Lay Ministry, Charlie Kruchten--Youth Board. Jerry Kaufmann made a motion to approve Kendra Frey as Youth Member at Large. A motion to approve the nominees was made by Cathy McAlexander and 2nd by Alice Chenoweth. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Third, we approved the nominating committee to recruit members for additional PPC members that includes the Lead Pastor, three congregational members (self-nominated) that include Kathy Lovell, Dianne Brice, and Lon Kaderavek. Three PPC members will be determined. A motion to approve the nominees was made by Marv Hupp and 2nd by Mary Weeks. Motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Our final topic was to accept nominations for attendees to the Synod Assembly in May 2026. We can send 3 adults (either 2 males and 1 female or 2 females and 1 male), 1 young adult (under 30 years old) and 1 high school youth. Our Lead Pastor and Pastor Sally are both voting members. Dianne Brice self-nominated as well as Susan Heide and James Newman. The under 30 category person will be determined. Nancy Passehl will find an additional person to attend. A motion to approve the nominees was made by Darlene Holl and 2nd by Tom Varley. If any adult under 30 or a high school youth is interested, please contact Aletha Ballweg or Jackie Frosch in the church office.

Other news: Nancy acknowledged that we had a very busy and active year and thanked our TNT and the call team for their work. Our year with Intern Elise shows St John's is a teaching congregation and we are very proud of it.

Thanks to our entire staff for working so hard this year to keep us up and running and even more importantly thriving. Our PPC is great and had a great year of volunteering over and over.

We are very happy to have Pastor Tom aboard. Especially Sally who took the lead. In recognition of all Pastor Sally has done she will be taking an extended vacation time January 20th for four weeks, to renew and rev up for the coming year. She is not leaving, not on sabbatical, just using some very much earned time away in combination with her vacation.

Properties- A huge thank you to John Ballweg and committee for overseeing our updates to the parsonage and the entire building inside and out. The Properties budget went up by almost \$14,000 over last year. While that is a very large increase, costs like natural gas, utilities, and insurance are just a few things that are more expensive. We are very grateful for the contributions this year to refurbish the parsonage to make this a comfortable home for Pastor Tom and Karen

Looking further ahead with Properties, other projects include replacing/rewiring the sanctuary light fixtures, sealing and re-striping the parking lot, replacing blinds on the windows in the educational wing, and replacing the rubber membrane roof on the Fellowship Hall. We are doing advance planning for some of those projects now and will share additional information when we feel it's time to move forward.

Nancy then thanked everyone for the support and appreciation shown to all of us and your willingness to continue to be involved, volunteer, give in time, talents and finances. We are an amazing St John's. The chosen word for 2025 was "transparency" and I feel we did a great job at being open, honest, and forthcoming. Our word for

2026. It is “VISIONARY”. Let’s look above and beyond, reach for the stars and dream and we will achieve our dreams with everyone’s help.

At 9:23 am, Bob Nelson made the motion to adjourn the meeting and was 2nd by Donna Nelson. Director Nancy Passehl asked if there were any objections and after receiving none, she adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted, Cathy Yanke

PARISH PLANNING COUNCIL MINUTES
DATE: November 4, 2025

Present: Nancy Passehl, Tom Kreis, Sally Williams, Gwen Ringelstetter, Marv Hupp, Eunice Yanke, Tracy Pape, James Newman, John Brennan, Cathy McAlexander, John Ballweg, Roger Seymour, Gina Varley, Melani Wheeler, Sean Jager, Cathy Yanke

Absent: Todd Wytenbach

Call to Order/Opening Remarks:

Meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. by Nancy Passehl. Nancy P asked for approval of the agenda. Motion to approve was made by Melani and 2nd by Roger. Motion carried. A devotion/prayer was then given by Gwen.

Secretary Minutes:

The October minutes were submitted online by Cathy Yanke. A motion to approve minutes was made by Gina and 2nd by Tracy. Motion carried.

