

# Visionotes

St. John's Lutheran Church  
December 2023



Holiday Bazaar 2023  
Cookie & Candy Walk  
Overwhelming Generosity!

**Christmas Eve Services — p. 6**

**Feature: Christmas Traditions — p. 17**

**Mission Endowment Fund Generosity — p. 26**

**Bazaar Success — p. 27**

All the news about the day and giving's recipients.

**Holiday Brunch Fundraiser — p. 28**

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# We are the church — together.

**Worship in the Sanctuary:** Saturdays at 5pm & Sundays at 9am  
**Livestream Worship on YouTube:** Sundays at 9am  
**Weekly Online Worship** at [www.StJohns-LC.org](http://www.StJohns-LC.org)  
**Church Office:** 608-882-4044, Mon-Thurs, 8am-4pm

## St. John's Staff

Pastor	Matthew Pook
Pastor of Congregational Care	Jerry Tews
Office Manager	Chris Cole
Community Life Coordinator	Becca Pook
Children's Ministry Director	Callie Jones
Financial Director	Deb Herbers
Music Director	Sharon Magee
Custodian	Emily Schmitzer
Ministry Coordinator	Carolyn Butts
Communication Coordinator	Alyse Miller
Nursery	Mikayla Samuelson
Little Fish Preschool Teacher	Melissa Blake

## 2023 Church Council

President	Jeff Updike
Vice President/Life & Growth	Amy Larson
Secretary/Fellowship	Keith Miller
Treasurer	Brandon Mohrbacher
Building and Grounds	Sean Mangold
Memorials	Dan Millin
Music and Worship	Renae Smith
Mutual Ministry	Julie Creek-Hessler
Parish Education	Bethany Steindl
Social Concerns	Debbe Topel
Stewardship	Eric Peterson
Youth Ministry	Erika Stoker
Youth Representative	Jack Burton

### Mission Endowment & Scholarship Fund Committee:

Rhonda Crans, David Karr, Jenna Mangold,  
Lynda Moseley, Jonathan Schalow

### Mutual Ministry Committee:

Jeanna Blume, Wanda King, Ann Legris,  
Joy Olson, Gordy Miller, Glenace Smelcer

# Why Worship Books?

*18th in a series of "why" questions about what we do as a church, particularly during worship*

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Most worship services of our church include people who are gathering with us for the very first time. It's one of the things about our congregation I thank God for. These people usually come because someone invited them. They come because they are looking for hope and community, for inspiration and guidance, for peace and connection. In hopes they'll find what they're seeking and return, we do our best to offer hospitality, from signage outside the doors to communion instructions at the beginning of worship. Even the Welcome Books we pass down the pews are part of our hospitality, to help us know one another and make a connection.

For someone new to our worship life, it might seem like an odd thing to sign in with your name when coming for worship. Some people might even be skeptical – why do they want to know my name? But we actually sign in, or at least check in, more places than you might think. When I visit patients at a hospice center, I check in and sign my name. Visitors are an important part of the well-being of their patients, and they want to know who is entering their facility. When we visit a clinic or office, we present ourselves and share our name in order to inform the staff that we are ready to meet. Most funerals and weddings have a guest book to sign, as a record of our presence at the event. We sign in because our presence matters to the family as they mourn and to the happy couple as they celebrate. In all these cases, our presence matters.

Your presence matters to your church, too. On Sunday mornings, somewhere around the first song, a notepad comes down the row with a space for our name. For Saturday evening worship, we tend to sign in upon arrival before sitting down. Sometimes there is even a line at the Welcome Book! In whatever way the book comes to us, we are invited to write our name and offer some communication to the church. Are you a member of the church? A guest? Would you like further connection and conversation? We ask because we care. The Welcome Book provides a simple way for all worshipers to connect with our church staff.

The Welcome Book is also a way for worshipers to connect with each other. Those connections matter, too. Look at the names of those on the page with

you. Connect their name and their face. If you realize you've never met, introduce yourself. If you got a reminder of their name, use it to greet them.

All these connections add to our well-being and happiness. They grow our sense of belonging. In a world where it is so easy to be isolated, it's good to know we are part of a community, of something bigger and greater than ourselves, that we belong in this world, among God's people, and to one another. The Welcome Book is a small way that we live our values that relationships matter and that we need each other.

St. John's uses Welcome Books in the conviction that our very presence matters. Guests matter, members matter, all who come matter. Showing up – for God and for one another – is important. It says that we care. It sets our priorities with how we use our time. Life can be busy if we let it, and we all face various obstacles in gathering together. Online worship has proved to be a helpful way to address some of those obstacles. Still, it's a victory to come together to worship the Lord, grow in faith, and support each other on life's journey. We rejoice in each other's presence. The Welcome Book is a simple tool that helps us communicate an important truth: you matter to God and you matter to this community.

Even the story of Jesus' birth began with signing in. Emperor Augustus wanted "all the world" to be registered. He was taking account of all his people. Everyone had to show up and be counted, so Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. The story goes on to tell of God showing up for the whole world. At the heart of Christmas, God shows up in the form a fragile, human life. We can hardly fathom all that it means for you and me and the whole world that God cared enough to show up for us. God's presence in Jesus Christ matters! Jesus came in the conviction that you and I matter to God, today and forever. Every time we gather, whether it's the first time or the thousandth time, we rejoice together in God's presence among us all.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Matthew Lock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to its right.

*"Come, let us worship and bow down.  
For the LORD is our God, and we are  
the people of God's pasture, the sheep  
of God's hand." — Psalm 95:6-7*

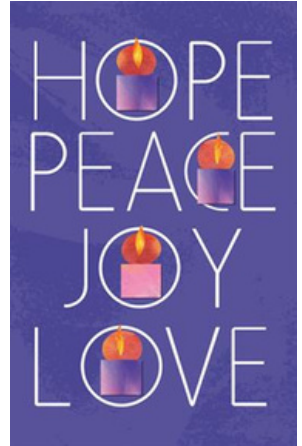
# REACHING UP: WORSHIP & PRAYER

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## *The Promises of God: Advent Sermon Series*

The Bible is full of the promises of God. In fact, the word “testament” comes from Latin and means “promise.” Both the Old Testament and the New Testament tell of the many promises of God. God promises to do things for us — to strengthen us, to guide us, and to be with us. God promises to provide for us — to give us peace, comfort, and forgiveness.

