

St. John's Lutheran Church Newsletter

**Interim Pastor
Mark Oehlert**



8 5th Street S.W.
Waukon, IA 52172-0403

Phone 563.568.3623
Fax 563.568.3922

stjohnswaukon@gmail.com
www.stjohnswaukon.net

Wow! Ash Wednesday begins on February 18! As we are just beginning our time together, (as my Elderly Aunt told me many years ago) life goes faster as the years add up! I didn't think that was possible as a 20 year old, and yet the truth is upon us!! Zoom- here we go! The preliminary plan is to hold Wednesday evening worship services each week during Lent with Holy Week as we know it culminating in the high point of our church year with the Resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday!

There is something about the imposition of ashes along with the midweek journey toward the cross as Lent unfolds. At times, Lent seems to drag on while old man winter slowly lets go and spring crawls into our lives. Then after Maundy Thursday and Good Friday- just when it seems darkest- God says; "hold on- I have a big surprise for you!" I invite you here and now to be present for this most holy of time in the church year! Tentative schedule is: Ash Wednesday February 18, Each Wednesday evening following includes supper at 5:00 P.M. with Holden Evening Prayer at 7:00 P.M. Holy week includes the meatball supper on Wednesday April 1, Maundy Thursday April 2, Good Friday April 3 and Lent concludes with the Resurrection of our Lord on April 5! Please mark your calendars and I do so look forward to seeing you all along the way! Regarding the call process: in this edition of our newsletter, please find and read the two page letter from Pastor Steve Brackett on the topic of the call process and availability of pastors for congregational service. It is quite revealing! Highlights are:

- There are far more congregations looking for pastors than there are pastors available
- Few pastors have asked to have their paperwork sent to our Synod congregations (or any Synods for that matter- few pastors are moving)
- Mission & ministry matter! Pastors seek strong congregations with active leaders who seek to serve both inside and outside the church walls
- What to do? Invite persons who show gifts for ministry to consider becoming pastors- I will tell you that is exactly what happened to me. Others saw me as becoming a pastor before I did. That confirmed what I was thinking deep inside for many years. I began seminary at age 42.
- Let it be known what St. John's has going for it! Tell the story of vibrant worship with beautiful music, outreach in caring for others who experience food, clothing or housing insecurity, social connections in groups and the warmth that comes as life together is shared. We may underestimate how much it means to know and be known within a congregation as care is given and shared.
- Everyone has a gift! Abilities are meant to be shared. The Bible is full of examples from the very young to the quite elderly- just as we are- making a difference in the lives of many people. If we are alive- we have not aged out of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ! I am praying and asking you to pray of just how your abilities can build up the body of Christ known as St. John's! The church is needed now as much as ever it was!

Grace and peace, *Pastor Mark Oehlert*

Office Hours: Mondays following the first and third Sundays, from **9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.**, with adjustments as needed.

Appointments at other times—at church, in homes, or at other mutually agreed-upon locations—are always welcome.

Contact Information: Pastor Mark Oehlert | 815-970-4780 | pmsoth@gmail.com



Circle News

Sarah Circle They will be taking the winter off. See you Tuesday, April 14 at 9:15 am!
Dorcas Circle will meet virtually at 7 pm on Tuesday, February 13.

LYO Youth Ministry Team

LYO is tentatively planning to go to Mt. LaCrosse Sunday, February 1 for skiing and/or snowboarding from 1-5 pm. More details and information to come.

Please join us for supper before Ash Wednesday service February 18 from 5:30-7:00 pm. LYO will also be having casserole suppers during Lent, February 25, March 4, 11, 18, & 25.

Sunday School & Confirmation News

After a wonderful Christmas program and a short winter break, Sunday school is heading back to the classroom!

Our Confirmation students are learning about the Bible. Why is the Bible like a table and A SPARK! Ask the students about their Wednesday meetings, as they sit around the table and learn about another sacred story.

