



Dear People of Spirit of Joy,

It is hard to believe that a New Year is upon us – 2026. Jennifer and I wish each one of you coming year of surprise blessings and wondrous discoveries. So, HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Humm – surprise blessings and wondrous discoveries. They happen all the time when we are alive and attentive to what's happening around us. They also happen when we intentionally place ourselves in learning environments that open our minds to things we haven't known before and challenge us to think more broadly and deeply about our Christian faith and understanding.

I am deeply aware that I am your pastor on an "Interim" basis. Though I might be with you for a while longer, that time is limited by many factors. I've wanted to be an 'equipper of the saints' more than a 'space filler'. I want to share with you and your Council as much of what I've learned during my past years in ministry as I possibly can while I am with you. However, that's a two-way street. The other side of sharing is a commitment that goes something like this: "Let's learn as much as we can from this guy while he's still around." Or let's all participate in a 'Learning Environment' at Spirit of Joy as much as we can.

St. Paul's desire for each one of us goes like this: *"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."* [Ephesians 1:16ff] This happens, in no small part, when we make a commitment to be involved in learning opportunities as a priority of our life in faith.

In this coming year I am making it my priority to be in **learning opportunities** with you and helping Spirit of Joy to equip itself as a "Learning Community." My prayer is that you would consider a similar commitment.

Beginning the third week in January we are offering two learning opportunities. Kellie Sanders and Pr. Naomi are offering a six-week course entitled: **"Faith and Civic Life."** I've taught it before and HIGHLY recommend it. The ELCA put immense resources into developing an official Statement by that name, involving scores of church leaders, theologians, lay people and congregations from across the country in its making. See more information on that course elsewhere in the Newsletter. All are invited!

I will be leading another six-week **"Spiritual Growth Group"** on Paul's letter to the Colossians, with a 10-person limit. The past two groups have been wonderful experiences – just ask someone who has participated! After Easter I will lead a six-week course on The Forgotten Luther Project that builds upon the 'Faith and Civic Life' materials. At the same time, others will be facilitating more 'Spiritual Growth Groups'. COME AND SEE! Sign-ups will be available soon. Make your participation in learning a New Year's resolution!

In Love and Peace,

Pastor Braaten

JANUARY

Birthdays

Wendy Anderson	7
Cindy Hendrickson	7
Cameron Musil	7
Linda Waters	7
David Knutson	11
Dottie Sperger	13
Sharon Thaler	13
Pr. Braaten	14
Beverly Saunders	15
Elizabeth Valenzuela	21
Derek Swenson	22
Lauren Mudro-Petersen	30

If your special day is missing from our list, please call or email the church office to let us know.



Deaths

Please pray for the families of these members and former members who have passed into eternal life:

Nancy Sowarby, Carolyn Ward, George Wells,
Yona Ash, Mary Ann Schulz, Ken Suhr

Recurring Offerings

Want to give a recurring offering to SOJ without writing a check every time? Most banks have a free "bill pay" feature that you can utilize to have a check mailed directly to SOJ or directly deposited. Contact your bank for more information.

REWARD PROGRAM

Spirit of Joy is the recipient of donations from the Fry's Community Rewards program. You do nothing, other than register, and a percentage of your purchases will be sent to Spirit of Joy to be used by the Altar Guild.

SOJ received \$47.94 for the 3rd quarter 2025. Let's do better and don't forget to designate your rewards when shopping during the holidays!

Call the office for more details on enrolling.



Spirit of Joy

LUTHERAN CHURCH



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928-634-4102

Rev. Conrad Braaten
Interim Pastor
prbraaten@gmail.com

Rosie West, Office Manager
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Website:
www.sojaz.net

Send prayer requests to:
prayer@sojaz.net

Visit us at:
www.facebook.com/sojaz

Communion Ministry



Please see Pr. Braaten if you are interested in taking communion and/or visiting with homebound members.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES at SPIRIT OF JOY

1. **Faith and Civic Life:** Led by Kellie Sanders and Pr. Naomi. Six-week course will meet on Mondays beginning January 12 at 9:30 – 10:30. See class description below. All are welcome!
2. **Spiritual Growth Group:** Led by Pastor Braaten. Six-week course will feature study of Paul's letter to Colossians. Limited to 10 people.
3. **Confirmation:** Confirmation class will begin in January. We are still trying to coordinate times. Pastor Braaten will lead with the assistance of a number of other members.

Spiritual Growth Group

A six-week study of Paul's letter to Colossians beginning January 15th at 10:00 am to 11:30 am in Bible Study Room 1. Led by Pastor Braaten, we will focus on the 'how' of learning from scripture; by "listening, prayer and discipline". Limited to 10 people, you will find it to be a wonderful experience – just ask someone who has been in a Spiritual Growth Group. Sign up sheet is in the narthex or contact Pastor Braaten.