Treasurer report:

The committee reviewed and discussed the October 2025, Treasurer Report submitted by John Brennan.

October report numbers.

Current Month Income	Current Month Expenses	Current Month Balance	Year-to-Date Income	Year-to-Date Expenses	Year-to-Date Budget
39,778.80	46,942.63	-7,164	462,606	451,695	521,008

The executive board has decided to make a change in how we do our bookkeeping. Starting January 1, we will be contracting with an outside bookkeeper to handle record keeping and bill paying. This change will facilitate direct deposit of employee pay and handle the fairly big change from QuickBooks record keeping to

using our church Icon system. This change will save us about 600 dollars a year. The version of Quickbooks software we have used for a number of years will no longer be offered by Quickbooks, requiring the change.

A motion to approve the financial report was made by Eunice and 2nd by John Ballweg. Motion carried.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Evangelism: Gwen Ringelstetter reported:

- Still looking for a Board Photographer, next photos to be taken are for new member installation.
- Gathering 2025 Graduate addresses, to send Care Kits.

Fellowship: Cathy McAlexander reported:

- We served a Welcome reception honoring Pastor Tom and Karen. We served homemade apple crisps with vanilla custard and a cheese and sausage platter with crackers.
- We presented Prayer Calendars for members to pray for our pastors and cards to be signed for each pastor.
- We honored our members who are 90 years of age and older with a reception where we served a variety of quick breads and cheese and crackers. Honorees who were present received an individual quick bread to take home to enjoy. We also had cards for church members to sign to send warm wishes to them. Shawls were given to each 90+ member. The shawls were hand crocheted by Kim Diehl.
- At adult education, Roger Seymour suggested we repeat the game night that was held last February. He sent info to me but suggested James and Tracy be involved in the game night.

Lay Ministry: Gina Varley reported:

- UCC will be hosting the ecumenical Thanksgiving Eve service on Nov. 26th.
- The Sunday School Christmas program will be during worship at the 10:30 service on Dec. 14th. Early service will have the regular 3rd Sunday in Advent service.
- We are doing some research preservation and repair of hymnals.
- Josie Fentress will be taking over as Lay Ministry Director.
- Lay Ministry will decorate the altar for Thanksgiving on **Saturday morning Nov. 15th at 8 am.**
- Candle set up will be **after late service on Sunday December 21st.**

Parish Education: James Newman reported:

- Sunday School Christmas program will be on December 14th. The 8am service will be the normal Advent 3 service. Dress rehearsal will happen in between services. The 10:30 service will combine Advent 3 and the Christmas program will happen during the normal reading time and will take approximately 20-30 minutes. This is different from previous years and there was nothing wrong with that, but we are exploring to see if this schedule is a better fit for our Sunday school families.
- Confirmation students will be at Maplewood village on November 12th. They are also peeling potatoes for the Sauk Prairie thanksgiving meal Wednesday before thanksgiving at noon.
- Adult Ed wrapped up a book study this month. Upcoming topics are LGBTQ+ and pronouns, and hard conversations with family and friends

Properties: John Ballweg reported:

No meeting this month.

PR & Social Concerns: Melani Wheeler reported:

- Reviewed items for the Gun Violence items. Shared the book that I ordered and I will have available in library soon for folks to check out if desired.
- Just Bakery in full swing.

Stewardship Board: (Anne Klinkner/Todd Wyttenbach) reported:

- **Annual Financial Review Timing** will take place on Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 5:30 PM. All members of the Stewardship Board are invited to be present. All team members who participated in the 2024 annual financial review will return for the 2025 Financial Review.
- **Fall Stewardship Campaign** will be held October 19, 2025. John Brennan will prepare and deliver the Stewardship Sunday Temple Talk this year. The focus for the Temple Talk will highlight the community aspect of St. John's and all of the good things we can accomplish as part of a community both within the walls of the church and outside the walls. The Temple Talk will invite people to come in and join in our community activities.
- The format for the Time and Talent Survey will remain the same as last year. The pledge card will not be used this year. Update: It will be included for one more year.

