

# **St. John's Lutheran Church Newsletter**



**Interim Pastor  
Mark Oehlert**

**HAPPY  
New Year**

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Dear friends in Christ,

New Year greetings in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

May I introduce myself to you as your part time interim pastor? While many of you have either met both my wife Nancy and I, or attended worship where I led on several occasions recently, I would like to share a bit more detail of our background.

Sycamore, Illinois is where I was born into a family of six children. My mother taught grade school and my Father was an automobile salesman with an emphasis on General Motors products. I became interested in agriculture while in high school as a member of the FFA. Our family had moved from town into the country when I was 13. I worked for area farmers and took on raising beef cattle as my FFA project. While in FFA, our inspirational ag teacher convinced me that I could begin a farming operation, even though my family did not own land, nor had capital to do so. In 1972, our ag teacher helped me rent 100 acres to begin and a farmer I worked for loaned me \$6,000.00 in order to get started - since no bank would supply an operating loan. I attended Kishwaukee College and obtained a degree in Farm Management, Cum Laude. The farm grew to 300 acres and then gradually to 1100 acres. I farmed with Nancy's help for 25 years.

We attended Salem Lutheran Church as a family, and faith was foundational to my upbringing. I loved attending worship, youth group and was elected to serve on the congregational council at age 18. The next youngest man - only men on council at that time - was 35 and the rest were older. As a senior in high school, I asked my pastor what it would take to become a pastor. When he told me 8 more years after high school, that seemed like simply too much at the time. I loved farming and I loved the church - so I served in any way I could from youth group leadership, to shoveling snow to choir to whatever was needed. I was married at age 20 to Kara Bealmer. Kara finished college to become a teacher but became ill. She died at age 23 from a metastasized brain tumor. Needless to say, that was a time that deeply challenged my faith. "Where are you God?" I wondered. I did learn the importance of worship in that time, because I attended worship even in the pain. While I could not repeat prayers or sing the hymns - others near me did and that is what carried me through to better days.

I met Nancy, (a true gift from God,) who had lost her Father at age 15 thus giving her an understanding of the fleeting nature of life itself as well as a deep understanding of what it means to be alive - that life is a gift and there are no guarantees. We married in 1980 and have two daughters, Stephanie and Michelle. Stephanie is married to Pete Klein and they have one son, Benjamin, age 11. Stephanie, Pete and Ben live in Peosta.

Michelle is single and lives in Sycamore, Il.

We left the farm in July of 1997 so that I could attend Wartburg seminary. I graduated in 2001 after completing the course work to obtain a Master of Divinity degree. Ordination and first call led us to Kansas City, Missouri at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church for three years, 2001-2004. I was associate pastor at Gloria Dei. Second call was to Sterling, Illinois to St. John's Lutheran Church where I served from 2004-2016. At St. John's, I was senior pastor with a staff of 8. My third call was to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in rural Scales Mound, Illinois from 2016-2019.

I retired at age 65 in 2019, just before covid hit. I had experienced some health concerns, specifically, severe joint inflammation, leading to the decision to retire from full time ministry. I have been diligent in participating in the recovery and for several years now have been blessed with excellent health. It is important for me to measure my energy output to maintain wellbeing.

## Continued from page 1-

As you may already know, the agreement with St. John's (thus all of you) and stated in the Northeastern Iowa Synod contract, is that with the help of God and based on God's Word, I will lead worship on the first and third Sundays with Holy Communion, tend to administrative matters such as council and trustee meeting guidance, visit the sick and or dying, preside at funerals, weddings and baptisms as needed, and focus on three main areas: 1) visitation, 2) family and youth ministry, and 3) pastoral leadership at church and outreach to the community as I am able. I plan to offer office hours on Mondays following the first and third Sundays from 9:00 am-1:00 pm and adjusted as needed. Of course, appointments at other times at church, in homes or in other agreed upon locations are most welcome! The agreement is based on a one quarter time schedule which means an average of 12.5 hours per week.

Here is my contact info: Pastor Mark Oehlert cell: 815.970.4780 email: [pmsoth@gmail.com](mailto:pmsoth@gmail.com).

