

ST. JOHN AMELITH CHURCH AND SCHOOL NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2026

Church Important Dates - see calendar for details

- 2/1 - Education Sunday Breakfast
- 2/3 - No School due to voting
Stewardship Mtg @ 11am
Council Mtg @6pm
- 2/7 - Youth Group Mtg - see Deb for time
- 2/8 - Superbowl Sub Sale
- 2/9 - Altar Guild Mtg @6pm
- 2/15 - Chicken BBQ
- 2/16 - No School
Fund Development Mtg @6pm
- 2/17 - Elder Mtg @6pm
- 2/18 - Lent Begins
Lenten Dinner @5pm
Ash Wednesday Divine Service @6pm
- 2/22 - Voter's Meeting @11am



St. John Amelith
**SUNDAY
SCHOOL**

February 8 & 22
11:00am - 12:00pm
Preschool - 4th Grade

- Bible Stories
- Crafts and Games
- Play and Sing

Come and travel with us through the Bible and hear God's story about how much He loves us!



The SJA Youth Group
Young adults in grades 7-12 that come together to help others, hang out, and have fun all in the name of Jesus.
If you are interested contact Deb Hutter
February Meeting Dates
7 & 22

Online giving through our Vanco app is available by scanning this QR code



Lenten Season 2026
Ash Wednesday February 18, 2026
Lenten Supper @ 5:00pm
Divine Service @ 6:00pm

Mid-week Lent Events
Wednesdays, February 25-March 25
Lenten Supper @ 5:00pm
Evening Prayer Service @ 6:00 pm
Bible Study Following

Palm Sunday Divine Service March 29 @ 9:30am
Confirmation Sunday

Maundy Thursday Service April 2 @ 6:00pm

Good Friday Tenebrae Service April 3 @ 7:00 pm

Easter Divine Service April 5 @ 9:30 am

From The Pastor's Desk

The Epiphany season began with a star over Bethlehem and soon comes to an end with the light and brilliance on top of the Mount of Transfiguration. Here the Father says before the glory shine from Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5). We prepare ourselves now for the season of Lent, listening to Jesus. Hearing Him is most important when going to the cross, but His suffering and death have hope. Light will break forth from Him again for the God/man has overcome all that we fear.

Listening is how the church now lives and at the heart we find there is witness, mercy, and life together. Epiphany reveals the light of Christ and Lent is the light unashamed to save us. "Dust you are and to Dust you shall return" certainly means our own mortality. Yet, it also includes other pains of upon this present life held captive to sin and death. The signs today are more than shifting demographics, but over the issue of listening. There is a polarity deeper than politics, but a spiritual darkness that leaves any to be helpless, reactionary and lost. Listen To Him!

Our democracy has the right of free speech, but it also means the ability rightly to listen. We degrade love between each other as a nation, but our greater problem is with God. This is not about philosophizing, but how God is for us in Christ despite a whole sinful world. St. Paul says, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:16-17). Hebrews states, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened..." (4:2).



The Church is a place for listening centered on Jesus Christ. On the other side of Lent, the light of His resurrection declares, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). It means more than trying to make a convincing appeal for church beyond a position. It is about the baptized confessing Christ just as we listen to Him. He teaches us to listen just as His speaking is the truth of undying love to any. While we must deal with the present voices, listening to Him matters for faith in God and love for one another. Present ideologies will pass, but the spiritual battle belongs to the cross.

Our Lutheran Fathers appeal to Christ's Words of institution (Lord's Supper) for listening to Him. They said, "(Jesus) is not a mere man or angel, neither is He just true, wise, and mighty, but He is the eternal Truth and Wisdom itself and Almighty God. He knows very well what and how He is to speak. He can also powerfully effect and do everything that He says and promises" (Concordia, 812-813). There is no listening unless we are rooted in God's Word. There is no listening apart from growing in Christ's love by the Sacrament. Listening lets us branch out to serve and bear fruits of faith. He brightens the darkness to even say, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice" (John 10:16).

The bless His people with peace,

Pastor

Rest from Our Labors, Rest from Our Screens?