God promises to be things for us — to be our Rock, our Shepherd, and our Savior. The promises of God sustain us throughout the seasons of our lives, especially in tumultuous times. During the 4-week season of Advent, we’ll immerse ourselves in the promises of God and what they mean for us today.



- December 2 & 3... Isaiah 40:1-11 (Isaiah of the Exile)
  - “The Promises of God,” Advent 2 of 4: The Promise of a Shepherd
  - Guest preacher: Rev. Tim Dean
  - Church Council Elections after worship
- Wednesday, December 6 at 7pm - Midweek Advent Worship 2 of 4: Peace
- December 9 & 10... Luke 1:5-13, 57-80 (Zechariah’s Song)
  - “The Promises of God,” Advent 3 of 4: The Promise of John
- Wednesday, December 13 at 7pm - Midweek Advent Worship 3 of 4: Joy
- December 16 & 17... Luke 1:26-45 (The Promise of Jesus)
  - “The Promises of God,” Advent 4 of 4: The Promise of Jesus
  - Saturday at 5pm - Blue Christmas Worship
  - Sunday at 9am - Children’s Christmas Musical *Angels Say What!?*
  - Christmas Caroling, 10:15am
- Wednesday, December 20 at 7pm - Midweek Advent Worship 4 of 4: Love
- December 23 & 24... Christmas Eve Services
  - Saturday, December 23 at 5pm, and Sunday, December 24 at 3pm, 5pm, and 7pm
  - NO 9am worship on Sunday, December 24
- December 30 & 31...Mark 1:1-20 (Beginning of Good News)
  - Lessons and Carols

## Midweek Advent Worship: Experiencing the Promises of God

“Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world; the light no darkness can overcome; stay with us now, for it is evening, and the day is almost over. Let your light scatter the darkness, and shine within your people here.”

— Procession, Holden Evening Prayer



Can you hear this call-and-response tune in your head? Beginning Wednesday, November 29, we will gather weekly for a half-hour evening service to anticipate the Light of the World. Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is a time in the Church where we wait for the Messiah. What better way to wait than with each other? You are invited Wednesdays, Nov 29, Dec 6, 13, and 20, at 7pm to Holden Evening Prayer: to sing, pray, and center our hearts and minds on Jesus. The evening reflections will center around when we have experienced the promises of the hope, peace, joy and love of God. Make space in your Wednesday nights this December to make space in your hearts for the coming Savior.

## Christmas Eve at St. John's

You are invited to our Candlelight Christmas Eve services on Saturday, December 23 at 5pm, and Sunday, December 24 at 3pm, 5pm, and 7pm. Invite as many as you like to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Over four services we'll have room for you, your family, your friends, your neighbors, your teacher, your postal worker, your grocery clerk, etc.

*There will be no Sunday 9am worship service on December 24.*



## Inclement Weather Reminder

No matter the conditions outside, count on worship with St. John's. Please use your best judgment regarding your own safety. If travel is not safe for you, stay home and join us online Sunday at 9am on YouTube. Or tune in to the Bethel Lutheran Church worship service televised on Sunday mornings at 10am on WKOW-TV 27.

## St. John's Advent Devotion: The Promises of God

Our 2023 Advent devotional journey has begun! Twenty-eight writers of our congregation will help us contemplate the many promises God has given us. Copies are available in the Gathering Area. Or, read online through our website under "Events." This daily reading, our midweek services, and weekend worship all coordinate to focus on God's faithful promises to us.

From our 2023 Advent devotion:



"As the years are going by and I'm aging, I think of the wonderful promise I've been granted." — Joann Lien, Dec 1

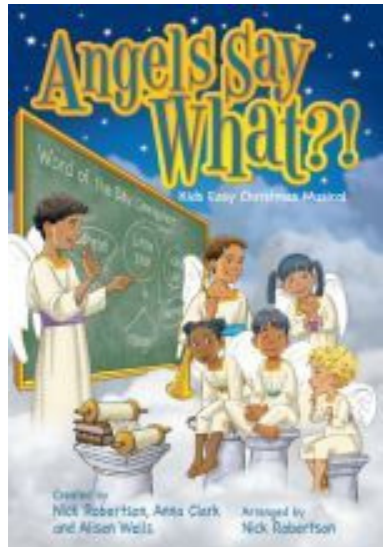
"And God not only just forgives your sins: God forgets about them." — Derek Blume, Dec 21

"...there was this strong peace in my heart telling me 'let me hold your fears' and 'you are strong.'" — Chris Cole, Dec 4

## Angels Say What?! Christmas Musical

The Christmas story has been told and retold in many ways, but we rarely hear it from the angels' perspective. As all of the angels gather in Heaven, they discuss all of the good news that they've just told Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and wise men. Not only do they experience sharing the news of Jesus, but they learn what it means to truly have a part in the greatest story ever told!

**On Sunday, December 17 at 9:00am**, St. John's grade school children will present "Angels Say What?!". Children have been rehearsing since October, singing, learning choreography, and memorizing lines. Mark your calendars to hear the ANGELS tell the story of the birth of the Savior.





## Sadness & Hope on December 16

This Christmas there are 9 countries enduring civil war in the world. There are 18 countries overrun by terrorists. Then there is the Russo-Ukrainian and Israel-Hamas Wars. 12 million children struggle with hunger in the US. 7.4 million families are living below the poverty line in the US. On top of all of those, this time of year can be a very isolating and dreary time for many people: those grieving the loss of loved ones, dealing with separation or divorce, struggling to find meaningful employment, facing depression or family crisis, or longing for years gone by. Every greeting and song can remind the grief-stricken of how unhappy life is at this moment. To acknowledge this and support each other, we offer our annual Blue Christmas Service.



**Our worship on Saturday, December 16, 5pm will be a Blue Christmas service.** We will worship with extra gentleness and hope. We will light candles, acknowledge our heartache, and reflect on Christ's promises for us. We will cry out and pray to the Lord with open and soft hearts. We will ask for healing and relief. If you desire, you may also receive the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for healing. We pray you will find comfort and hope in this time together. With the winter solstice on December 21st, this is literally the darkest time of the year. Thankfully, Christ is our light and our peace, today and always.