As I am known to be in our shop with tools operating or out and about in the valley where we live sometimes my cell reception is spotty. Should there be urgent need to contact me and my cell is not answered, feel free to call Nancy at 815.625.1415- she keeps pretty good track of me!

It has been a joy to be with you already and I believe God has brought us together to share ministry that enlivens and feeds our shared faith in significant ways. Certainly, things will be different in some ways so I ask you to affirm with me the eternally true statement that "life is full of change- may we together seek the Spirit of God in every one!"

Grace and peace, *Pastor Mark Oehlert*

## **Thank You Members**

Your kindness and generosity do not go unnoticed.

Thank you for your dedication in assisting with our services during the recent winter weather, particularly when travel was difficult for many.

Through your efforts, our congregation has brought comfort and support to numerous families this holiday season by providing Christmas gifts, food baskets, and baby kits. Your contributions are deeply appreciated by all who receive them.

Thank you,

Your St. John's Church Family

## **Sunday School & Confirmation News**

Our Christmas Program was joyfully held on Sunday, December 21, at 10:30 a.m. Thank you to everyone who helped make it a special celebration! Sunday School Classes will resume on January 11.

Our Confirmation students continue their faith journey with enthusiasm under the leadership of Melissa Clarke. Melissa has been doing an exceptional job guiding and encouraging our youth this season. Confirmation classes will resume on January 7. As a reminder, if school is canceled, Confirmation will also be canceled. Please watch our Facebook page for updates and announcements.

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### **Radio Ministry**

Jan 4 Donations in Memory of Victor Stuckman

Jan 11 Thank you for your donations during the Holidays

Jan 18 Church Funds

Jan 25 Church Funds



### **To Receive the Word**

Sunday morning worship services are on the local radio station. Dial in 103.5 FM (KNEI) at 8:30 am or log into [www.kneiradio.com](http://www.kneiradio.com) to worship with St. John's. We also are video streaming on Facebook Live.

You may now receive the newsletter via email as a PDF document. Contact the church office if you would like to be on this email list. St. John's is on the web at [www.stjohnswaukon.net](http://www.stjohnswaukon.net) and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/stjohnswaukon/>

## **Trustee Meeting** \*\*SEE NARTHEX BULLETIN BOARD for details\*\*

The Trustee's met Tuesday, December 16 and the full minutes are posted. Key updates:  
Solar Project: We are running on Solar Power. Payment has been made for the project.  
Downstairs men's bathroom urinal has been fixed.  
Pledge cards will be going out with your end of the year giving statements.



## **Call Committee Update**

We have finished the ministry site profile and have turned it into the Synod Staff for review. We are continuing to move forward with the next steps in the process.

## **Circle News**

**Sarah Circle** met in December. They will be taking the winter off. See you Tuesday, April 14 at 9:15 am!  
**Dorcus Circle** will meet virtually at 7 pm on Tuesday, January 13.

## **Meals on Wheels**

As many of you already know, Meals on Wheels (MOW) will be discontinued at the end of 2025. Hopefully the new program Mom's Meals will continue to supply satisfactory frozen meals. You were a bright spot in each recipient's day! A sincere thank you to all of you have been faithful St. John's Thursday drivers.

~ *Nona Sawyer*

## **Beat The Winter Blues In Christ**

Focus on spiritual practices like prayer, gratitude, and meditating on encouraging scriptures while also incorporating healthy habits like getting sunlight, staying active, eating well, and connecting with others to combat seasonal sadness and find renewed strength in faith

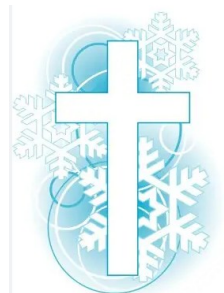
### **Spiritual Strategies**

- \* **Pray & Reflect:** Find a quiet space to talk to God, laying your emotions before Him; use specific prayers for depression and anxiety to find peace in Jesus.
- \* **Practice Gratitude:** Start a daily journal listing things you're thankful for to shift your focus and invite God's peace.
- \* **Meditate on Scripture:** Read and internalize verses like ("Don't be afraid, for I am with you") and ("He gives strength to the weary") for renewed hope.
- \* **Declare God's Truth:** Speak out affirmations like "The joy of the Lord is my strength" to combat negative feelings.