Faith and Civic Life Course

Mondays, January 12–February 16, 9:30–10:30am in BS 1, facilitated by Dr. Kellie Sanders and Pr. Naomi

What does it mean to live out our faith faithfully in today's civic and political landscape? How do we follow Jesus, seek the common good, and engage in public life without losing our unity as the body of Christ?

This six-week Faith and Civic Life course invites participants into thoughtful, prayerful conversation about discipleship, democracy, and civic engagement. Rooted in Scripture and Lutheran theology, the course creates space to explore challenging questions about faith and public life while honoring our shared identity in Christ, even when we disagree.

Participants will:

- Deepen their understanding of how Christian discipleship is lived out in a democracy
- Learn Lutheran perspectives on government, justice, and civic responsibility
- Develop skills for respectful, grace-filled dialogue around controversial issues
- Reflect on how faith shapes personal and collective civic engagement
- Discern faithful ways to love neighbor, seek justice, and serve the common good

Each session includes Scripture, prayer, short video teaching, guided discussion, and reflection activities. Participants will engage as a community of moral discernment, practicing careful listening, honest sharing, and mutual respect through shared conversation.

Whether you feel energized, cautious, or unsure about civic engagement, this course offers a supportive and meaningful space to grow spiritually while exploring how faith informs our life together in the world. Please sign up by emailing Kellie at ksanders0410@gmail.com or calling her at 815-751-1133.

Come and See!

WELCA NEWS



Our special “THANK YOU” to Becky and Jeff Keck for offering their home as the setting for the December holiday brunch. It was a wonderful time to mingle and get to know one another better. Also, to partake of some very tasty cuisine! With cooperation from the weather, some enjoyed socializing on their lovely patio.

Earlier in the month, on December 6th, we held our annual “Taste of Christmas” Bake and Crafts sale. It was a good success and fundraiser for WELCA.

After all the activities to honor the birth of Jesus, the Christ, we look forward to a new, re-energized season of work in and for WELCA.

A Blessed 2026 to all!

Respectfully submitted,

Dee Codner, Co-Secretary

The next WELCA meeting is Thursday,
January 8th, 9:30am in the fellowship hall.

TASTE OF CHRISTMAS—DECEMBER 6, 2025



A special thanks goes to everyone who made the **Taste of Christmas** a great success. Thanks to those who organized, baked, sewed, knitted, crocheted, painted, pickled, candied, crafted in any way, added up purchases and counted out change, handled the quilt ticket sales, made or distributed flyers, handled publicity, donated Christmas items, put up and took down signs, made lunch for the workers, brought items, those who set up on Friday and those who stayed around and helped on Saturday. It was a great example what can be done when people work together. Thank you!

FOOD BANK SUNDAY

Non-perishable food items will be collected Sunday, January 4th, for our local food bank.

Leave your food items in the grocery cart in the narthex.

Please remember to check the expiration dates on food before donating.



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

DID YOU MISS IT?

Spirit of Joy had a very special Christmas Eve service led by Pr. Braaten which included lessons, carols, communion, angels, a shepherd, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus!

You can watch it by going to our website: <https://sojaz.net/> and clicking on the link to the video.

*Pictured at right:
Greeters Hal & Ronda Hatfield,
Pr. Braaten, Angels Linnea & Lillea
Simpson, Elizabeth Tavasci as Mary,
Audrey Tavasci as Jesus, Tom
Berlage as Joseph, Lucas & Everett
Hoedl as shepherds.*



Religion and Science Lecture Series

The annual Religion and Science Lecture Series, sponsored by Spirit of Joy, will once again take place in February. The lectures, which are free and open to the public, will take place each Sunday from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m. in the church sanctuary followed by light refreshments in the fellowship hall.

A preview of what's to come:

On February 14th, Dr. Jim Allen, DO, will speak about his experiences as a physician in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Look for more details on lecturers and dates in the February newsletter.

Andrea Meyer is the chair of the popular series that was brought to Spirit of Joy by Pastor Ed Womack. The series is presented as part of the Clergy Letter Project, an association of religious leaders and scientists who believe that there is no necessary conflict between religion and science.

WORSHIP SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jan 4: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12
Jan 11: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17
Jan 18: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42
Jan 25: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23



DAYTIME BOOK CLUB

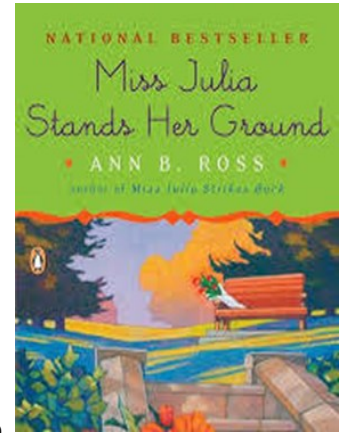
January 22, 2026

Miss Julia Stands Her Ground

Ann B Ross

Summary:

In *Miss Julia Stands Her Ground*, the title character must prove Little Lloyd's paternity after her housekeeper's troublemaking uncle, Brother Vernon Puckett, claims Little Lloyd is not the son of Miss Julia's late husband. With the paternity dispute threatening her late husband's estate, Miss Julia embarks on a humorous but challenging mission to find proof, which may involve exhuming the body or finding a personal item of the late Mr. Springer for DNA testing.