Table Time Discussion Ideas

Why is the Bible like a table and a spark? The Bible is like a **table** because it gathers us together. Just like we sit around a table to eat, talk, and listen to one another, we come to the Bible to share stories, ask questions, and grow in faith together. No one is left out—there’s a place for everyone.

The Bible is also like a **spark** because it lights something inside us. A spark can start a fire, give warmth, and help us see more clearly. God’s Word sparks curiosity, faith, and new ideas about how to love God and our neighbors.

Discussion prompt: At home, when you sit around the supper table together? How do the Bible stories you hear act like a spark in your life?

Thank You Members

Your work throughout the church does not go unnoticed. From the Christmas decorations and shoveling snow to supporting our Sunday worship services, it truly takes many hands to keep everything running smoothly.

Thank you to those who helped secure the new solar security lights in the parking lot, and to everyone who worked to get the Confirmation projector back up and running.

Your dedication and service throughout the winter months are deeply appreciated.

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 to worship with St. John’s. We also are video streaming on Facebook Live. Bulletins for the service can be found on our web pg www.stjohnswaukon.net

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

and Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnswaukon/>

Radio Ministry

Feb 1 Church Funds

Feb 8 Church Funds

Feb 15 Church Funds

Feb 22 Church Funds



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

The Trustee's met Tuesday, January 20 and the full minutes are posted.

Key updates:

Giving statements were mailed out for 2025 along with the pledge cards.

New solar parking lot lights are up.

Call Committee Update

We are continuing to move forward with the next steps in the process. Please read the article by Pastor Steve Brackett, Assistant to the Bishop for Rostered Leadership from the Northeastern Iowa Synod about the Reality of the Call Pro-

St. John's Women Serving and Socializing

Happy New Year to each and every one of you! We hope that this will be a year full of health and happiness! We have been working on the yearly WELCA booklet. We hope to have them available for pickup at the back of the church at the end of January or the beginning of February. Please watch for those booklets.

WELCA received some thank you notes from some of the organizations that we donated money to at the end of the year. Those notes are posted on the bulletin board in the back of the church. Please feel free to stop and check them out.

We also received a very nice thank you note from a church family thanking us for supporting their family during the holidays. We wish to thank everyone who donated to these causes. It is nice that we can help out members of our church family.

This year we are concentrating on Baby Kits for World Relief. You can help us out with this project by donating items needed to make these kits. The kits include a larger blanket that is 36" by 50", a smaller blanket, 2 t-shirts that are size 3-24 months, a sweatshirt with a hood, 2 sleepers or pajamas without feet, socks, and cloth flat fold diapers. These items don't have to be new. They can be gently used as well. Please bring the items to the table at the top of the stairs across from the elevator.

Respectfully, Karen Stamper

History of Church Bells

The story of church bells began around 400 AD with [Paulinus of Nola](#), who introduced them to call people to prayer, evolving from earlier handbells and Jewish traditions, and became formalized by Pope Sabinian in 604 AD, growing from simple calls to worship to complex systems used for mass communication, marking time, and even as sacramental tools to ward off evil, with their technology advancing through the Middle Ages and beyond.



Evolution & Function

- **Medieval Growth:** By the early Middle Ages, bells were common in Europe, especially in Ireland, and became vital for community life.
- **Spiritual Significance:** Bells were seen as "evangelists," driving away demons, calling people to faith, and signaling God's presence, with some even being anointed.

Mass Communication: Beyond worship, they announced emergencies (fires), wars, and important community events, sometimes ringing in coded messages

Technological & Cultural Development

Change Ringing: In the 17th century, technology improved with bells mounted on wheels, allowing for controlled, complex patterns known as "change ringing" (e.g., [Tintinnalogia](#) in 1668).

- **Bell Founders:** This era saw a boom in specialized bell founders, like those in Britain, creating intricate bell systems.

Global Spread: The tradition spread worldwide, with unique expressions in places like Russia, and even saw bells from captured churches repurposed for temples, notes [Hindustan Times](#).

