

Saint John News

Proclaiming and Practicing the Love of Christ

February 2026

From the desk of Pastor Nathan ...



“How is it with your soul?” the elderly man asked college-aged me.

It would have been a weird question for the church fellowship hall even without the overly firm hand shake and direct eye contact. I’d have felt much better if he had just asked about something normal like the weather or politics. But that’s what he asked: “How is it with your soul?”

“Uhhh...fine....I think” I mumbled, mentally running through a bunch of guesses about what he was asking: “Is he asking how I’m feeling? Whether I’ve sinned lately? Whether I’ve read my Bible? What is he hoping I’ll say? How is it supposed to be with anyone’s soul?!? Do souls change? What exactly is my “soul” anyway?!? My thoughts? Feelings? Habits? Attitude? Convictions? Uhhhh....”.

My confusion wasn’t a lack of preparation. It

was truthful reflection of my own understanding of my inner life: confused. Since becoming a pastor, I’ve grown to think that this is not all that peculiar. Many of us struggle to make sense of the three-ring circus going on inside our heads and hearts, or wherever our “soul” is located.

It’s not for lack of trying. There are any number of tests and tools that purport to help us understand the workings of our souls. Personality tests like Myers-Briggs, Disc, or the Enneagram describe our tendencies and preferences. Counselors try to help us understand our past and patterns. Neurology offers a look at how biological aspects of the brain and trauma may impact our inner life.

All of these can offer helpful tools for understanding some aspect of one’s inner life. Yet I’ve grown to feel that they all fall short of offering the tools needed to answer the question: “How is it with

your soul?” For that, I’ve had to turn to a different set of tools: the language of virtue and vice.

Simply put, virtues and vices are habits of the human soul, moral tendencies shaped by repeated behavior. Every time I complain about my house, it becomes easier to do so again. I see nicer houses. I grow less grateful for what I have. The vice of Envy takes hold. On the other hand, when I share with someone in need, it becomes easier the next time, my stuff becomes less important, and the virtue of Generosity grows.

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■ **From the Desk of Pastor Nathan, continued**

The language of virtue and vice describes in moral terms what recent neuroscience has shown to be true: repeated thoughts rewire our brain for easier repetition. Repeated moral choices rewire our souls for easier repetition.

Why is this a big deal? Because it's not well with my soul. By nature, all our souls come preloaded with some pretty bad habits. Jesus said that "from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, envy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21). The Bible calls this our "flesh", or sinful nature, and it is true of all of us. We are all by nature enslaved to the Evil One, living in the "passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3).

But Christ died and rose to free us from our vices. All our sins, including our vices, were nailed to the cross with Him. "Those who belong to the flesh have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). All of His virtues, His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control

are given to us by His spirit! (Galatians 5:22). How is it with your soul? Forgiven and Free!

So why bother about virtues and vices? Isn't this something Jesus takes care of and we don't need to think about? Well not so fast. Jesus has won, but the battle isn't over. The flesh still struggles against the spirit and "the passions of the flesh...wage war against your soul" (1Peter 2:11).

That's the truth about the state of the Christian soul: it's in a battle. And in battle, it matters whether you fight. If you "sow to the flesh," feeding your vices, they will grow stronger. If you "sow to the spirit," feeding your virtues, they will grow stronger (Galatians 6:8). Knowing your particular array of virtues and vices teaches you where to fight, because we're not all sinners in the same way. Luther writes, "No one passion ceaselessly drives at us. Anger does not always burn, evil desire does not always rage, we are not constantly tormented with envy, but one succeeds the other. When these all sleep, sloth does not. If you are active, then pride awakens."

Thus, learning the virtues and vices equips you to daily take up the cross of fighting your sin, and daily look to Christ for the shape

of His character. This will be our goal this Lenten season in our midweek sermon series on the "The Battle of the Soul." We'll explore the seven chief vices and their corresponding virtues. We'll see how Luther taught them through the Ten Commandments. And we'll learn how the Gospel arms us to fight our particular sin, and daily assures us of God's grace, so that by the end of the season we can all say with confidence how it is with our soul:

It's in the fight.