- The mailing/distribution plan is as follows: The letter, Pledge Form and Time and Talent Survey will be mailed USPS to those without email. Others will receive with the Friday Notes. Hard copies of the Time and Talent Survey and Pledge forms will be available in the Narthex area.
- During 2026, our Stewardship Display in the Narthex will highlight our accomplishments and missions with the intent to educate people and encourage increased giving.
- **Venmo and Paypal Suspension/Vanco Options Update** Work continues on this.
- **Thank You Todd Wyttenbach** Anne thanked Todd for serving as chairperson of the Stewardship Board this past year. Todd will remain on the board. A few new items in the last year included a display board in the Narthex highlighting an expense each month for 12 months that is covered by giving and a revamp of the financial report to have it better match the categories used for budgeting.

Women of ELCA: Eunice Yanke reported:

- Five ladies attended the WELCA Biennial Convention on October 4th at The Grove in Mazomanie
- Pennies for Poverty offering will be collected for the remainder of the year in connection with the convention, but sent to 6:8
- Thankoffering service will be Sunday, November 23rd
- Ruth Circle will visit Special Friends in November.
- The Bible Study Leaders meeting for November will be on Tuesday, November 25th at 9:00 a.m.

Youth Committee: Tracy Pape reported:

Youth Board – October 2025

Leadership Transition

- Tracy invited Charlie Kruchten and Penny Johnson to a meeting to review upcoming youth activities and committee operations.
- Tracy updated Charlie on the remaining 2025 calendar, outlined 2026 plans, and provided:
 - A list of Youth Committee members and contact information
 - The submitted 2026 youth budget
 - Copies of the October 2025 PPC agenda and October 2025 Youth Committee minutes for reference
- Discussion included the frequency and format of Youth Committee meetings, as well as PPC meeting schedules

and locations, to help familiarize Charlie to both committees.

- Charlie Kruchten will officially join the Youth Committee at the November 12 meeting, where Tracy will introduce him before regular business begins.

Program & Event Updates

October 2025

- Corn Maze Outing: October 15, 4:45–7:00 p.m. (organized by Penny).
- Food Pantry Service: Partnership with 6:8; sign-up and communication coordinated by Penny.

November 2025

- Thanksgiving Community Meal: November 26, Noon.
 - St. Al's Potato Peeling—volunteers needed for peeling and dicing. SignUpGenius and email coordination by Penny.

December 2025

- Christmas Caroling: December 10, 6:00 p.m. at local nursing homes.
 - Adult drivers needed; return to St. John's for hot chocolate and cookies. Sarah Goetsch, volunteered to be a driver.
- Caring Tree Shopping: Sunday at 9:30 a.m. (date TBD).
 - Budget: \$900; limited number of student shoppers.
 - Adults needed for driving.
 - SignUpGenius and email coordination by Penny.

January 2026

- Winter Youth Night: January 7.
 - Supervisory and volunteer roles were discussed. Committee shared ways they can contribute. Also a discussion was had for a dinner option.

February 2026

- Potential Winter Activity Options:
 - Ice Skating at The Edgewater
 - Snowshoeing
 - Candlelight Hike at Mirror Lake

March 2026

- Ash Wednesday / Lent: Student-led service planned.

Member at Large: Roger Seymour reported:

· No report provided.

Youth member at Large: Sean Jager reported:

· No report provided.

Pastor/Intern Reports

Tom's Lead Pastor Report:

Worship & Program Planning

- Completed the 12-month preaching schedule in collaboration with Pastor Sally.
- Initiated Christmas season worship planning, including the children's Christmas play, Christmas Eve services, and other seasonal events.