Modern Day Today, church bells still call people to worship, mark canonical hours (like the [Angelus](#) at 6 AM, noon, 6 PM), and serve as enduring symbols of faith and community, continuing traditions centuries old.

Lent, Did you Know?

Lent is a 40-day reminder that it is God who saves. God saves us through the ministry of almsgiving as our hearts are opened to the injustices of our world. In all the stories of this Lenten season, let us remember that the agency always belongs to our God.

The Significance of "40 Days":

The number 40 appears throughout the Bible as a period of trial, testing, or transition, such as the Israelites' 40 years in the desert, reinforcing themes of spiritual preparation and reliance on God.

Key Facts about Lent:

Purpose: To prepare for Easter by reflecting on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, fostering repentance, prayer, and spiritual discipline.

Ash Wednesday: Ashes (from palms) are applied in the shape of a cross, signifying "dust to dust" and our need for a Savior, while also remembering baptism.

Color: Purple, symbolizing penitence and royalty, is used in worship.

"Alleluia" Omitted: The joyful "Alleluia" is skipped during Lent due to its penitential nature, returning with great joy at Easter.

Fasting & Giving Up: Giving something up (like food, TV, or a habit) is a free-will act to remember Christ's sacrifice and focus on Him, not a strict requirement.

Biblical Roots: The 40 days mirror Jesus' 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4) and the Israelites' 40 years in the desert.

Practices: Includes midweek services, prayer, Bible reading (like penitential Psalms), and focusing on Jesus' Passion story.



St. John's February Hymns



Feb 1 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

No. 873 Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!

First Lesson: Micah 6:1-8

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Gospel: Mathew 5:1-12

**No. 650 In Christ There is No East or West
During Distribution 714, 716**

No. 717 Let Justice Flow like Streams

Feb 8 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

No. 665 Rise, Shine, You People!

First Lesson: Isaiah 58:1-9a

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

No. 714 O God of Mercy, God of Light

No. 677 This Little Light of Mine

Feb 15 Last Sunday after Epiphany

No. 834 Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

First Lesson: Exodus 24:12-18

Second Lesson: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Gospel: Mathew 17:1-9

No. 315 How Good, Lord, to Be Here!

During Distribution 838, 863

No. 318 Alleluia, Song of Gladness

Feb 18 Ash Wednesday

No. 602 Your Heart, O God, Is Grieved

First Lesson: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**No. 803 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
During Distribution 592, 599**

No. 319 O Lord, throughout These Forty Days

Feb 22 First Sunday in Lent

No. 322 Oh, Love, How Deep

First Lesson: Genesis 2:15-17; 3-7

Second Lesson: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

**No. 325 I Want Jesus to Walk with Me
No. 320 The Glory of These Forty Days**

Music Ministry

Choir is back to their regular schedule of rehearsals through mid February when Lent begins.

Beginning Sunday, February 22 Senior Bell Choir will move rehearsals from Wednesday evenings to Sunday evenings at 6:00 pm.

Wednesday, January 14 the Senior Bell Choir cleaned the hand bells after their rehearsal. This takes two sessions as we have two sets to clean totaling 122 bells! The choir members got to visit and enjoy fellowship with one another as they clean and polished the bells.

Thank you bell choir members for all your time and effort to keep our bells in good shape. For just a reminder and a bit of history, our original set of 37 bells will be 50 years old in 2027!

Wishing you all the best!