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires".
Galatians 5:24



Campaign Gift Planning Luncheon

By Lana Urban

St. John attendees were blessed to hear Craig Stirtz, gift planning counselor, share what services he provides during a lunch and estate planning seminar in the fellowship hall on Sunday, Jan. 25th. Capital campaign co-chairs, Max and Melanie Wake and Bob and Lana Urban hosted and provided the lunch. Pastor Bruick opened with prayer.

Those in attendance got to hear Craig share ways to use the blessings God has provided us to help grow

our ministry in the future.

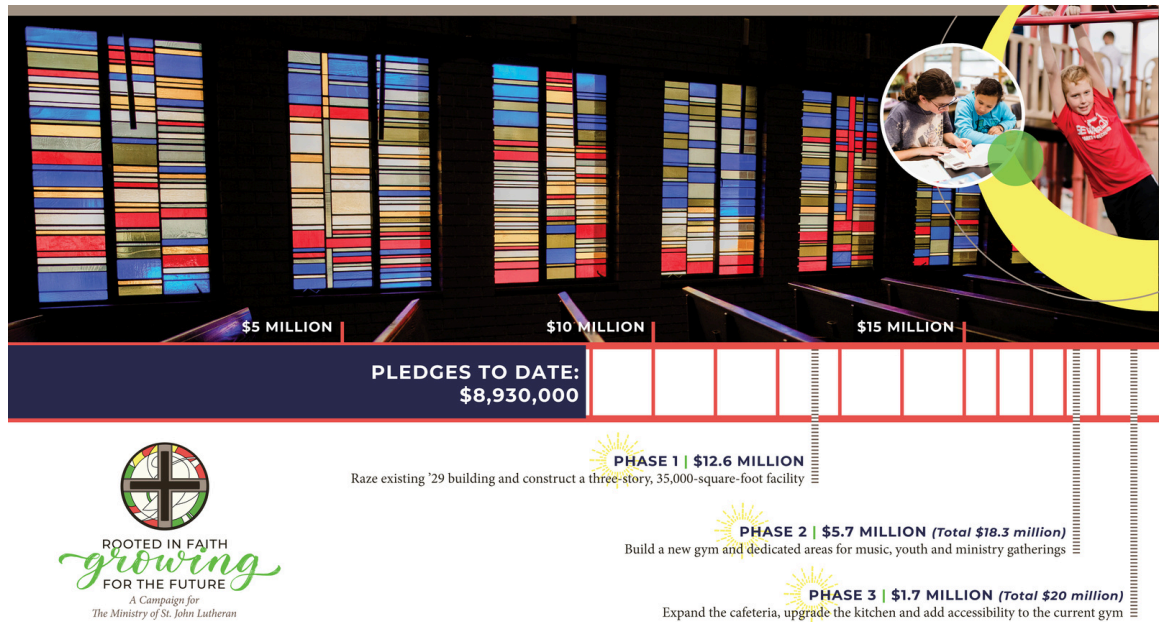
Stirtz is a gift planning counselor who serves the church through Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod Foundation. He assists congregations and donors in the Nebraska District, and Concordia University, Nebraska. He has helped Lutherans in Nebraska plan gifts for ministry support for 35 years. Craig provides resources and expertise to those who want to use their estate plan to express their love for the Lord.

He focuses on careful planning for the needs of loved ones and family members as well as for those served through the ministries people care about.



Campaign Update

Campaign Progress



Ministry Anniversaries

In each newsletter we list the members of the church, school, and Child Development Center whose start date was in the current month.

Take time to pray and thank God for these workers!

David Rempfer
2/1/2014

Jeri Morrison
2/1/2021

DuAnne Dereemer
2/20/2019



rGroup Variety Encourages Participation

By Nathan Scheck

The Epiphany rGroup season is well under way! With 153 participants registered across eighteen rGroups, this growing ministry of St. John helps congregants grow in their relationships with God's Word and one another. Participants meet weekly to dig into Scripture, examine the discussion questions drawn from each week's sermon, and share a time of intentional fellowship and prayer. While the groups all explore the same questions, there are different types and styles of groups.