*December 17 at 9am is the children's Christmas musical.*

### **St. John's Welcome Statement**

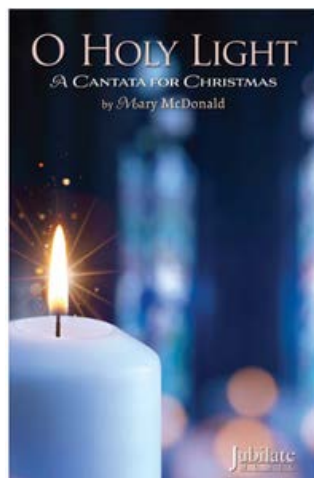
Jesus commands us to love one another. We welcome all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, past misdeeds, socio-economic circumstances, immigration status, or anything that too often divides us. We welcome and celebrate diversity and uniqueness.

**We welcome you.**



## Ecumenical Christmas Concert — Sunday, December 3

There are many opportunities to engage in Advent: our St. John's devotional book, coming to midweek worship, or lighting an Advent wreath at home. Maybe this year you will add the Ecumenical Christmas Concert to your second week of Advent. Singers from the surrounding community will share their gift of music to put Christ at the center stage of our season and our hearts. St. John's is hosting this annual tradition on Sunday, December 3, 5:00pm. O Holy Light by Mary McDonald shares a journey of the celebration of the Light of the world. Filled with beloved carols and exciting songs, this cantata captures the many moods of Christmas with a fresh voice.



The narration explores God's Light contrasted with the world's darkness, and how the Holy Light of Jesus will never be quenched. Mark your calendar and plan to enjoy an inspiring evening of music to set your heart and soul on the true wonder of Christmas. Mark your calendar and plan to enjoy an inspiring evening of music to set your heart and soul on the true wonder of Christmas.

## Handel's Messiah: Festival Choir of Madison

Madison Chamber Orchestra and Festival Choir of Madison is teaming up for TWO nights of Messiah at Bethel Lutheran Church, Madison. **Get your tickets online for either Friday, Dec. 8, 7pm or Saturday, Dec. 9, 7pm.** You may recognize a certain soprano in the front row (Becca Pooock!)



Not up for a night of Handel? Enjoy the choir's Christmas concert, "Merrily On High," Sunday, December 17, at 3pm, which is perfect for the whole family.

# Here We Come A-Caroling: Sunday, December 17

Caroling at Christmas can be dated back to the year 1223. The church of St. Francis of Assisi believed singing songs full of joy was more appropriate than the dull hymns of the Middle Ages. Almost 800 years later, St. John's carries on this merry tradition. Warm up your voices and bundle up to share the Christmas cheer around the community on **Sunday, December 17.**



You, your friends, and your family are all invited. **Following 9am worship, we'll depart from the church building by 10:30.** As long as you have joy in your heart, we want your voice in the chorus. *This is for people of all ages.*

Save the Date:

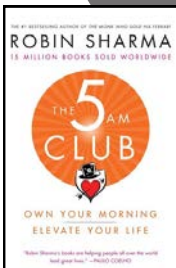
Our annual **Bluegrass Worship Weekend** will be January 6 & 7, 2024.



## Whatcha Reading? with Johann Kleisch

### The 5am Club by Robin Sharma

"After many recommendations I finally read The 5am Club and it was a game changer. While I was already waking up fairly early, since reading the book, I've been constantly getting up at 5am or sooner during the week and at 6am on the weekends. It's a fascinating fiction story with powerful teachings and insight about the importance of having a good morning routine. Highly recommended for anyone who wants to get more out of life!"



# REACHING WITHIN: SPIRITUAL GROWTH & FRIENDSHIP

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## December Adult BASIC

Each Sunday at 10:15am St. John's will host a variety of friends to share about their expertise and passions. Grab a mug, a snack, and a friend to grow in faith and connection. Here's our December schedule:



- **Dec 3:** Bible Study with Pastor Matt
- **Dec 10:** Bible Study with Pastor Matt
- **Dec 17:** Caroling for all ages at 10:15am (see page 10 for details)
- **Dec 24:** No 9am service/No BASIC

## Epiphany Open House at the Poock's on January 2

Stop by the Poock's to celebrate the day of Epiphany (Jan 6) and the ending of the 12 days of Christmas. This is a day for visitors, remembering the wise men that came to visit the young Jesus.



Matt, Becca, Eleanor, Micah, Simon, and Marty (the dog) extend a warm invitation to you for **the 14th annual Poock Open House, on Tuesday, January 2, from 4:30-6:30pm.** Fiesta Chili (mild) will be served, so get your adventurous tastebuds ready! If you'd like to bring an appetizer or snack, let them know. Together we'll celebrate the beginning of a new year. You'll find the lights on at 470 W Church St. in Evansville.



## Care Circle

The Congregational Care Faith Circle is a confidential gathering open to all who are enduring hardships.

**Come on Tuesday, December 12th, 1:00-2:00pm.**

## 2024 & 2025 Church Council Candidates

Every year the congregation elects individuals to a two-year term to oversee the mission of our congregation and plan for the future of our ministry. Serving on council is an important role of leadership and listening, prayer and service.



Elections are December 2 and 3 following worship. Come to vote and affirm these willing leaders for St. John's.

- **Julie Creek-Hessler (2nd term)** — retired teacher; worship leader; adult small groups; Vacation Bible School
- **Keith Miller (2nd term)** — retired teacher; worship leader; youth ministry leader
- **Brandon Mohrbacher (2nd term)** — credit analyst; worship steward; men's ministry
- **Kaye Crocker (1st term)** — retired school district office; offering counter; memorials manager; altar guild

*Thank you Amy Larson for your service on St. John's Church Council. Your contributions and leadership will be missed.*

## Financial Peace University: A New Year's Gift for You

Take control of your money with Financial Peace University (FPU), the nine-lesson course that gives you a proven plan to master budgeting, pay off debt, build wealth, and give generously. The course centers around lessons taught via video by Dave Ramsey, Rachel Cruze, George Kamel, and Dr. John Delony followed by small group discussions. Sessions are hosted by Eric Hessler, retired accountant and course alum.



**FPU will meet on Thursdays, January 11 – March 7, from 6:30-8:00pm, at St. John's Fellowship Hall.** Your family membership fee is \$80 per household and includes a free year of membership with online tools created to support your journey. Childcare is included upon request. For more info contact Chris Cole at [office@stjohns-lc.org](mailto:office@stjohns-lc.org). It's not a magic bullet, but FPU will teach you to take control of your money, invest for the future, and give like never before. Your financial health would be a great gift for 2024.