- **The conflict:** Hazel Marie's uncle, Brother Vernon Puckett, arrives and alleges that Little Lloyd is not the biological son of Miss Julia's late husband, Wesley Lloyd Springer. This claim endangers the inheritance of the boy, whom Miss Julia has grown to love, and the integrity of the estate.
- **The solution:** To settle the dispute, Miss Julia must either allow DNA testing via exhumation or find a personal item of her late husband to use for a DNA sample. Her new husband, Sam, suggests this approach, and her housekeeper, Lillian, may have some useful items.
- **Additional plot points:** While dealing with the paternity issue, Miss Julia also has to contend with a church petition to run for the board of elders and a difficult party scheduled at her home.

Avid Readers: Please note there are five Thursdays in January. We will meet on the 4th Thursday, January 22.
YLN copies: Large and regular print

Book List Possibilities for 2026

1. ***Miss Julia Stands Her Ground***, Ann B Ross YLY: Large & Regular Print—January book
2. ***Broken Country***, Clare Leslie Hall YLN: audio on CD, Large & Regular Print, CD Book, e-audio book, e-book, Kindle—February book
3. ***Desert Noir, a Lena Jones mystery***, Betty Webb (AZ University Professor), Rita's recommendation, YLN:
4. Regular Print
5. ***Flying Angels***, Danielle Steel YLN Reg and Large Print, ebook
6. ***When We Meet Again***, Kristin Harmel YLN Reg Print
7. ***Cutting for Stone***, Abraham Verghese YLN Regular Print, Audio on CD, e-audio book, ebook, Kindle
8. ***The Book of Longings***, Sue Monk Kidd YLN Reg and Large Print Audio on CD, ebook, Kindle
9. ***Salt to the Sea***, Ruta Sepetys YLN Reg and Large Print Audio on CD, e-audio book, ebook, Kindle
10. ***The Book Woman***, Kim Michelle Richardson YLN—no listing
11. ***The Anxious Generation***, Haidt, Jonathan YLN Regular Print, Audio on CD, e-audio book, ebook, Kindle
12. ***The Girl with Seven Names***, Hyeonseo, Lee YLN: Reglar print, e-audio
13. ***What Alice Forgot***, Moriarty, Lane YLN: Large and regular print, paperback, audio on CD, e-audio book, e-book, Kindle

ATTN Avid Readers: This is an ambitious list; when/if you read one of these, please share with the group if you liked/disliked the read. That facilitates our future book choices each month.

Happy New Year ♡ Happy New Year ♡ Happy New Year



IN-REACH / OUTREACH TEAM

The In-Reach/Outreach Team will meet on Wednesday, January 7th at 10am in the Conference Room.

VERDE VALLEY HOMELESS COALITION

There is a constant need for gloves during the winter months. Please leave your donations in the marked container in the fellowship hall.

Mark your calendar for the “2nd Annual Dinner with the Homeless” on Thursday, February 12th, 2026.



Naomi Barcanic

GATHER BIBLE STUDY

January's Gather Bible Study will meet on Thursday, January 15th, at 2pm at the Dunns, 245 Rogers St, Clarkdale.

We will be using the Gather magazine Study Guide for January.

Judy will call and check a few days before the scheduled meet and if it needs to be changed, she will call those who attend. All are welcome to join us!



SOJ's MEN'S GROUP

The Men's Group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 8am at Red Rooster Café in Old Town for fellowship and to discuss that week's Gospel. This month, they will meet on Thursday, January 8th, and January 22nd. For more information contact Tom Berlage, 1-218-576-8861.



ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Our Annual Meeting is January 18th immediately following worship. As stated in our constitution, to be a voting member you must have attended worship in the previous year, and made a “contribution of record” – which means using an envelope with your name on it, or via a check with your name on it. It can be any amount. The important part is “of record”.

Printed annual reports will be distributed the weekend of January 11th so that you can review the financial statements before we vote on the 2026 budget the following weekend.



BLOOD DRIVE RESULTS— THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who helped make our annual Red Cross Blood Drive a success! Thank you to the Verde Valley Voices for clearing the room after their holiday potluck. Thank you to Kristi Alley and Mell'O'Dee Gaber for assisting with registration. And most especially, thank you to those who gave a blood donation! We collected 23 units of whole blood and each of those donations has the potential to help three people.