We have a variety of life stages represented from intergenerational groups to college-aged groups to young families. While the groups all explore the same questions, there are different types and styles of groups. We have a variety of life stages represented from intergenerational groups to college-aged groups to young families. We also have groups that meet in the mornings, others that meet in the evening, one group has dinner together, and several groups gather together during the education hour on Sunday mornings.

Our hope is that the wide variety of times and group styles will make rGroups as accessible as possible to as many of the congregation as would like to participate. If you would like to be a part of our rGroup ministry, we would love to have you! The next term will be starting on April 12th. If you have some friends you'd like to gather to be a new rGroup reach out to Esther Langness, our Engagement Coordinator, esther.langness@stjohnseward.org. Sign-ups will be available in the weeks leading up to the start date.

rGroups

Official Acts

Baptisms

January 18, 2026, Sawyer Mary Potter, daughter of Jay T. and Brittney N. (Loseke) Potter

Funerals

November 29, 2025, Iva Mae Roettjer at the age of 100 years, 2 months and 4 days

December 5, 2025, Robert Alan "Bob" Koch at the age of 76 years, 11 months and 24 days

December 6, 2025, Kenneth Lee Luebbe at the age of 80 years, 1 month and 9 days

December 16, 2025, Cynthia Sue "Cyndi" Johnson at the age of 73 years, 8 months and 7 days (non-member)

Transfers In:

(M/M) Aaron & Laura Rohde and Calvin, Grant, August and Fiona

Transfers Out:

Cole Pearson to Trinity Lutheran Church, Schuyler, NE

Sara Sidlo and Charish and Noah to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE

Release:

Chase Berry



Foxes Writing Den Provides Students Extra Time For Creativity

By Katherine Steffen

At St. John, there are many ways for students to engage in extra-curricular activities beyond the classroom. One creative outlet that was initiated last year is the Foxes Writing Den. Led by second grade teacher, Miss Krause, the Foxes Writing Den is an opportunity for kids grades 2 – 6 to come together several times a month after school and have fun expanding their writing skills. When asked what prompted her to launch this activity, Miss Krause shared: “I love working on writing with students. In class, writing time always goes so fast, and there never feels like there is enough time to relish the planning, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing aspects of writing. I had some students who were excited about writing and eager to work on their craft, so I came up with an after-school way to engage with them.”

In the Foxes Writing Den young writers find support, encouragement and an impetus to write. Once a month Miss Krause prepares a mini-lesson on one aspect of writing.

Some of the lessons have included how to add sensory details, plot structure, and writing from various perspectives. After the lesson, the students write for 10-15 minutes and then have an opportunity to share what they’ve written. Miss Krause says that after each student shares something, everyone provides “snaps for the author” and “noticings.” Noticings are when students notice things about the author’s writing. For example, “I noticed you started by talking directly to the readers” or “I noticed your story had a lot of suspense.” These are ways for students to lift one another up and encourage each other. It also helps students learn from one another.

Several other times a month, students can attend “come and write” where Foxes Writing Den members can write or bring independent works in progress. Students note on the board what aspect of their writing they are working on:



brainstorming ideas, practicing their story, wanting time to write, revise or edit. Students who want time to write spread out around the room and just write. Others are paired up with students who are working on the same aspect, or with Miss Krause. Each of these sessions end with a share time as well. “We have 24 students signed up for the Foxes Writing Den. They don’t all attend each time. We usually have 8-15 students present at each gathering,” said Miss Krause. “They’re all really great kids who are a lot of fun to work with. I love getting to encourage their creativity and creating a space for them to experiment and grow their writing craft.”



CDC NEWS

How Do We Compare?

By Lisa Aring

We are beginning to look at enrollment for the next yearly session which, for the Child Development Center (CDC) starts after Memorial Day. As we work on enrollment for next year, it is a time for us to reflect on what makes the CDC different and unique. How does our center compare to other types of childcare facilities?