Jim Bieber



FEBRUARY

Tentative Pastor Schedule

Feb. 1 Pastor Mark Oehlert
 Feb. 8 Pastor Elizabeth Hermeier
 Feb. 15 Pastor Mark Oehlert
 Feb. 18 Pastor Mark Oehlert
 Feb. 22 Pastor Mark Swanson

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Worship 8:30&10:30am w/ comm *Noisy Offering 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir 1pm-5pm LYO Skiing Trip 7pm Men's Choir	2	3	4 6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir/Confirmation	5	6	7
8 Worship 8:30&10:30am 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir 7pm Men's Choir	9	10 7pm Dorcas Circle Meet Virtually	11 6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Sr Bell Choir 7pm Confirmation @ WWC	12 WIC Here	13	14
15 Worship 8:30&10:30am w/ comm 9:30 Sunday School & Sr Choir 7pm Men's Choir	16 March Newsletter articles DUE	17	18 Ash Wed. 5:30-7pm LYO Supper 6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Imposition of Ashes/Holden Evening Prayer Service Confirmation meet briefly AFTER services	19	20	21
22 Worship 8:30&10:30am 9:30 Sunday School/Sr Choir/ Corner of Hope Presentation 6pm Sr Bell Choir (during Lent) 7pm Men's Choir	23	24 Nursing Home Visits 1pm Northgate 2pm Good Sam 2:45pm Ever- green	25 5:30-7pm LYO Supper 6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Holden Evening Prayer Service Confirmation meet briefly AFTER services	26	27	28
1 MARCH Worship 8:30&10:30am w/ comm *Noisy Offering 9:30 Sunday School/Sr Choir/ First Communion Class 6pm Sr Bell Choir 7pm Men's Choir	2	3	4 5:30-7pm LYO Supper 6pm Youth Bell Choir 7pm Holden Evening Prayer Service Confirmation meet briefly AFTER services	5	6	7

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



- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1—Owen Allison | 11—Jeremy Wicks | 22—Cindy Copp |
| 1—Robert Thorsten | 13—Peggy Slaughter | 23—Tucker Jackson |
| 2—Jan Gordon | 15—Erin Bunge | 24—Sarah Jackson |
| 3—Adam Bieber | 15—Katherine Hanson | 24—Kathy Wiedner |
| 3—Hailey Houg | 15—Allison Rottink | 24—Lillianna Wilkes |
| 3—Leslie Miller | 16—Sean Bieber | 25—Olivia Bell |
| 5—David Bahr | 16—Judith Engle | 25—Melynda Emerson |
| 5—Marcus Bell | 17—Zach Clarke | 25—Johnathan Erb |
| 5—Wayne Sawyer | 18—Adam Hagensick | 26—Jace Gossman |
| 6—Elsie Clarke | 19—Lynda Palmer | 26—Taylor Knudtson |
| 7—Carla Schnuelle | 21—Carole Yohe | 26—Dawn Teslow |
| 9—Paul Snitker | 22—Adelle Clarke | 27—Linda Halverson |
| | | 29—Mary Ament |

February Anniversaries
Matt & Dawn Teslow
Allen & Ella Mae Goeke
Lyle & Annette Stock

January 2026

Baptisms: None
 Weddings: None
 Deaths: None

St. John's Volunteer Duty List

Feb	Service	Greeters	Readers	Comm. Asst.	Comm. Prep.	Acolytes	Ushers
1	8:30AM	Jens/Jane Kallevang	Chris Engstrom	Jens/Jane Kallevang; Bev Haas	Cindy Barness; Nona Sawyer		Scott Houg; Logan Houg; Dave/Wendy Sanderson
	10:30AM		Linda Groe	Linda Groe	Sherry Knudtson; Kasey Iverson		
8	8:30AM		Becky Roe				Same
	10:30AM	Ed & Karen Stamper	Sarah Sweeney				
15	8:30AM	Nona Sawyer	Nona Sawyer	Sue & Bill Blagsvedt; Linda Groe	Ann Hagensick; Bonnie Roe		Same
	10:30AM		Lori Hesse	Lori Hesse	Altar Guild		
18	Ash Wed		Vickie Larson	Chris Stuckman	Linda Groe		
22	8:30AM	Ron/Linda Dahlstrom	Linda Groe				Same
	10:30AM		Jill Kistler				

