

The Mustard Seed*

Newsletter for members and friends of
St. John's Lutheran Church, Waterloo
(Bennington) ELCA



2026



In the outstanding musical *Hamilton*, there's this repeated question, "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" *Hamilton*, you'll recall, was killed in a duel by Aaron Burr. Who tells *Hamilton*'s story after his death? (Eliza *Hamilton*, his wife, does.)

At our synod gathering in Waverly in June, the bishop asked-challenged participants as he invited us to ponder, "Can we keep updating our stories as congregations?" He pointed out how many of our congregations started around ethnicities—German, Norwegian, Swedish and had its own stories to tell.

In 2026, those ethnicities aren't as helpful in defining who and how we are today. And that's okay! What are our stories today? Who tells our story now, in 2026? For SJB, (see below)

July

- 5: 9 AM Worship with communion
- 12: 9 AM Worship/Fellowship
Semi-Annual Meeting
- 18: 10 AM Dunkerton Days Parade
- 19: 9 AM Worship with communion
- 26: 9 AM Worship/Fellowship
1 PM **SJB Kayaks at George Wyth**; contact Dan and Deanne for details; open to all. Bring your own lifejackets and kayaks, too, though many kayaks are available from Deanne and Dan. You provide your own snacks and beverages, too.

August

- 2: 9 AM Worship with communion
- 3-5: PB in Des Moines for The Jordan Project (see pg. 3)
- 9: 9 AM Worship/Fellowship
2:30 PM VBS Day!! See pg. 2
- 16: 9 AM Worship with communion
- 23: 9 AM Worship/Fellowship
- 30: 9 AM Worship/Fellowship

September

- 2: 7 PM Confirmation Orientation
- 6: **9 AM: Last service at 9 AM**
- 13: CHURCH at 10 resumes!
- 20: SUNDAY SCHOOL STARTS: 9 AM; Church council
- 27: **9 AM Sunday School; 10 AM: Worship**

part of our story includes the natural disasters that struck the area in 2000 and 2008. How have those events shaped our story? We saw both resilience and generosity as we moved forward.

But we are not simply people of the past. We have stories yet to write. God has stories yet to write through us.

What stories is God looking to write through us as we reach out to welcome those who may not have a church home?

Or who may have had a church home but now are having to look elsewhere for spiritual nurture, care, community and involvement? We can be the ones to help others write new stories.

The gospel for June 28, Matthew 10: 40-42, lifts up the theme of welcome. Hospitality is one of the great hallmarks of religious traditions regardless of denomination "brand name."

As we think about telling stories and God writing new stories through us, I pray that one of the things that will (continue to) be said about SJB years from now is that we, who had others open their doors for us, opened our doors to others.

What might we do to start to better prepare for welcoming others? Something to ponder!



*Why "The Mustard Seed?" In Matthew 17 and Luke 17, Jesus said that mustard seed size faith is enough. God is the one who makes things happen! Even a little belief is enough from us! This newsletter is a little glimpse into life here at SJB. Enjoy! We're also on Facebook! Look for the church page and the youth and Sunday school page, too

Council news

There was not a quorum at the June 21 council meeting, so no actions were taken.

Discussions about property included the lighting update, the clogged drainage tile and the need to improve drainage, the unexpected replacement of a leaky water heater and preparations for the July 12 semi-annual meeting.

Planning for Sunday School and VBS occur at end of month.

Pastor presented briefly on The Jordan Project, a program out of Grand View University. Link to council to follow.

Collecting School Supplies for LWR Kits



NEEDED:

70 sheet spiral notebooks (4 per backpack)

Crayons: 16 or 24 pack

Ruler w/centimeters

2.5" Eraser

Unsharpened Pencils

Pencil sharpener

Black or blue ink (NOT gel)

Blunt scissors

Attention Grades 4-5-6: You get your own class & room this year!

This fall, we will add a third section of Sunday School! Grades 4-6 will now be together in their own classroom.

We've worked hard over the past few years to grow our Sunday School, and now we're to the point where we can add this age group and they can have their own class. Hurray!

The curriculum we'll use is called "Connect" and builds in more hands-on learning activities. It also has a Bible specifically for this age group, so we will order those and then begin using them for our Bible presentation to third graders, too.

We'll continue with grades preschool-kindergarten and grades 1-3. This is an exciting time, and we look forward to this next chapter in our life together.

Bethany will put out the call for teachers, too, for the lower grades. We're so thankful for all from the congregation who have taught our children in the past. YOU have shared the love of God with a child—what a gift.



Aug 9 = VBS Galaxy Launch Crew, Pizza Supper and Pool Party



The planning team for VBS met June 29. Get ready to join the launch crew as we go into "Galaxy and Launching Kids on a Mission of God's Love." Blast off time starts at 2:30.

The afternoon will include lesson time, crafts, games, music and more! We'll have a pizza party at church and then head to the Tripoli pool. The pool is an indoor one, so we won't be rained out this year! Lifeguards provided, too.