# Making Connections: John and Jayne Ruchti

By Jayne Ruchti

John and I have been married for 21 years. We are a blended family with three girls between us. When we met, Brianna was 17, Marissa six, and Miranda was three. We have three grandchildren from Brianna and John McClintock. Marissa and Alex were married in June, and Miranda and her fiancée Hunter are currently in the wedding planning stages.



Brianna and I moved to Evansville in 1991 and started attending St. John's. I wanted Brianna to attend Sunday School, so I transferred my membership from St. Peter's Lutheran in Muscoda, WI where I was confirmed. Brianna was confirmed at St. John's. John, Marissa, and Miranda started attending in 2002 after John and I were married. John transferred his membership from UCC in Brodhead, WI where he was confirmed.

John has been employed at Kuhn North America in Brodhead for 30 years as Sales Coordinator. I retired from Dental Health of Madison in December 2021 after 30 years in the orthodontic field.

Our faith and friendships have grown so much over the years with participation in small groups, retreats, bible studies, and group travel. Our girl's faith grew with their participation in mission trips over the years. The parishioners here at St. John's are truly our family. We are so blessed and thankful for the leadership, staff, and all the members that participate and volunteer to make it such a great place to spend time and worship.

We give to St. John's because God has given to us. We give back to St. John's so they can pass on our gifts to those in need. St. John's does a great job directing the funds so we know it's getting into the right hands.

# Women's Retreat — January 19-21, 2024

Thirty-six women are registered, but there's more room for you! You won't want to miss this weekend at the Prairie Center at Bethel Horizons in Dodgeville. This year we welcome guest speaker Julie Van Hove from Defined Ministries ([definedministries.com](http://definedministries.com)). She has spent 25+ years in ministry. Julie has a heart for God and for women who want to define who they are through their identity in Christ.



It's time to take time for you, ladies. Cost is \$175 for the whole weekend which includes lodging, food, and entertainment. Contact Becca Pook or Chris Cole with questions. Register now at the Ministry Table or church office with a \$50 non-refundable deposit by December 1. Full payment due January 2.



## Our Mission Statement

Reaching Up, Reaching Out, Reaching Within...  
because GOD reaches out to us.

## Our Core Values

- |                           |                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Inspiring Worship         | Uplifting Prayer            |
| Faithful Service          | Caring Invitation           |
| Lifelong Spiritual Growth | Christ-Centered Friendships |

## Bible Study on Thursdays at 1:00pm with Pastor Matt

You are invited to join Pastor Matt every Thursday afternoon at 1:00pm for Bible Study in the lounge. Each week we'll preview the upcoming weekend's scripture reading through reflection and conversation. No experience necessary. Come when you can; our group is different every week. What remains constant is that we always laugh and learn together.



# Men's Retreat: February 2-3, 2024



It is difficult to prioritize relationships when most of us have to-do lists, jobs, and commitments, but Jesus loves us too much to leave us to our own demise. God wants us to have friends that really know us and accept us for who we are. The Church is designed to be a community who will listen to us and pray for us when hard times come.

You are not alone, Brother. Let's prioritize Christ-centered friendship in our lives.

**When:** Friday, Feb. 2, 5pm (depart) – Sat., February 3, 6pm (arrive home)  
**Where:** Bethel Horizons, Dodgeville, WI (hotel-style rooms)  
**Cost:** \$113 for lodging, three meals, supplies (due to office by Dec. 1)  
**Who:** Men of St. John's, our guests, and Pastor Matt

This time away will allow us to relax and bond with other men of faith. We will support each other, read the Bible, pray together, and get outdoors. And we'll put our hands to work on service projects around Bethel Horizons. Contact Chris Cole or Pastor Matt with questions. Register now at the Ministry Table or church office with a \$50 non-refundable deposit.

**Not able to make it to the retreat,  
but still want to connect with other men of faith?  
You've got options!**

The next **Men's Group** will meet on Sunday nights, January 14 & 28 at 7pm. Gather with other men at the church for an hour of study, prayer, and connection. Interested in joining?  
Reach out to Pastor Matt to get on the reminder list!

Find yourself with some free time on Tuesday mornings? Join other men for the **Tuesday Morning Work Group at 8:30am** for coffee and odd jobs around the church.



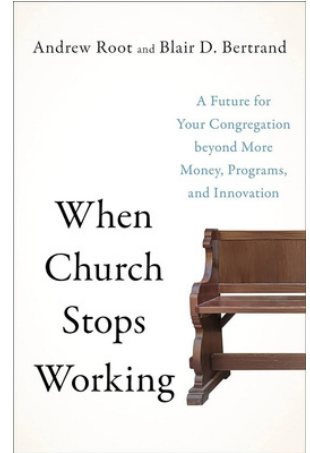
# REACHING OUT: SERVICE & INVITATION

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## Council Matters by Keith Miller

On November 13, the Church Council met for its regular monthly meeting, and it was held in the Chapel because preparations for the Bazaar were in full swing. Jeff Updike, our president, brought in the delicious treats. After calling the meeting to order, we prayed for each other in triads after sharing our highs and lows. Next, the council approved the minutes from September. Thank you to Erika for handling the minutes while Keith was on his retirement vacation out west. The financial report was next, and it contained some wonderful information. Total giving was up 17% in October compared to last October. We are 97% on budget so far this year which is pretty amazing this late in the year.



Participation was just under 1,500 people for October, which is a 300-person increase compared to October of last year. Pastor Matt went next with his Pastor's report. Highlights included a pumpkin carving event with the Sweet Wednesday high school students and the annual lively Beatles worship service. The church council is currently reading and discussing the book When Church Stops Working, and we discussed Chapter 2. Then, the ballot for the next church council election was set and approved by motion. Finally, a motion was made to adjourn by Erika and seconded by Julie. Adjournment unanimously approved.

## Stay Connected with St. John's



**Online** at [www.StJohns-LC.org](http://www.StJohns-LC.org)

**On Facebook** at [facebook.com/St-Johns-Lutheran-Church-Evansville-WI-145437998849063/](https://facebook.com/St-Johns-Lutheran-Church-Evansville-WI-145437998849063/)

**With Daily Nudge Text Message Devotions** at [trunc.us/dB47CB](https://trunc.us/dB47CB)

# Feature: Christmas Traditions

## Glenace Smelcer

Traditions create memories. We have some special old traditions for the holiday season. We begin with the Lighting of the "Advent Candles" and devotions each evening and also have an Advent wreath with little gifts to open each day, counting down the days until Christmas.