January 1, 2026

By Joshua Pauling

In the middle of the 20th century, the philosopher Josef Pieper warned of an “overvaluing of the sphere of work.” Worklife was coming to consume everything else. Careerism was overtaking marriage and family. The home sat empty while the lights stayed on at the office. Every aspect of life was subsumed into what Pieper called the cult of “total work” — all for the sake of consumer capitalism, GDP and the American Dream.

Developments since Pieper’s day confirm his warnings. Those lights that stayed on at the office have now morphed into the ever-glowing light emanating from our backlit slabs of glass that stand always at the ready. The cult of total work now extends even further, as digital devices enable our work to come with us literally everywhere. And not only do our devices nudge us toward the cult of total work, they nudge us toward total distraction and amusement. Amid all of this, it is unsurprising that we find it difficult to experience true Christian leisure, that attunement to reality and posture toward God, one another and the world for which we are designed.

In response to this modern, digitally amplified rat-race, a practice called a “digital Sabbath” has become trendy, promoted by both Christian and secular sources. The idea is to take an intentional weekly break from screens and the internet to recalibrate ourselves to the real world, to real people — and, for Christians, to our very real God. What are we to make of these attempts and efforts? Should we participate? Do these practices have anything to do with our keeping of the Third Commandment, to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy?

What Are Digital Sabbaths?

The digital Sabbath trend started picking up steam around 2010, a few years after the release of the smartphone. Tiffany Shlain, an early promoter of the concept, explained recently,



“For over 15 years, I have turned off all screens for one day a week for what my family and I call our ‘Tech Shabbats.’ ... The idea of taking one day a week off from responsibilities and work is a very, very, very old idea. In our 24/7 information overload world, it’s a good time to bring this idea back.”

In his best-selling book *The Tech-Wise Family*, well-known Christian author Andy Crouch offers a similar take on digital Sabbaths: “We are designed for a rhythm of work and rest. So one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year we turn off our devices and worship, feast, play and rest together.” Likewise, in *The Common Rule*, Justin Whitmel Earley posits the daily principle of “Scripture before screen; prayer before phone,” and suggests that each day we eat at least one meal with others and have one hour with our phones off. Weekly, he suggests that we have at least one hour of in-person conversation with a friend, that we fast from something for a 24-hour period during the week, and that we practice some sort of Sabbath rest. Some churches have also encouraged their members to participate in digital fasts during Lent.

One might say this type of guidance is too prescriptive and verges on legalism. At the same time, we all crave practical advice for navigating life in the digital age and can benefit from simple rules practiced in community. Such

actionable suggestions, when properly understood within the framework of Christian liberty, can be expressions of Christian prudence and sanctified wisdom for living well in these times.

How Do ‘Digital Sabbaths’ Relate to the Christian Sabbath?

But how do these practices relate to remembering the Sabbath day by keeping it holy? In the narrow sense, they don’t have anything to do with keeping the Third Commandment *per se*. As Luther writes in the Small Catechism, the meaning of the Third Commandment is that “we should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” When the Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of “doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath,” our Lord minced no words: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:23–28). Christ came to fulfill the Sabbath, bringing the healing, forgiveness and restoration that the Sabbath always pointed toward. In the Divine Service, we get a foretaste of this true Sabbath rest, where Christ, who has done all the work for us, gives us Himself and grants us true rest as we hear His living voice and receive His living body.

On the other hand, Christ’s fulfillment of the Law is not an abolishing of the Law (Matt. 5:17). The Formula of Concord reminds us that the Law “is properly a divine doctrine,” which shows how man ought to be “in his nature, thoughts, words, and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God” (FC SD V 17). Though Old Testament Sabbath observance is done away with in Christ, this is by way of pattern and fulfillment, shadow and reality, lesser and greater — not by way of erasure or demolition. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9–10).

There also remains a Sabbath principle stitched into the natural order and into our human bodies. We need rest; animals need rest; all of creation needs rest (Rom. 8:18–23). And that rest finds its culmination in our restful reception of Christ and His perfect work for us. But we can also acknowledge that our practical choices can either aid or hinder our reception of Christ’s gifts on the Lord’s Day. Might a decision to, say, not bring our phones into the sanctuary during the Divine Service help us avoid distractions and aid our glad hearing and reception of Christ’s Word and gifts? To go further, might a period of time with no digital devices on Sunday help us experience a measure of refreshment and recalibration that could strengthen our faith toward God and love toward neighbor?