All childcare centers take care of children, and we do that also. We provide care for children 18 months old to 12 years of age. But what we offer at the CDC goes beyond childcare. What is different? St. John has trained teachers in all classrooms. The 18 month-2 year toddler teachers have an Associate degree in early childhood. All the other

teachers have teaching degrees. The CDC has preschool in all classrooms which makes us unique. This is not typically what you find in childcare. At the CDC, teachers create lesson plans using Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines. Early childhood education is critical for children's success in school, and we see ourselves as the beginning chapters of St. John School.

St. John CDC has met the requirements for the **Nebraska Step Up to Quality** at the Step 5 level. This is the highest level. This is hard to do with a larger center. St. John CDC has met the qualifications for the National Lutheran School Accreditation, a

rigorous process that looks at all aspects of the school.

The most important part of what we offer at St. John for childcare is a whole educational experience infused with Christian training and atmosphere. This part is priceless! Faith development happens in the early years and we are instrumental in teaching the faith to children—many of which don't have churches. We have the opportunity to plant seeds of faith in the hearts of our students, trusting that the Holy Spirit will grow that faith wherever the that child goes in life. Thank you for your prayers and support of this vital St. John ministry.

St. John Celebrates National Lutheran Schools Week Jan. 26 – Jan. 30

St. John took part in celebrating National Lutheran Schools Week in January. The week is part of a nation-wide event that involves Lutheran schools across the country.

The week recognizes the uniqueness of being able to practice and proclaim the love of Christ through education and celebrates the work God is doing through Lutheran schools.

Students at St. John had many ways to participate in the celebration,. The next page includes a few of the exciting moments from the week.

National Lutheran Schools Week



Students who dressed up as future church workers on Career Day.

The service project for the week was putting together solar lights and water kits for families in Africa or South America. Students prayed for the families who will receive the 63 solar lights and 72 water filters. Thank you to all of those who ordered kits through Thrivent Financial to make this service project successful!



First grade celebrated the 100th day of school by dressing up like they were 100 years old!

Students also participated in a range of activities working in “family groups.” which consisted of students in different grades grouped together. This was an opportunity for younger students to learn from older students, and older students to encourage and support younger students.



“... And what we have left undone ...”

By Ron Bork

Have you made any New Year's Resolutions? How are you doing in keeping them? Do any of those resolutions fall into the group described by the title of this article? “... And what we have left undone ...” is part of our Confession of Sins in our worship services. We confess ... “I have sinned against You [God] in thought, word, and deed by what I have done and by what I have left undone.” The undone sins are those positive things that we fail to do. Opportunities arise to show God's love, and we fail to do those things. Read through the ten commandments and their meanings and you will find many of those opportunities to show God's love to our neighbors.

Failing to keep a New Year's Resolution is not a sin. You decided to exercise more, but that's not happening. You resolved to lose some weight, but you indulged in too many parties and family gatherings. There may be others that are “left undone.” I have two personal resolutions that I will keep this year. 1) Walk a significant distance each and every day. 2) Pray and read Scripture every day.

There's one other that I will do, and I'd like YOU to join me in this resolution. 3) Identify a young person that you believe would be a good pastor, teacher, deaconess, youth director, or church musician in the future and then talk to that young person and pray for him or her.

Our church and our world are in desperate need of people who will dedicate their lives to sharing the Gospel with others each and every day in their vocation. That can happen through our encouragement of young people to consider full-time church work in their future. It is something that should not be “left undone.”

Will you join me in this New Year's resolution? When you identify a young person, let me know so I can add him or her to my daily prayer list, and so I can talk with him or her also.

Ron Bork
SAS Congregational
Representative
ronbork48@gmail.com

February is Health Month

Our bodies are an amazing gift from God. Our hearts are a vital part of how well our body functions. God gives us wisdom for how to care for our bodies, including our hearts.

During the weekend of February 21 and 22, visit our table in the narthex with heart health resources, items to encourage your faith, ‘One Small Step’ ideas, and a self-check station for taking your blood pressure.