Since my children are grown, they have carried on the family tradition. Decorating the Christmas tree is special as each ornament has a memory too. We have a "glass pickle ornament" that hides in the tree and on Christmas Eve the first child to find it gets a surprise. As adults a new tradition was started, we play a game to exchange gifts, everyone brings one or two gifts, following a theme, red and yellow, everything weighs a pound, or a homemade item, a great family fun time.

But the greatest tradition is attending the Christmas Eve Service, singing carols, lighting the candles and singing "Silent Night" and listening to the "greatest story" ever told, the Birth of Savior Jesus Christ.

Traditions change as families change, but creating the memories gives families the love for each other, and the joy of serving — so use old traditions or create new traditions... either way, make memories!

## Erika Stoker



I was born and raised in snowy Minnesota. Every year, Christmas Eve was the same hectic schedule: it always started with a traditional Norwegian meal with Grandpa Olaf, yes to lefse but no to lutefisk! After that, we went to the evening church service which was a Christmas carol candlelight service. I loved the singing and the quietness of this service. Then it was a long car ride to my other grandparent's farm in River Falls, WI, with stops at Aunt Dolly's and Jackie, an old friend of my mother's.

Once we saw the Christmas tree glowing in my grandparent's window across the bare fields, we knew the relaxing Christmas was about to begin. We unloaded the car, put on pajamas, and waited until the Tom & Jerry's were made so we could gather around the metal spinning tree to open presents!

Once I had a family of my own, my husband and I made a few changes to the tradition; we wanted to take the hecticness out of the holiday. Our rule was that our girls would wake up on Christmas Day in their own home. Any and all were welcome to join us at our house — and we always had a FULL house! We kept the tradition of the Norwegian meal but often different items were added to appease everyone. We still made it to the candlelight church service on Christmas Eve. Our Christmas celebration has become a time to slow down: sing carols, sample cookies, put up the Nativity scene, and just be with family. Christmas is a time to remember how Jesus came into the world and created a new family: his family with Mary and Joseph, but also a family of those who love each other and love God. At Christmas, I enjoy finding these family members and slowing down to bask in the glow of the love.

## Joy Olson

The George Family always was together on Christmas Day. We all drew names and Grandpa & Grandma George always bought a gift for everyone. I loved the close family being all together; we always had a big family dinner. Grandpa died in 1965 after a car accident. Grandma would not celebrate after that. We no longer had that togetherness, and families went their own way. I see that as a mistake. If something happened to one of us, I told Larry that we need to keep our tradition going, no matter how difficult. Christmas is for family, a time to show our love.



My family still carries on that tradition. In our early years with married kids, they would come and stay the weekend. They liked to call it our "Walton Family Christmas" — I can still hear them saying "Goodnight, John Boy!" As the family grew, and with married grandchildren, we made the decision to plan Christmas weekend for the 2nd weekend in December. Now, with 33 of us, Larry & I send the married kids and grandkids to a motel. We keep the grandkids and great-grandkids at our house. The parents love it and it gives the cousins time to be together.

Our tradition is to all go to church on Saturday night and open gifts after church. Grandpa and Grandma buy gifts for everyone, and the kids have a name draw. This year we are changing things around and we will have dinner on Saturday night and open gifts. Sunday, we will all go to church as a family and have brunch after. We think we will have more time for family fun and games. Another Olson family tradition is that we always sing the Doxology, before meals when we are together. After the family has gone home, I like to put our nativity scene under the Christmas tree; it was a wedding gift. It really reminds me of what is truly important. Then we have time to prepare ourselves and do all that needs to be done at Church to prepare for the birth of baby Jesus. I serve on Altar Guild and that is a busy time at church. We also have time to unwind and know the real meaning of Christmas, and we pray our family can do that, too.

## **Renaë Smith**

Christmas continues to be my very favorite time of year. As a child, I was often so excited about the holidays that I couldn't sleep and inevitably became "sick" on Christmas day from all of the excitement. Nevertheless, coming from a Norwegian background, our family had our biggest celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas Eve. Because I grew up on a dairy farm, this meant the long wait until the milking and chores were done... which as a child seemed like forever. After all the cows and calves were fed and we were cleaned up ourselves, we sat down to a simple dinner



which typically included Oyster Stew. (I only drank the broth!) Our dessert always included choices from a huge tray of many varieties of cookies that we had helped prepare in the month prior. (Our basement freezer was filled to the top with these cookies to be used as treats for the following week's arduous task of "stripping" tobacco, our cash crop that would hopefully pay for machinery repair and replacement. With 5 children home from school for a week, our time was always put to use.) After eating our favorite cookies, family members would gather in our tiny living room and exchange gifts under the soft, colorful lights of the Christmas tree. When 10:00pm approached, we knew it was time for our family of seven to all pile into the car and head down the road for the annual Candlelight Church service. What I remember most as a child was getting that bag of peanuts with candy and fruit similar to the tradition Glenace Smelcer has shared with St. John's. Throughout the years, we have tried to carry on these Christmas Eve traditions with our own family. (Well, the Oyster Stew only lasted one year.) Of all the many traditions, it is the Candlelight Service that I value the most, especially if our whole family is able to attend. After the busy preparations for Christmas, it is at this time when I finally pause to reflect on how truly blessed we are for the gift of that tiny baby. When the church takes on that warm peaceful glow and we sing Silent Night in God's house, I feel his presence so clearly. On Christmas Eve, I am filled with hope, joy, peace, and love. I wish I could carry that feeling in my heart all year long. Have a very merry and blessed Christmas!

## **Bethany Steindl**

When I was a little girl, my Grandma Denner began giving us Christmas ornaments for our Christmas gift. We received them on Christmas Eve when all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins met for dinner after church. Most of the time, the ornaments were wrapped without a designated name and we chose from the pile of presents. Grandma said she wanted us to have beautiful ornaments to put on our tree when we left home and had families of our own. As a child, I did not appreciate the gift my grandma was giving me.



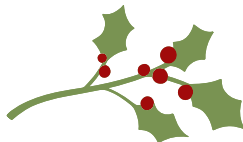
My parents, Richard and Nancy Krake, began giving ornaments to their grandchildren when they began to arrive. My boys now have beautiful ornaments to decorate their own trees some day. If I have grandchildren someday, this is a tradition that I will carry on. Every year when I place these special ornaments on the tree, I remember my grandma and the gift of family, which is a gift from Jesus.