### **Practical Self-Care (Rooted in Faith)**

- \* **Get Natural Light:** Take walks outside, even short ones, and sit near windows to absorb sunlight and boost mood.
- \* **Stay Active:** Exercise releases endorphins and can be a way to connect with God's strength.
- \* **Eat Well & Hydrate:** Good nutrition supports both physical and mental health.
- \* **Stay Connected:** Combat loneliness by reaching out to friends, family, or church groups; help others by volunteering to bring good news to them.
- \* **Create Joyful Rituals:** Engage in fun, simple activities, like reading, taking baths, or cuddling a pet, as acts of self-care.

Recognize that feelings of sadness, lethargy, or anxiety can sometimes be more serious (Seasonal Affective Disorder) and it's okay to see a doctor or mental health professional for support.



# St. John's Women Serving and Socializing

WELCA has been busy lately. We have served a couple of funerals and also at the Ecumenical Concert. Thank you to all who furnished food or served at these events! Christmas shopping for kids has happened.

Thank you to Cindy Wuebker for doing the shopping.

She was able to purchase gifts for 14 kids. The gifts will go to six kids that she got their names from the relief office and eight kids from our own congregation. Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to this worthy cause. The money that was collected for the Thank offering was sent off. There was \$100 that was collected for this effort. Again, thank you to all that donated.

We hope that everyone has a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Respectfully,

Karen Stamper



## Solar Project News

Representatives from the Allamakee Energy District visited St. John's in December to review our solar project. We are pleased to share that they will be featuring St. John's solar installation in an upcoming article.

Our motivation for pursuing this project was to be good stewards of our resources while realizing long-term savings on our electric bills over the next 30 years. The projected cost savings will help offset ongoing expenses such as building insurance and staff salaries, strengthening the financial sustainability of our ministry.

The assistance provided by the Allamakee Energy District was invaluable. They helped get the process started by bringing the possibility of solar energy to our attention and clearly outlining the overall cost savings, which gave us the confidence to move forward with the project.

## St. John's January Hymns

### Jan 4 Second Sunday of Christmas

**No. 303 Brightest and Best of the Stars**

First Lesson: Jeremiah 31:7-14

Second Lesson: Ephesians 1:3-14

Gospel: John 1:[1-9] 10-18

**No. 815 I want to walk as a Child of the Light**

**During Distribution 294**

**No. 671 Shine, Jesus Shine**

### Jan 18 Third Sunday After Epiphany

**No. 798 Will You Come and Follow Me**

First Lesson: Isaiah 9:1-4

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

**No. 306 Come Beloved of the Maker**

**No. 674 Let Us Talents And Tongues Employ**



### Jan 11 Baptism of Our Lord

**No. 302 As with Gladness Men of Old**

First Lesson: Isaiah 42:1-9

Second Lesson: Acts 10:34-43

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

**No. 423 Shall We Gather at the River**

**No. 310 Songs of thankfulness and Praise**

### Jan 18 Second Sunday After Epiphany

**No. 308 O' Morning Star**

First Lesson: Isaiah 49:1-7

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Gospel: John 1:29-42

**No. 696 Jesus Calls Us: o'er the Tumult**

**During Distribution 336 & 448**

**No. 311 Hail To the Lords Anointed**

## January Music Ministry

Thank you to the Senior Choir, and Senior and Youth Bell Choir for providing choral and bell choir music during advent and Christmas. As well as the wonderful music and extra time and effort to make the 49<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Choir concert an overwhelming success for everyone in attendance and the many listening or watching the live broadcast on Facebook.

The Sunday School Christmas program will be over soon along with the Christmas Eve services. We will be ushering in the new year with Senior Choir beginning rehearsals on Sunday morning January 4 at 9:30am and Wednesday, January 7 the Youth Bell Choir we rehearse at 6:00 pm and Senior Bell Choir at 7:00 pm

Wishing all a Happy New Year!