Marcia and Mick Shanahan

INSTANT CHURCH DIRECTORY!

Our church directory is now available for your phone!
Follow the directions below to download the app.
Call the church office if you have any questions.

VIEW OUR CHURCH DIRECTORY ON YOUR MOBILE DEVICE!

FREE App for iPhone, iPad
& Android



Our church directory is a great resource tool that allows you to get to know our church family better!

Simply go to the App Store, search for *Instant Church Directory*  and download the FREE app to begin.

Enter your email listed in the directory, and click "Send Secure Sign-In Link." Check your email, and click the "Log in to Instant Church Directory" button.

If you're not listed in the directory, OR if you have trouble logging into the app, please contact the church office.



2025 SPIRIT OF JOY CHURCH COUNCIL

Officers

Kellie Sanders—President
ksanders0410@gmail.com, 815-751-1133

Laura Stransky—Vice President
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Mick Shanahan—Faith Formation
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Sue Bro—In-Reach/Outreach
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Ex Officio
Pr. Conrad Braaten
prbraaten@gmail.com, 202-213-4235

FINANCIAL REPORT—November 2025

Operating Fund—November

Operating Fund Income	Operating Fund Expenses	Pastoral Call Fund Adj.	Net Income
\$ 23,022.48	\$ 13,012.55	\$ 0.00	\$ 10,009.93

Year-to-Date (Jan-Nov)

Operating Fund Income	Operating Fund Expenses	Pastoral Call Fund Adj.	Net Income
\$ 208,629.59*	\$141,859.02**	\$ 41,683.44	\$ 25,087.13

*Fundraising Income—\$775.95; Youth—\$700.00; Shoe Drive—\$3,268.00; Joy Pack Grant—\$3,926.00

**Youth \$800.00; Shoe Drive \$2,234.91

11/30/2025 Ending Balance

General Fund	\$99,637.11
Mortgage Fund	8,783.61
Restricted Ministries	<u>12,694.56</u>
Ending Balance	\$121,115.28

Board Restricted Fund—November

Income	Expenses	Restricted Fund Transfer	Net Income
\$ 2,000.00	\$ 4,523.00	\$ 0.00	(\$ 2,523.00)

Year-to-Date (Jan-Nov)

Income	Restricted Fund Transfer	Expenses	Net Income
\$ 9,804.00*	\$41,683.44	\$ 32,753.14**	\$ 18,734.30

*Thrivent Choice Dollar	\$1,154.00	**Youth Camp Fee	\$250.00	Parking Lot	\$5,415.00
WELCA for Chairs	\$5,000.00	Piano Tuning	\$700.00	Landscaping	\$1,100.00
Donation for Chairs	\$1,650.00	Building HVAC	\$9,145.73	Chairs	\$7,095.41
Restricted Fund Transfer	\$41,683.44	Roof Repair	\$9,047.00		
WELCA Mortgage Princ.	\$2,000.00				

11/30/2025 Ending Balance

Mortgage Principal	4,066.00
Organ/Piano Fund	2,300.87
Reserve Fund	41,683.44
Restricted Undesignated	<u>5,516.37</u>
	\$53,566.68

Bank 11 month CD	\$ 10,000.00
Mission Investment Fund Savings Balance	\$ 2,427.84
Mission Investment Fund Mortgage Owed	\$108,725.38

MEMORIALS, HONORS & GIFTS

*If you have felt blessed by someone,
give a gift in their honor or memory.
You are sharing that blessing
with others.*

DECEMBER 2025

JOY PACKS

Anonymous
Lucy Acheson
Trudy Currie
Fred & Sally Huff
Anita Young



Spirit of Joy LUTHERAN CHURCH

330 Scenic Drive
Clarkdale, Arizona 86324
www.sojaz.net



O Lord, let my
New Year's resolution
be to 
follow you
more closely
and to
trust in your
loving guidance.

SOJ Weekly Worship Schedule

Mid-Week Worship—
Wednesdays 5pm
Worship—Sundays 9:30am
Fellowship—following
Sunday worship

January Highlights

Jan 4—Food Bank Sunday
Jan 7—In-Reach/Outreach Mtg (CR), 10am
Jan 8—Men's Group @ Red Rooster, 8am
WELCA Meeting (FH), 9:30am
Jan 11—Distribute Annual Reports
Jan 12—Faith and Civic Life Course begins (BS1), 9:30am
Jan 15—Spiritual Growth Group begins (BS1), 10am
Gather Bible Study (Dunn's), 2pm
Jan 18—Annual Congregational Meeting (S), 10:30am
Jan 21—Church Council Meeting (CR), 1pm
Jan 22—Men's Group @ Red Rooster, 8am
Daytime Book Group (CR), 2pm