## **Dan Millin**

I was raised Catholic, and we usually went to midnight mass on Christmas — this required us to open our presents on Christmas Eve. I was raised on a farm and that meant getting up, milking the cows, and doing all the chores. We then went to my grandmother's for a pot-luck meal. Upon having children, we opened our presents on Christmas morning. Not being on a farm, this seemed like a good move. After opening them we attended our Lutheran service.



Christmas was always special to me. I wanted to pass it on to my kids. Life is a journey and it's always nice to stop and relax and look at what you have done and what you need to do in the future.



### **Prayer Team**

The Prayer Team of St. John's is ready to pray with you — for healing, hope, wisdom, gratitude, and more. See the welcome desk and pew racks for a prayer card to fill out and return in the offering boxes, to the office, or see our website for a confidential online request form.

*For more information on the prayer team,  
contact Becca Pooock at 608-490-3144.*



## Faithful Service Highlight: Office Volunteers

Although St. John's office manager is quite efficient and very competent, there are several individuals that volunteer to make the office run even more smoothly.

- Each month a group of dedicated ladies, Pam Keisler, Carol Golz, Pat Peckham, Linda Guth, Joan Fisk, and Marie Gallman, comes to assemble, label, and sort the Visionotes newsletter. The task is 600 newsletters large, but they are a mighty bunch.
- Every Tuesday morning, Debbe Topel covers the phones and activities of the office during the staff meeting. She has random crafts, mailings, and other projects to tackle during her office time.
- And finally, Carolyn Butts covers the weekly bulletin, weekly powerpoint, managing the Befrienders' ministry, and "other duties as assigned" three days of the week.

With these committed volunteers, St. John's office accomplishes much more to live into our mission: to reach up, reach within, and reach out. Thank you good and faithful servants!



### Green Living Tip: Put an Eco-Twist on Holiday Traditions

Holidays are a great time to celebrate faith, family & friendships. It is also a time where consumers are known to splurge, our carbon footprint expands, and waste increases. As you start to decorate for the holidays, think about putting an eco-twist on traditions. Small eco-friendly changes can lead to positive lasting impacts on our earth:

If your holiday traditions include putting up **a real Christmas tree**, consider a fresh cut tree that does not have any dyes or chemicals. When you are ready to take your tree down, ask local farmers if they want them for their farm animals. Goats especially love fresh cut Christmas trees!



# Faithful Service Opportunity: Global Health Ministries

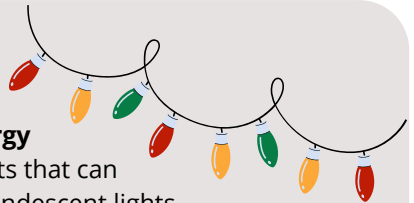
Global Health Ministries (GHM) is an independent Lutheran nonprofit (501c3) established in 1987, and specializes in capacity-building for Lutheran health systems in under-resourced countries, serving some of the most vulnerable people in the world. St. John's is partnering with GHM on **Wednesday, December 13, 6:00-7:30pm** to roll bandages for mission hospitals and rural clinics.



These places are the frontline for healthcare for millions of people across the globe. Most lack even the most basic supplies, including bandages. Many have no access to clean, affordable bandages, and many have little or no access to clean water. Sterilization is difficult and it can be a challenge to have enough clean bandages for daily patient care. GHM rolled bandages help meet that need. Although most often used for wound care, including burns, the bandages can be useful in other ways at hospitals and clinics where resources are scarce. GHM rolled bandages have been spotted holding an IV in place, and tying up broken surgical lights. Since 1987 GHM has sent more than 2.1 million bandages to international partners — that's almost 2,500 miles of bandages!



by Lindsay Trustem



Holiday lights are beautiful, but many are **energy vampires**. This year, consider LED holiday lights that can use up to 80% less energy than traditional incandescent lights.

Gift wrap and ribbon are large contributors to waste generated during the holidays; the common store bought stuff is **often not recyclable**. Save resources by choosing sustainable wrappings & ribbons which are recyclable, like craft paper wrapping and ribbon.

Invest in a reusable advent calendar. Many families can't wait to put up an advent calendar! If you purchase a reusable one, you can fill it with homemade gifts and treats.



## My Faithful Service

by Ruby Davis



Many members of our congregation know me because of my volunteer work with the Altar Guild. That's where I have been most visible since returning to Evansville to live in 2010.

My membership at St. John's goes back to when I was baptized by Pastor Arvid Romstad when I was an infant, and was later confirmed in this church, as well. My paternal grandparents were active members here in Evansville, while my maternal grandparents were active in the Orfordville Lutheran Church. I have been blessed to be reared by a faithful and loving extended family. They and my godparents acted as examples of service to God. My mother was the director of the St. John's Junior Choir; and, of course, I was a soprano in that group. Music has always been an important part of my life.

As an adult, I lived in other parts of Wisconsin, and became a member of a Lutheran church in each town where I lived. It was important that I contribute my time and talents, and I chose to join the Altar Guild in each congregation. In so doing, I learned from many dedicated and devoted members, and was part of a team of like-minded individuals.

Welcoming guests to dine at our home was also an important part of our family life. I learned how to handle details, including how to set the table for formal dinners. This aspect of my adult life tends to be reflected in my interest in working to prepare the altar table for Holy Communion. We realize that all are invited to share in this sacred sacrament, a "foretaste of the feast to come" with our Lord in Heaven.



It was my pleasure to serve on the design committee for the remodeling of the sanctuary and other parts of our church building starting around 2013. I also was a member of the capital campaign committee, which successfully brought together the funds to make this project possible. I have been part of the Music and Worship committee for many years. We meet monthly to coordinate the plans for worship services. It is essential that Altar Guild be aware of plans for all services and events.

Why do I serve? It is a way to show my gratitude to God for all my blessings, as well as to carry on the legacy of service of those loved ones who went before me. We are blessed to be a blessing!

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## Stewardship Word of the Month

**Commitment.** Sometimes it's easy to dream of a life with no obligations. We could do whatever we want, whenever we want. Though it sounds enticing, such a life wouldn't be any life at all.