The Reality of the Call Process Today Continued page 8

by Pastor Steve Brackett, Assistant to the Bishop for Rostered Leadership from the Northeastern Iowa Synod Star Newsletter - November/December 2025

When I came onto the Synod Office staff in March 2015 and began helping congregations to call a new pastor, things were very different. When a congregation completed their Ministry Site Profile and were ready to enter the interview phase of the call process, I would always have at least one pastor to bring to them who had expressed interest in their call. Our larger congregations would typically receive the paperwork of 3-7 candidates. And in most cases, other names would come soon after if the initial candidates were not a good fit for the congregation or vice-versa. The entire call process would last about one year to 15 months, on average. Rev. Steve Brackett

Today, it is rare to have the paperwork of even one pastor to give to a call committee when they reach the interview phase of the call process. So, what has changed? Why is it taking so long now to find and call a new pastor?

First, there are far more congregations in the call process than there are pastors to fill them. As of November 15, 2025, nationwide the ELCA has 578 ministry sites that have submitted a Ministry Site Profile to begin the interview process, compared to only 366 pastors (including recent seminary graduates) who are ready to interview. Retirements are the biggest factor in this gap. And since for the foreseeable future we will have more pastors retiring than seminary graduates to take their place, this gap will only widen—and quickly.

Second, the preferences of pastors have changed. Ten years ago, pastors were far more open to taking a call where the wider church had the most need. That usually meant taking a call in a rural area and in a ministry site that was made up of two or more congregations. That was a typical first call for our new seminary graduates. That shifted dramatically following the pandemic. The isolation experienced during the shutdown has resulted in most pastors now seeking calls based on geography—in larger communities with more amenities, closer to children and grandchildren, or closer to aging parents. Fewer pastors are willing to consider calls in rural communities, especially if their spouse and older children cannot find employment. In past years, we would hold between 25-30 interviews with pastors from outside our Synod each year. Obviously, not all of them would choose to seek a call in our Synod, but many would at least interview in one of our settings. As of mid-November, in 2025 we have interviewed only 11 pastors from outside our Synod. Of those, only 4 asked to have their paperwork sent to one or more of our ministry sites.

Third, there are many congregations just like yours looking for a pastor. As worshipping communities, we do not like to think of ourselves as being in competition with one another, but you are. You are not only competing with similar calls in our own Synod, but you are also competing with similar calls in Synods all around us. Pastors can be very selective in where they interview because they have so many choices available.

Finally, mission and ministry matter. Most pastors today seek to become a part of a ministry site that is active in the community, has strong faith building programs for all ages, has strong lay leadership and member participation, and is open to trying new ways to better serve the needs of people inside and outside of the church. Pastors today do not want to simply be a chaplain for a dying congregation or a congregation that is satisfied with maintaining the status quo.

So, what can we do to respond to these ongoing changes and challenges? First, invite someone to consider becoming an ordained pastor or deacon. Many congregations in our Synod have a history of supporting members to attend seminary and become ordained pastors. Unfortunately, few congregations have done so in recent years. Our Bible camps and Lutheran colleges continue to cultivate young people to consider the vocation of ministry, but their efforts alone are not enough. With the many pathways to ordained ministry available today, gifted individuals, young and old, will find an avenue to becoming a pastor or deacon that works for them. But first, someone must encourage them to explore the call to ministry. The Synod Office helps with discernment conversations, with a caring Candidacy Committee to walk with seminarians, and with scholarships to cover tuition.

Second, it is okay to brag about your ministry site and community. We do not like to brag as Midwesterners and Lutherans. But I tell call committees that the call process **is a time to brag**. The only way to override the preferences of where pastors and deacons **think** they want to serve is to convince them that they will love your community and congregation as much as you do. Bishop Kevin Jones and I participate in all interviews of pastors who are willing to consider a call in our Synod. We are the first to lift up the many positive aspects of northeastern Iowa, our communities, and our congregations. You can build on those conversations through an inspirational Ministry Site Profile, Facebook page, and website.