*Jim Dieber*

# JANUARY 2026



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
				 Church Office Closed		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Worship 8:30&10:30am w/ comm *Noisy Offering 9:30 Sr Choir 7pm Men's Choir			6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir/Confirmation			
11	12	13	14	15 WIC Here	16	17
Worship 8:30&10:30am 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir 7pm Men's Choir		No Sarah Circle 7pm Dorcas Circle Meet Virtually	6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir/Confirmation			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Worship 8:30&10:30am w/ comm 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir 7pm Men's Choir		6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir/Confirmation				
		6pm Trustee Mtg				
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Worship 8:30&10:30am 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir Tentative Annual Mtg. 7pm Men's Choir		Nursing Home Visits 1pm Northgate 2pm Good Sam 2:45pm Ever- green	6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir/Confirmation			

The names listed are those currently recorded as active members in the church CDM+ directory. If your name was inadvertently missed or any of your information is incorrect, please contact the church office at 563-568-3623 or [stjohnswaukon@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnswaukon@gmail.com)



**January Birthdays**

- |                      |                         |                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Debra Berger—1       | Marlene Houg—9          | Diana Johnson—21    |
| Jacob Jones—1        | Jane Kallevang—10       | Marvin Winters—21   |
| Bruce Torkelson—2    | James Collins—11        | Denise Wullner—21   |
| Landon Wilkes—2      | Jay Hansen—11           | Kimberly Rolfs—24   |
| James Bieber—3       | Debra Thorstenson—11    | Marvin Hill—25      |
| Lori Jacobs—3        | Delores Johnson—12      | Gerald Pittmann—25  |
| Henry Lacey—3        | Patty Nordheim—13       | Taylor Jackson—26   |
| Linda Groe—4         | Mark Stock—13           | Mark Goeke—27       |
| Paul Sorum—4         | Isaac Fink—14           | Dennis Deal—28      |
| Kinsley Ann Bosley—5 | Caleb Roffman—16        | Jens Kallevang—28   |
| David Sanderson—6    | Nathan Johnson—17       | Thomas Schreiber—29 |
| Jonathan Marti—8     | Thomas Fink—19          | Ashlyn Johnson—31   |
| Nancy Brandt—9       | James Hanson—20         | Evonne Kistler—31   |
| Ann Hagensick—9      | Gavin Smith-Wittrock—20 |                     |



**January Anniversaries**

**Verland & Ellen Lenth**

**December 2025**

Baptisms: None  
 Weddings: None  
 Deaths: Victor Stuckman, Susan Freese

**St. John's Volunteer Duty List**

Jan	Service	Greeters	Readers	Comm. Asst.	Comm. Prep.	Acolytes	Ushers
<b>4</b>	8:30AM	Bev Haas	Mary Jackson	Randy Hesse Bonnie Roe Sarah Bieber	Bev Leiran, Keegan Leiran		Tom/Bev Leiran Family
	10:30AM		Kristi Fahey	Wendy Bucheit	Carole Yohe, Kristi Fahey		Yohe/Fahey Family
<b>11</b>	8:30AM	Lee & Chris Ellickson	Dave Sanderson				Same
	10:30AM		Ed Stamper				
<b>18</b>	8:30AM	Russ & Mary Jo Meyer	Sue Blagsvedt	Russ/Mary Jo Meyer, Vickie Larson	Kayla Leiran, Kreed Leiran		Same
	10:30AM		Karen Stamper	Karen Stamper	Altar Guild		
<b>25</b>	8:30AM	Todd & Marlen Hills	Brenda Dougherty				Same
	10:30AM		Linda Groe				

# How to Find Joy in Christ

How to find joy in Christ, which involves a deep relationship with Jesus, trusting God's promises, living His teachings (serving, prayer, scripture), and finding hope and peace even in suffering, making it a steadfast inner state rather than just a fleeting feeling. Many believers describe this as an unshakable, powerful joy stemming from knowing Christ is present and guides them, fulfilling a purpose beyond circumstances.