No one would know what to expect from us... no one would be able to count on us. Our legacy would be limited, and our life wouldn't amount to much. Author, pastor, sociologist Tony Campolo says, "We create who we are through the commitments we make. And without commitments we have no identity." You are who you are through the commitments of your life. Some of these commitments you have chosen for yourself. Others are simply given to you without your asking. Either way, they shape you. They give you meaning. And they will end up forming your legacy. As Christians, we take our commitments seriously and choose them wisely. But don't be shy to commit your time, your talent, and your treasure to making a difference in the world. In doing so, you'll find true life.

## The Gift that Keeps On Living: The St. John's Mission Endowment Fund

Some gifts last a day, like gourmet popcorn. Some gifts can last a lifetime, like a piece of jewelry. Few gifts last beyond a lifetime. A gift to St. John's Mission Endowment Fund is one of those gifts that makes a lasting impact for God's work in the world long after we are gone. The principal is invested and never withdrawn, while the interest from our investments is distributed annually.



Our Mission Endowment Fund receives gifts from memorials, wills, trusts, annuities, insurance, living trusts, bonds, stock, and real estate. **Please consider a gift to St. John's in your estate plans.**

In the Fund's fiscal year, ending with September 30, earnings to distribute totaled \$8776.46. With the proposal of the committee and approval of the council, we are advancing God's work in the world by generous gifts to:

- Lutherdale Bible Camp: \$1,000.00
- Bethlehem Lutheran Church: \$1,000.00
- Pastor's Emergency Fund: \$2,521.17
- Levi Leonard Elementary School: \$1,000.00
- Aware of Evansville: \$1,000.00
- Evansville Ecumenical Care Closet: \$500.00
- St. John's Capital Expenditure Fund: \$1,755.29



What a joy to support God's word near and far with our generosity!

*The faithful members of the Mission Endowment Fund Committee are Rhonda Crans, David Karr, Jenna Mangold, Lynda Moseley, and Jonathan Schalow.*

### **MORNING PRAYER SERVICE, TUESDAYS @8:30**

St. John's Prayer Chapel; a 20-minute service of prayer  
You are invited. All are welcome.

## 2023 Annual Holiday Bazaar – Praise the Lord!

Generosity, creativity, and joy were in rich supply for this year’s event. We had a steady flow of shoppers throughout the day and utilized our space in creative ways. The dining room served three shifts of guests. The silent auction continued to thrive online and in-person. Our quilt shop was overflowing. And the new Frozen Foods Shop was a total win! Seasoned and new servant-workers helped make the day a joyous success.

### Initial receipts reveal that we raised over \$16,000!

All the proceeds will be distributed between Evansville Fire Department, Vermont flooding and Minnesota tornado relief, migrant children in Central America, and invested in St. John’s Mission Endowment Fund. Special thanks to co-chairs Kate Cheramy and Allison Hilliard for their leadership. Lucky for us — they both plan to return next year to help manage this whole thing again!





*Clockwise:*

**No Grownups Allowed Shop:**  
Sandy Thompson, Lizzie, Katrina  
Thompson, Ashley Thompson;  
**Crafts Shop:** Kira Tortomasi,  
Sara Torotmasi, Sebastian;  
**Bakery Shop:**  
**Baskets Shop:** Lindsey Jobe,  
Evelyn Stencil, Jayne Ruchti.;  
**NEW Frozen Foods Shop:** Sue  
Reese & Maureen Anderson



## Care Closet Thanksgiving Baskets

Thank you to all who donated for the Care Closet Thanksgiving Baskets! **St. John's collected 4-ingredient desserts for the 86 Thanksgiving baskets!** And even more people were helped with the offering at the Thanksgiving Service. Our generosity will live in the hearts of those who received the baskets and fill their cupboards this holiday season.



## Holiday Brunch Buffet — December 10

On Sunday, December 10, our own Kathy Wells is hosting a Holiday Brunch Buffet with proceeds benefiting the Evansville Care Closet and Creekside Place Community Center. The brunch will be served **10:30am-1:30pm at Creekside Place, 102 Maple St, Evansville**. There will be four large food stations with over 25 different food items plus desserts and beverages (Gluten free and vegetarian available.). Cost: a suggested, minimum donation of \$12/adult, \$10/65+ adults, and \$6/child ages 5-11.



### **St. John's is shifting to collecting pull tabs/pop tabs for Ronald McDonald House — Madison.**

Keep your cans at home, but pop those tabs off and bring them to the Gathering Area at the church building. Let's keep families with sick children together and near the care and resources they need.





## Missionary Moment: Ashley Bowman, Seminary Student

By Ashley Bowman

I just completed my first internship, also called CPE — Clinical Pastoral Education. For this internship, I spent time working with Linda O’Leary as a hospital chaplain; provided spiritual care to St. John’s members; and spent time working from home staffing a late-night ministry care line through San Francisco Night Ministry.

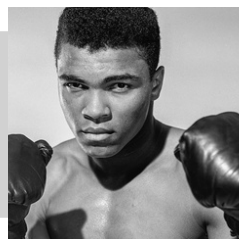


All of these experiences were really meaningful to me and renewed my sense of purpose in providing care for others as part of my calling. I enjoyed getting to form relationships with Paulette, Elaine, and Evelyn at The Heights through weekly visits. I couldn’t believe I was getting internship credit for getting to go hang out with these awesome ladies!

Doing chaplain work at the hospital gave me one particularly poignant memory: my very first blessing of a newborn baby was to a family whose baby’s name was also Ashley. At a moment in the summer when I was struggling greatly, I got to go sit with a family and say these words aloud: “Bless Ashley with peace and joy as she grows to fulfill her life purpose.” I have said those words out loud a lot since then.

I am in my final year of classes in seminary. I am particularly enjoying my final-year thesis on American Christianity as it relates to child abuse and gender-based violence. In March, I will find out where I will be sent for my pastoral internship, which will start over the summer. My husband and our dog will join me as we relocate for a year. We are looking forward to the next adventure and appreciate your thoughts and prayers as we’re trying not to be too anxious about the lack of planning time!

“Service to others is the rent you pay  
for the room here on Earth.”  
— Muhammad Ali



# CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRIES

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## Sweet Wednesday Christmas Party

We'll have our annual Christmas party for high school only on **Wednesday, December 20, 7:30-9pm.**

Bring a white elephant gift wrapped up to share (This is something you already own that could possibly be valuable to someone else, or purchase a used item from a thrift store for \$5 or less.). We'll celebrate Christmas with delicious food (from Kathy Wells), fun, and gifts!