The Reality of the Call Process Today continued from page 7

Third, set yourself apart. With so many similar calls from which pastors can choose, it is important to think of ways to help your ministry site and community to rise above the rest. A well written Ministry Site Profile, and up-to-date website, and current pictures and postings on social media help, but more effective advertising is needed in today's call process environment. Again, the Synod Office is here to help. To meet this need I have developed the Enhance Call Process, which involves setting up a call process webpage for a ministry site. Each website includes links to call process documents and helpful ministry site and community information, but the most helpful part of the webpage is a video that helps to tell the story of the congregation(s) and the community. It is an effective way for pastors to get to know people and the community from a distance. Thus far, two pastors directly credit the Enhanced Call Process videos for piquing their interest in the calls that they have now taken in our Synod. The hope is to eventually have a call process webpage for every congregation/ministry site that is seeking a new pastor. The current Enhanced Call Process webpages can be viewed on our website: <https://neiasynod.org/open-calls/>. Click one of the "Watch the video!" links.

Finally, do at least one thing well. This is especially important in small congregations with shrinking membership. All of us long for the glory days of parish ministry when churches were full, children and youth were abundant, and there were plenty of people to participate in the ministries of the congregation. Those days are gone. Rather than pining for the past, put your energy into focusing on **one thing** that you will do well. If you have no children in your congregation, then have the best possible ministry to homebound and nursing home residents. If you no longer have functioning committees, then become the congregation whose mission is to ensure that no one goes hungry in your community. If your membership is declining, then do not focus on your attendance numbers. Instead, count the number of "ministry touches" you have each week. That is, count the number of times a member shared the Good News with someone else, prayed with someone, visited someone, or served them in any way. Share those counts in worship each week. So, find the one thing that energizes your members, and make that the focus of your mission and ministry.

We regularly pray for our congregations and ministries that are in the call process. We hope that you are praying, too; praying not only that your open call will soon be filled, but also praying that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide your ministry as you continue to hold worship services, ensure that the gospel is preached, and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ as you serve your neighbors.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9

Updates From The Deacons

Christmas is over, but we are reminded that the "Light of the World"; our Lord, Jesus Christ is ever-present in our lives. Our season of Epiphany will end with the beginning of Lent, and the Deacons want to invite your participation in upcoming service schedules and events.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 18! We will have a traditional communion service with the imposition of ashes at 7 pm. We will use the Holden Evening Prayer service on the following Wednesdays, from February 25 to March 25.

Our LYO will begin weekly suppers (with free-will offering) on Ash Wednesday and throughout the weekly Lenten services on the following Wednesdays: February 25, March 4, 11, 18, and 25.

During Holy Week, we will have a Maundy Thursday Service at 7 pm on April 2, 2026; and we will host the ecumenical Good Friday Service, April 3, at a time TBD.

The Deacons have been working on the Volunteer Schedules for this next year. They will soon be available to pick up at church. If you signed up on the Time and Talent sheet for one of the following areas of service: Greeters, Readers, Communion Preparation, Ushers, Acolyte, Communion Assistants; please make sure you pick up your volunteer sheet. We will start First Communion classes beginning on Sunday, March 1 with a second class on Sunday, March 15. This will include our Fourth graders, and/or others that parents feel are spiritually ready for First Communion, after discussing this with both the Pastor and your child. As in the past, at least one parent and the child must attend the classes. The First Communion service is scheduled for Palm Sunday on March 29. Please contact the office or Pastor Oehlert to sign up for these classes. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Oehlert.

On February 22, Pastor Mark Swanson will be leading our services, and has graciously offered to give a presentation between services on the Corner of Hope/Growing Hope Globally initiative. Some of our parishioners participate in this program, so please join us in the Fellowship Hall for coffee and treats as we learn all about this worthwhile endeavor. We have multiple opportunities to join together in fellowship and worship, and as Pastor Oehlert mentioned in his sermon on January 18...invite someone, a friend, neighbor... to church.