We all know there is more to our heart than the physical part of it. God gives us a heart to follow Him, and to love Him and others. With our Heavenly Father's leading, let us also keep learning more about Him and what it means to follow in His way.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”
Matthew 22: 37 – 39.

In 2026, see if there is one new positive habit you can add to your routine that would benefit your heart. One small step can make a big difference!

Hosted by the St. John Parish Health Ministry, Wholistic Wellness Team

Pizza and Scripture: Monthly Dare2B Gatherings

Here at St. John, we boldly proclaim and practice the love of Christ. For generations, we, along with LCMS Lutheran churches across our nation, have brought up our children to join in this mission. Today, 7th and 8th grade students enroll in confirmation classes to dig into God's Word and Luther's Small Catechism to learn about their faith and our doctrine with the hope that at the culmination of their experience, they will affirm the faith they received in holy baptism.

Confirmation classes take place in two settings. They occur three days a week during the school day for our St. John Lutheran School students and on Wednesday evenings to accommodate the schedules of students from other parochial, public, and home schools. In addition, once a month all 6th-8th graders affiliated with St. John Church or School gather together for Dare2B in the St. John fellowship hall for dinner, fun and a devotion.

Dare2B exemplifies the encouragement given by the author of the letter to the Hebrews, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:23-25

This February, 6th-8th graders gather on the 11th at 6:30 p.m., one week earlier than listed on our Student Ministry Magnet.

Students can register by scanning the QR code or clicking this link to let us know you're coming! See you then!

Link: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/dare2b>

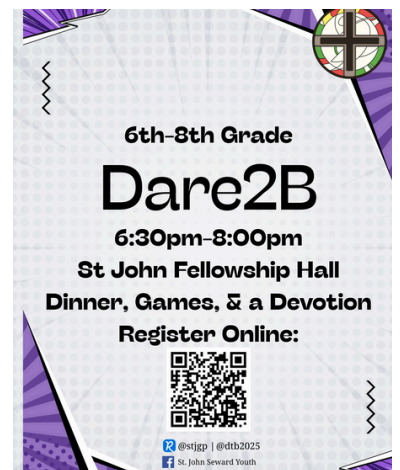
God Bless your February,
In Christ,
Tim Oberdieck

Ministry Action Teams for Youth Ministry

All of St John youth ministry is possible thanks to parents and adult leaders who answer the call to walking with our youth. What greater task is there than sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with our children, our church today, and the future of our church tomorrow? Come join our team and take part in the most fulfilling work you've ever done.

St. John Youth is possible thanks to five Youth Ministry Action Teams: Godparents Small Groups, Godparents Large Groups, Youth Hour, Youth Fundraising, and Summer Youth.

Want to get plugged in? Have a question? Email: tim.oberdieck@stjohnseward.org



Care Givers Available

by Jack Swanson

Our congregation's Stephen Ministry provides one-to-one, Christian care to people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. It consists of gifted laypeople who are trained to support and extend the care that pastors continue to provide. To assess the tough times in your life, consider the questions below.

If you checked one or more of the questions, you can call one of the Stephen

Minister Referral Leaders to discuss whether this would be beneficial for you from the confidential, one-to-one care of a Stephen Minister. St. John has a team of trained Care Givers who are anxious to donate their skills.

If you checked three or more of the questions, you likely need a Christian Care Giver in your life.

Do not hesitate!

Call: Deaconess Jeri,
402-643-2983;

Lana Urban,
402-641-3099;

Deanna Dowding,
402-643-3148;

Mary Ann Steinbeck,
402-499-6618

Wellness Survey

- Do you have health or wellness problems?
- Do you have a habit that you need to lose?
- Do you need someone to share your life issues with?
- Do you need to spend some time with your pastor?
- Are you unable to forgive some one?
- Are you depressed about the way your life is going?
- Are you putting your trust in yourself or considering ending your life?
- Are your emotions causing you to make bad choices with your life?
- Are you angry with God?
- Are you grieving the loss of a marriage, a loved one, a job, etc.?
- Are you facing a terminal illness?
- Are you lonely and discouraged with your life?
- Are you able to meet once a week with a trained Christian Care Giver?