Pastoral Care

- Conducted hospital visits to several members who were at UW Hospital, St. Mary's, UW Hospital on the east side, as well as multiple visits to visits to Sauk Prairie Hospital.
- Visited several people at Maplewood and the Pines.

Administration & Finance

- Collaborating with Nancy P. and John Brennan to re-evaluate financial reporting due to significant changes with the church's QuickBooks system.
- Began the preparatory paperwork for annual staff reviews.

Sally's Report:

- Safe Surrender of Firearms Update: Bishop Joy said other congregations have done this without issue, so it is supported by the synod. Our insurance does not have an issue with these events (past congregations have our same insurance). The local PD is interested in working with us and prefers the end of April. We will meet with the pastors of a church that hosted this event in the past to get more information.
- Donna Knickmeyer is our homebound communion coordinator. She shared that many of our folks are enjoying Zoom and don't feel it's necessary to have home visits on top of Zoom church (some still desire visits from pastors). We are always happy to increase visits as pastors and volunteers as desired!
- We've had a number of baptisms this summer/fall. Please be sure to reach out to these families and welcome their little one into the faith community!
- Pastor Tom and I will be attending a required boundaries training on the topic of gender justice all day Thursday. This is part of a three-year cycle.
- Safety Team: I'm starting to work on putting together the notes from our past meetings in a cohesive, easy-to-read format. Our next meeting TBA is focused on youth safety.

Old Business:

- Congregational meeting Nov 9 – need a budget summary voting on approval of the budget, nominating committee-need 3, Synod meeting May 15-16 need three and also approval of PPC. Topics for meeting include approving the budget, voting in new PPC members, volunteers to attend the synod meeting and nominations
- RIC Speaker – Dave Morstad – Dec 2nd meeting. Dave is Katie LaVigne's dad who is a pastor in Watertown. Their congregation recently completed the Reconciled in Christ (RIC) and will present to our PPC their experience and share thoughts. They will plan a 60 min presentation and will be at the next PPC meeting in December.
- Thank you to members departing. Nancy thanked Tracy, Sean, Gina, Roger, Todd, and Cathy for their service to the PPC. New members will be at the next meeting.

New Business:

- Financial duties – hiring service for bookkeeping. See Treasurer notes
- Aletha's hours and part time for Jackie. As Tom announced in church, Aletha's hours have been changed to Mon, Wed, Thursday and Jackie will work Tuesday and Friday. They will continue to look for the best ways to share the job responsibilities.
- Sally – vacation leave for a month mid Jan – mid Feb as a thank you for her extra efforts during the transition period between Pastor Fred and Pastor Tom.

Parking Lot Items:

- TNT – bucket list of items brought up by members that need additional discussion
- Strategic Plan

Next meeting is Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 6:00 pm.

Devotion will be given by John Brennan.

Gina made a motion to adjourn our meeting, and the motion was 2nd by Tracy. Motion carried.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:52 pm. with The Lord's Prayer lead by Tom.

Respectfully submitted by Cathy Yanke.



Happy December Birthday!

The day is in parenthesis.

Our Youngest:

Tripp Dvorak (13) Anna Troeller (30)

Our Sunday School Students:

Olive Rennie (4)	William LaBerge (6)
Evelyn Haffemann (6)	Audrey Maestri (15)
Paisley Stuetgen (19)	Sylvie Miller (19)
Gibson Koenig (23)	Hattie Roloff (25)
Harper Wasserberg (29)	

Our Youth:

Elio Piccinelli (2)	Dylann Fisher (5)
John Brennan V (5)	Michael Paul (11)
	Lilly Weittenhiller (15)
Josie Kinney (14)	Kate Endres (19)
Nellie Kaderavek (18)	Parker Frosch (24)
Evan Ryan (21)	Hudson Ballweg (28)
Willy Pickett (26)	

College and Career-age Young People:

Savannah Acker (2)	Landon Schultz (9)
Lily Fauerbach (11)	Destiny Bailey (15)
Hannah Stephan (16)	