The Old Testament Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ, and we are no longer obligated to keep it in the Old Testament sense — this is a wonderful thing. And yet, perhaps we can also learn from this long tradition of rest/work cycles in order to facilitate a more restful and receptive Lord’s Day — not in the sense of returning to the Mosaic shadow, but of experiencing the Christological reality of feasting, worship and celebration; resurrection, rest and rejuvenation; all as a foretaste of the true Sabbath rest for the people of God.

What Is True Leisure?

As we consider things that may be beneficial to *avoid* at times, it is also helpful to consider the ways we *should* invest our time and focus. As discussed elsewhere in this issue (see p. 9), our culture has an anemic view of leisure. When we hear the word “leisure,” we tend to think of things like watching TV, consuming entertainment, playing video games or engaging in other free-time activities. Josef Pieper again is helpful here, as he explains that leisure is something much more. Leisure isn’t the absence of work or the escape from “total work.” Nor is it the individualistic pursuit of amusements.

Rather, true leisure is the presence of something meaningful in itself: the activities and practices that further us as human beings and bring us into a deeper contemplation of goodness, beauty and truth. Leisure, in its historical usage, was not about amusing ourselves, but about advancing ourselves in ways that foster a life of faith toward God and love toward neighbor.

In a society that views just about everything through the lens of efficiency, optimization and quantification — only furthered by our digital devices — this older conception of rest and leisure is countercultural. But it is also freeing. You don't need to be obsessed with squeezing profits out of every minute of your day. You don't need to be consumed with optimizing every aspect of your life with the latest life hacks. You don't need to be worried about whether caring for a loved one or walking with someone through depression is efficient or not; you can do it because you are free in Christ to love your neighbor as He has loved us. True rest seems wasteful and inefficient to the world. But that is the whole point: Christ has ushered in a different kind of kingdom, not based on works, but on mercy, where the love of God in Christ is extravagant, reckless even, as He pours Himself out fully for the redemption of the world. In His kingdom, efficiency, productivity and the cult of “total work” have been dethroned by faith, hope and love.

What Should We Do?

Christ has brought us into new life in Him. He gives us true rest. And, perhaps, healthy digital habits can help us more fully experience that rest as part of an overall approach to living virtuously as Christians. The day of resurrection might just be the perfect day to habituate ourselves to a deeper reality and experience of something freeing — as long as such digital detoxes do not become the *focus* of our Sundays.

When understood within a positive Gospel vision, such forms of self-denial and self-

discipline as a weekly digital “fast” can be invigorating and liberating as they serve a larger purpose to point us toward Christ and our ultimate rest in our union and communion with Him. Just as the spiritual life is punctuated by times of fasting and feasting, so too our technological habits can be characterized by such wisdom and prudence, enabling us to more fully experience freedom in Christ as we are transformed into His image. Not because such things are required by the Law, but because we are free in the Gospel to get a taste of something better. As Paul writes, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:17–18 NKJV). And seeing the glory of the Lord as in a mirror might be easier when we're not looking at ourselves on a screen.

Photo: LCMS Communications/Erik M. Lunsford.

This article originally appeared in the [January 2026 issue of The Lutheran Witness](#).

The St. John Amelith Lutheran Church and School Parent-Teacher League is conducting a bottle and can drive to help offset costs for the school. There are two barrels outside the school entrance to deposit cans. If you'd prefer to have someone pick them up from your home, please contact the school office.





Bright start for kids. Brighter future for Michigan.

Enrollment is open to all families, regardless of income.

Students must turn 4 by December 1st to be eligible.

Openings available at the following locations!