Grace O'Neal Goes to Germany

By Julie Johnston Hermann

This past fall, St. John began providing support for Grace O'Neal, a new mission partner serving in Germany through Mission of Christ Network.

Grace grew up as a missionary kid and lived overseas in Jamaica and South Korea, developing an appreciation for culture and a desire to reach the ends of the earth in proclaiming the Gospel.

While studying at Concordia University, Nebraska, Grace was involved in Mission Minded Students, a campus group whose focus is to encourage and engage those interested in missions. She graduated in 2022 with a degree in Elementary Education, an endorsement in teaching English as a Second Language, and a Lutheran Teacher's Diploma.

Grace was called to work as a girls' dorm supervisor and Fundamentals of English instructor at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Concordia, Missouri, for the last three years.

This past year, God's timing opened the door for her to go back into the foreign mission field and serve with a small team in Auerbach, Germany. There, she serves the community around her through English teaching, hospitality at the bed and breakfast where she lives, food preparation, and art ministry. All these create opportunities for Grace to build relationships and share the Gospel.

In her November and December newsletter Grace shared a list of things she is thankful for in her ministry and recent time in Germany.

Blessings ...

- Reading to young students from various schools for a special book event.
- Painting her classroom blue!
- Connecting through meals and worship with Westmont College students.
- Hosting baking and watercolor painting events in her apartment.
- Performing with the Gospelchor for many Christmas events.
- Understanding more German each day.
- Deepening friendships through walks and talks.

She is praising God for...

- Willing and interested English students for 2026!
- Powerful Gospel proclamation through music of the Gospelchor

And asking prayers for...

- The Lord's continual provision for a clear vision in serving the community.
- The Holy Spirit's presence to be powerfully felt in those who have been recently baptized.





The Ministry of St. John Lutheran Church

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Budgeted Financial Statement for Period 6 - January
 St. John Lutheran Operating Statement Summary
 Company#: 1 Name: The Ministry of St. John Lutheran
 Fiscal Year Beginning 8/1/2025

<u>Description</u>	<u>Budget Annual</u>	<u>Budget YTD</u>	<u>Actual for Period</u>	<u>Actual YTD</u>
Income				
General Fund	\$2,298,730.00	\$1,204,748.60	\$135,630.50	\$1,079,127.78
Projected Deficit	\$194,696.07	\$102,040.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
CDC Income	\$968,623.00	\$485,207.03	\$97,300.21	\$502,471.69
School Income	\$590,000.00	\$357,950.00	\$49,020.26	\$366,909.81
Foundation General Fund	\$36,000.00	\$36,000.00	\$0.00	\$36,000.00
Interest	\$15,000.00	\$7,500.00	\$505.46	\$11,873.68
Other Income	\$4,700.00	\$2,349.98	\$275.00	\$2,585.41
Total Income	\$4,107,749.07	\$2,195,795.61	\$282,731.43	\$1,998,968.37
Expenses				
Board of Elders	\$259,164.00	\$123,500.35	\$20,153.07	\$117,102.45
Board of Christian Life	\$38,167.00	\$20,588.30	\$3,316.85	\$17,215.70
Ministry Operations Board	\$7,047.00	\$3,973.44	\$1,723.52	\$5,747.63
School	\$78,360.00	\$57,210.08	\$5,297.36	\$56,312.43
Child Development Center	\$118,345.00	\$58,928.53	\$8,507.93	\$61,244.35
Building Overhead & Improvements	\$352,200.00	\$183,245.04	\$26,395.56	\$186,275.46
Salary & Benefits	\$3,407,208.00	\$1,706,416.38	\$275,341.61	\$1,701,194.19
Total Expenses	\$4,260,491.00	\$2,153,862.12	\$340,735.90	\$2,145,092.21
Net Surplus/(Deficit)	(\$152,741.93)	\$41,933.49	(\$58,004.47)	(\$146,123.84)