There will be **NO** Confirmation or Sweet Wednesday on December 27th for Christmas Break.

## 3rd – 5th Grade Retreat @ Lutherdale Bible Camp

Hanging out with friends. Great food. Outdoor adventures. Fun camp activities. Does this sound like something that your child would enjoy? All 3rd – 5th graders are invited to a **24-hour overnight retreat at Lutherdale on February 10-11, 2024.** The experience starts Saturday morning and concludes Sunday morning. Cost is \$95 per person and includes meals (Saturday lunch and supper; Sunday breakfast), snacks, lodging, and program. Scholarships are available on request. Mark your calendar for a fun weekend!



## Children, Youth & Family (CYF)

### Calendar Highlights for December 2023:

- Saturday, Dec. 16th: Christmas program dress rehearsal 9-11am
- Wednesday, Dec. 20th: Jesus's Birthday Party at FC/ST
- Sunday, Dec. 24th: **NO BASIC / Christmas Eve**
- Wednesday, Dec. 27th **NO Soul Troop / Faith Corps**
- Sunday, Dec. 30th: **NO BASIC / Winter Break**

Questions about ministries for children 5th grade and younger?  
Contact Callie Jones at [children@stjohns-lc.org](mailto:children@stjohns-lc.org)!

## Reflections on the Trip to Deer Park Buddhist Temple

In November our Confirmation students, leaders, and parents made a trip to the Deer Park Buddhist Center in Oregon. We enjoyed learning about the history of Buddhism and some of their practices and beliefs. Did you know that Buddhism has been around for 2,500 years?



**Chris Cole** — There were so many things that I enjoyed: the colors in the building are bold and beautiful. It was nice to learn some history of Buddhism, but left me wanting to learn more about their faith practices and beliefs. I enjoy knowing how my Christian faith is alike and different to other faiths.

**Steph Kopp** — Visiting the Deer Park Buddhist Center is an eye-opening experience. I enjoyed listening to the teacher explain the history of their religion and beliefs, and I realized that Christians and Buddhists are somewhat similar, in that we all strive to grow to become better people and to love one another.

**Kate Cheramy** — Colorful.

I was not expecting the Buddhist temple to be so vibrant or filled with painted murals on most walls. Inside the teaching room was breathtaking. The front area that we sat facing has huge, gold statues honoring Buddha that pop out against the royal blue background



filled with blue lights, an image of the Dali Lama, and in a glass enclosure, a mannequin styled as a monk; the teacher sat in the middle and spoke to us in Tibetan and the assistant translated for us. Books on either side of the shrine were contained in little cubbies from near the floor to almost the top of the ceiling to enclose the focal point; I counted 5 across and 32 rows on both sides making a total of 320 books! Comfortable cushions were all over the warm maroon concrete-looking tile floor — which was a nice surprise considering no shoes are allowed and I was expecting the floor to be cold! Around the entire ceiling were red, green, and gold fabric edging and down each column were multi-colored tapestries. I was in awe of listening to a Tibetan monk talk to us in his native tongue, and as always it ended much too quickly. It was so cool to be able to visit and learn about another religion and the children were very captivated by the experience — there wasn't a peep until it was time for questions!



**Amy Floan** —

Deer Park Buddhist Center is so beautiful and peaceful. During the field trip, I was reminded that Buddhism and Christianity share some common values like kindness, generosity, and compassion.

# IN OUR THOUGHTS & PRAYERS

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## St. John's Members

Michael Adams	Warren Yoeger	Kira Tortomasi
John Almond	Jeff Farnsworth	Jeanette Schunk
Adam Kopp		

## Family & Friends

Braiden Bergum	Orrin	Sandra Zahn	Kristin Davis
Bill Springer	Jody Jones	Craig Thompson	Jodi Seyer
Georgean Nicholson	Marlene Jones	Barb Buttchen	
Wendy McClure	Rosemary Wangard	Kristin Davis	

## Partners in Mission:

Rev. Carl and Kelsey Grulke & family, in Botswana  
Rev. Bridget Gautieri in Germany  
Ashley Bowman, Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans

## Men and Women in Service:

Matt Forster, Nate Madsen, Bailey Olin, Tyler Schnell, Hunter Speropulos,  
Marcus Steindl, Mark Trawicki, Heather Ihlenfeldt, Branden Samela, Samantha Ihlenfeldt

## Condolences to:

**Scott and Kim Katzenmeyer and family** as they grieve the death of his mother, Sue Katzenmeyer.

**Heather Skumatz and Randy Sthokal and family** as they grieve the death of her father, David Skumatz.

**Rita Carpenter and family** as they grieve the death of his mother, LuluBelle Marie Tuescher.

**Rod Klitzman and family** as they grieve the death of wife, Majorie Klitzman.

## Congratulations to:

**Kaitlynn Finrock and Ethan Schmidt** on the birth of their son, Callan.

**Nick and Katie Byers** on the baptism of their son, Beau.

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The holidays are not always joy-filled. Sometimes they are filled with grief and sadness. Mark your calendars for our upcoming **Blue Christmas service on December 16th at 5pm**, where God will meet us right where we are.

*More details on page 8.*

# POINTS OF PRAYER

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Together we lift up these prayer concerns. Start by reading the prayer topic and “holding” those people or that situation before God. Say the topic over and over in your mind, or aloud, and raise it before God. Then continue in agreement with the petition of prayer. We pray:

## **For our journey of Advent and Christmas**

Light of the World, you shine into our darkness with hope. In the midst of a busy season, transform our hearts and center our lives on Christ’s love, born in us today.

## **For human rights for all**

Lord of Wisdom, awaken us to our duty to care for the basic needs of all people. Strengthen with hope people denied their human rights and freedoms. Provide us all with the voice to cry out for justice for the poor and the oppressed.

## **For peace**

Gracious and holy God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.

**We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.**

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## **A Liturgy to Mark the Start of the Christmas Season**

*Every Moment Holy, Volume 1; page 121*

As we prepare our house for the coming Christmas season, we would also prepare our hearts for the returning Christ.

**You came once for all people, O Lord, and you will come for us again.**

Though there was no room at the inn to receive you upon your first arrival,  
**We would prepare you room here in our hearts and here in our home,  
Lord Christ.**



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Evansville, WI 53536

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