Families may want to bring swim gear to church and change here before heading out. You're also welcome to bring lawn chairs because there's an outdoor patio.

We're also looking for helpers and are asking families to pre-register *if at all possible* so that we can see the grade levels represented and plan accordingly for supplies, too.

The link below will take you to a Google sign-up where you can both register your family members and indicate your interest in volunteering.

IF YOU WANT TO HELP BUT DON'T DO GOOGLE FORMS, we'll also have a clipboard in church. 😊

<https://forms.gle/T9evAY4UX1ai6u9P8>





2026 FFA Tractorcade Treat Making

When the Tractorcade comes near, the Dunkerton FFA kicks it into high gear! This crew and other friends came out to SJB to make bars and coffee cakes for the Tractorcade folks who were passing through the area June 15-17. In 3 short hours, they'd made 5 coffee cakes and hundreds of Cheerio Bars and Scotcheroos for the pit stop at Dusk-to-Dawn.

With SJB being out in the country, we have to work a little harder to connect with the community. This was another way we could connect because, thankfully, the Dunkerton FFA knew they could come to St John's when they needed space and multiple ovens!

The Jordan Project: What's that?

Pastor Beth and St John's were invited by Bishop Jones to consider being part of the 2026-27 cohort group for The Jordan Project (TJP), hosted by Grand View University, Des Moines, and funded by a Lilly Grant.

After discussion at council and looking through the link, [The Jordan Project | Grand View University](#), the council gave PB a "thumbs-up" to proceed. After applying June 25 and then being interviewed by the director of the program on July 1, Pastor Beth was accepted for the 2026-27 year. She will be in Des Moines Aug. 3-5.

Three project goals of TJP are as follows:

1. Provide radical **hospitality**. We will love well by creating space for pastors and congregational leaders to experience God's grace anew in community, to be vulnerable in their weariness, joy, dreams, deepest callings, and pain, to bear witness to the work of God we see in each of them, and to encourage by speaking courage, hope, and audacious faith into them. For congregations to thrive, they need to be poured into.

2. **Equip** pastors and congregational members with opportunities to explore the congregation's history, values and mission. Remembering who they have been helps identify values and better prepare and plan for the future. Values lead vision, and when congregations have a clear sense of identity, they can adapt to changing contexts while exhibiting clarity about their values.

3. Walk alongside congregations as they **innovate**. After congregations reflect on their history, values, and mission, they will engage in a community-based project that reflects their congregational values and meets the needs of their community's changing social and cultural context. Throughout the project, the Jordan Project will provide guidance as congregations cultivate Christian practices as they take their next faithful steps in ministry and service.

To facilitate this 10- month program and to create a community-congregation project, we as congregation and pastor will put together a project team of 3-5 people. People on the team will need to be able to commit to a monthly meeting to go through the materials that guide the process. There will also be opportunity to follow up via Zoom with the program leadership. Seed money for the project is provided, and the grant covers all travel and housing expenses.

What people can start doing right now is praying: for the team formation, for idea generation, for project creation and process engagement. This is an exciting time!

A Lutheran Services in Iowa Success Story that YOUR offerings helped make happen!

“Without Amy’s support, I would still be an addict, and I wouldn’t be where I am today,” said Michelle, an LSI client. Michelle was struggling with substance abuse, legal issues, and mental health issues when she found LSI therapist Amy Davis back in 2021.

“God helps us in ways we don’t always want him to,” said Michelle. “When the coronavirus pandemic hit, I lost my job. The unemployment lines were long at the time, so we went several months without a paycheck. I decided to get creative with my finances. I started selling drugs and was later arrested with a large quantity of drugs. They came in, took my kid, and I went to jail. After that, I was referred to work with Amy at LSI.”

Michelle and Amy worked through Michelle’s childhood trauma, processing the significant losses in her life due to drug overdose and death. Amy helped Michelle work on building a positive support system, a list of future goals, and a relationship with her daughter, Rachel.

“Rachel and I had a lot of problems when we entered therapy because I was a drug addict, and there was a lot of broken trust between us,” said Michelle. “LSI therapists helped us rebuild that trust and helped show her the progress I had made when she couldn’t see it herself.”

Rachel, in therapy as well, has been seeing LSI Therapist Chelsea Zaragoza since 2019. In addition to one-on-one therapy sessions with their respective therapists, Michelle and Rachel also do family therapy sessions with Amy and Chelsea. These sessions help mother and daughter talk about issues they are having in a healthy, productive way.

“Michelle has had a lot of struggles, loss, and a lot of people who didn’t believe in her, and her daughter was one of them,” said Amy. “We have worked hard doing family and individual therapy to bring those two back together, and it has worked. Where they are now, I don’t think I’ve seen a mother-daughter relationship as healthy as the two of them are.”

“I was a mess when I first came to LSI,” said Michelle. “Now, I’m sober, in college, have a high-paying job, and have my daughter back. Amy believed in me when no one else did, not even myself. She gave me hope.”



The Mustard Seed

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