## **Key Aspects of Finding Joy in Christ:**

- **Relationship with Jesus:** It starts with knowing and surrendering to Jesus, making Him the center of your life.
- **Focus on the Savior:** Joy comes from focusing on God's plan, His gospel, and His presence, not just life's situations.
- **Hope & Peace:** Joy is linked to hope in God, providing deep, unshakable peace even amidst trials.
- **Living the Gospel:** This includes serving others, praying, studying scripture, and keeping commandments.
- **A Fruit of the Spirit:** Joy is a result of the Holy Spirit living within, especially as one yields to God's direction.
- **Beyond Happiness:** It's distinct from temporary happiness; it's a deep-down assurance that the "sun is still behind the clouds".

## **How Believers Experience it:**

- Finding joy through service and helping others.
- Experiencing deep contentment and positive mindset.
- Feeling God's presence and love constantly.
- A new song of praise emerging even from dark times, as God lifts them up.

Ultimately, Christians believe joy in Christ is a deep, personal experience of God's presence and promises, leading to a transformed, hopeful life.



# Christian Music Genres

How have you found Christian versions of different genres of music? The Bible encourages listening to music that praises God, like psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but doesn't specify one genre. Instead, it suggests evaluating music based on its message, encouraging Christians to choose music that is biblically accurate, edifying, and stirs devotion to God. Ultimately, the goal is to listen to music that "dwells richly" in your heart and leads to gratitude and praise, regardless of the style.

Christian music is a vast genre encompassing many styles, from traditional hymns and Gospel to Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) with its pop, rock, and hip-hop forms, to Worship music, Southern Gospel, Christian Metal, and Christian Country, all sharing themes of faith, praise, and devotion, with major branches like Gospel focusing on African American traditions and CCM on modern sounds.

## **Major Categories & Styles**

**Gospel Music:** Rooted in African American traditions, it includes styles like Traditional, Quartet, Urban Contemporary, and Southern Gospel, known for emotional expression and improvisation.

**Contemporary Christian Music (CCM):** A broad umbrella for modern styles emerging from the "Jesus Movement," featuring pop, rock, country, and hip-hop.

**Worship Music:** Focuses on congregational praise and often overlaps with CCM, including modern worship, hymns, and liturgical music, with artists like Hillsong and Bethel Music being prominent.

## **Specific Genres & Subgenres**

**Christian Rock/Pop/Hip-Hop/Metal:** Incorporates secular genres with Christian lyrics (e.g., DC Talk, Skillet, Lecrae).

**Southern Gospel:** Often features vocal quartets and piano-driven arrangements, popular in the South.

**Christian Country:** Country music with faith-based themes.

**Bluegrass Gospel:** Traditional Appalachian style with a spiritual focus.

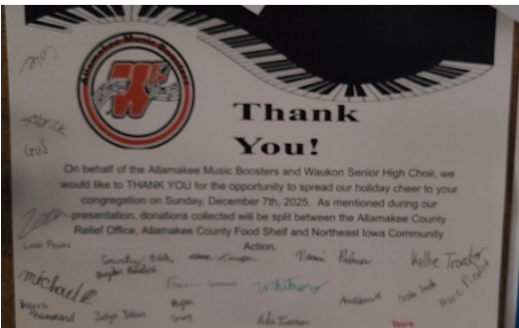
**Liturgical Music:** Music for formal church services, including hymns, chants, and anthems.

We can all find music uplifting, regardless of our preferred genre. Music has a unique ability to touch the heart and fill the soul.

# St. John's Happenings.....



**St. John's during the "most magical time of the year"**



**Thank You from the Waukon High School Tour of Churches**

## Food Baskets



Thank you to all that donated food, meat, money, or time to continue the tradition of providing food boxes for families at Christmas. We were again amazed at the generosity of this congregation. We gave over \$500 in grocery gift cards as well as all of this food + meat. God Bless all of you!

## Pennies for Presents



The Pennies for Presents were distributed, and we were able to purchase gifts for 14 children in our community. With your help, their Christmas was just a little merrier. God bless you for your generosity!