BAY COUNTY

Bay City

- Bay Co. Child & Senior Citizen Center
- Dow Bay Area Family YMCA
- All Saints Central
- Washington Elementary
- Kolb Elementary
- Zion Lutheran School
- St. John Amelith School
- McAlear-Sawden Elementary
- Kids University (Auburn)
- Trinity Lutheran - Monitor
- Lindsay Elementary

Bangor Township

- Bangor North
- Faith Lutheran School
- KinderKare (Thomas St)

Essexville

- Verellen Elementary
- Center Plaza

ARENAC COUNTY

- Au Gres-Sims Elementary



Funding from the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential supports the implementation of Great Start



NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

Lindsay Rivard | preschool@baisd.net | (989) 667-3209
www.BayArenacPreschool.com



St. John Amelith Great Start Readiness Preschool (GSRP) has openings! We recently received 6 additional openings for our FREE 4yr old preschool! Once the child turns 4 yrs old, they are eligible to join our classroom! Please share with anyone you know! Scan the link on the flyer, find it on our website or have them call the office.

Senior version of Jesus Loves Me

Jesus Loves me this I know
Though my hair is white as snow
Though my sight is growing dim
Still He bids me trust in Him

Refrain

Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so

Though my steps are oh so slow
With my hand in His, I'll go
On through life, let come what may
He'll be there to lead the way.

Refrain

When the nights are dark and long
In my hear He puts a song
Telling me in words so clear
Have no fear, for I am near.

JUST FOR FUN FROM
SOMEONE WHO THOUGHT
WE WOULD ENJOY AND
HAVE A LAUGH!

Refrain

When my work on earth is done
And life's victories have been won
He will take me home above
Then I'll understand His love

Refrain

I love Jesus, does He know?
Have I ever told Him so?
Jesus loves to hear me say
That I love Him everyday

Refrain

Now taking reservations for our summer day camp! We are more than just day care; your student will do learning activities to keep them on track over the summer, adventure around the church/school campus and get the chance to spend summer days with other kids when they spend the day with us. Spread the word and sign up now!

St. John Amelith Presents

6:30am - 6pm

Amelith Adventure Camp

Accepting Adventurers in grades 3yr old Preschool - 4th Grade

STEM Exploration
Arts & Crafts
Children's Theatre
Indoor/Outdoor Exploration
Bible Stories
Devotions & Reflection
Movement & Exercise
and Field Experiences

\$35 a day
\$150 a week

6:30am - 9am Early Care
9am - 3pm Camp Adventure
3pm - 6pm Extended Care

Teaching and CPR Certified Staff

June 15 thru August 14
Closed for deep cleaning June 29-July 3

Campers can come all day or part of the day snacks provided

For More Information or to sign up Contact us!

989-686-0176
1664 Amelith Rd. Bay City, MI 48706
office@amelith.org
www.stjohnamelithparochialschool.org



FEBRUARY

School Important Dates

- 2/3 - No School (voting day)
- 2/13 - Valentine's Day Party
- 2/16 - No School - Presidents Day
- 2/18 - Ash Wednesday Chapel Service

Hello Everyone! February is the shortest month of the year, but it always feels like it goes on forever for me! To combat this, I am reading the Word and exercising daily to stay focused in the new and not on the everlasting February. February's name originates from the Latin word februatius, meaning 'purification'. We view this as a reminder that through Christ, we receive a new start daily, not just annually. February is a time to observe God's ongoing work and the initial signs of spring. Praying that the signs of spring are an increase in temperatures :)

Pastor will have a special chapel service for the kids in church on Ash Wednesday, parents are welcome to come. Please see the Lenten schedule, we have dinners and evening prayer services every Wednesday evening and would love to see you!

OUR CHAPEL MISSION IS TO SUPPORT LUTHERAN FOR LIFE

"Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"



Lutherans For Life logo

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE logo

Blessings, Mrs. Molly

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

2 Corinthians 5:17

February Prayer Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 SJA Students	2 Council	3 Stewardship Committee	4 February Anniversaries	5 February Birthdays	6 Teachers	7 February Altar Guild Servers
8 Youth Group	9 Quilting	10 Finance Team	11 Bible Study	12 Organists	13 Church Mice	14 Chicken BBQ Volunteers
15 Chicken BBQ	16 Fund Development	17 Amelith Adventure Camp	18 Pastor	19 Snow Flow Volunteers	20 LWML	21 Endowment Fund
22 Voter's Meeting	23 Board of Ed	24 Elders	25 Outreach Committee	26 SJA Taskforces	27 Treasurer	28 Trustee Members

Every day, let us include the person/position/event mentioned in our prayers. You can pray for them, the job they do, those who receive or in whatever way you are led.