



St. Paul Lutheran Church ELCA

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DECEMBER 2025

"Advent: A Season of Preparations"

We nearing the beginning of the church liturgical season of Advent. Advent takes place during the course of the four weeks before Christmas. Within the church, the Christmas season "officially" begins on Christmas Eve. Advent is an important season for us because it is a season of preparations.



We are called to (1) prepare for the coming celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, (2) prepare for the coming again of our Lord - whenever that may be, and (3) prepare for the Lord's coming into our heart and life each and every day.

But as I've thought about some of the instances where my ministry has crossed paths with the lives of God's people over the course of the years, I've realized that there are an awful lot of things going on in the lives of the members of Christ's Church that are very difficult, if not impossible, to prepare for.

- How does one prepare for walking into the office, or the plant, or the shop and receiving word that one's job is no longer there for them?
- How does one prepare for that word from the doctor that the lab reports are not what they were hoping to see?
- How does one prepare for that phone call in the middle of the night with the voice of a stranger at the other end of the line that asks if you are the parent of so-and-so?

- How do you prepare for that which is so unexpected, so unwanted, and so devastating?

I don't have an easy answer to any of these questions. There are obviously things that we can prepare for. The Christmas season? Maybe you are getting ready to address cards, decorate a tree, teaching our children and working on the children's Christmas story presentation, baking cookies, buying gifts and/or designating gifts to something like ELCA World Hunger, etc. But what about the "impossible-to-prepare-for" events of our lives?

How about this? Yes, it's true that a primary Advent message is "Be prepared"; but let's never forget that our Advent and Christmas preparations are always based on the fact that God has cared enough for us that God has already taken care of the ultimate preparations.

We can not prepare for all that life will throw at us. But thanks be to God, God has come into our world as one of us - the Word incarnate, God in-the-flesh - to be born as one of us, live as one of us, die as one of us, and then rise to new life as one of us - for us.

Will this change the message of that pink slip, or lab report, or phone call in the middle of the night? No, I'm afraid not. But I pray that you will know that God came into this world as a baby in Bethlehem in order to fully walk with you in - and through - the tough times of your life. God is prepared to do that with you right now. And I believe that God is doing that with you right now.

As you work at your Advent and Christmas season preparations this month, may you know that you do so only because God has already made all the necessary preparations for this season of your life. And if you are thrown into a life-circumstance that you weren't prepared for, may you know that the Lord is Immanuel - "God with you".

"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." (First Corinthians 2:9)

The peace of the Lord be with you.

Pastor Mark S. Luepke



Dear St. Paul Members & Friends,

We are excited to share some great news - Pastor Mark Luepke has agreed to continue serving as our part-time interim minister after the New Year. We have been blessed with his passionate preaching, and are thankful that he will continue sharing the Good News with us at St. Paul. He will be available to encourage staff and meet with parishioners. Thanks be to God!

Blessings,
St. Paul Council

Join us For Worship

9:00 a.m. worship to praise God.

The Livestream can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#)



This past month we have prayed for the following: Lori Dewey, John Renner, the Woodworth family, Michelle Klinger, Matt Friel, Sandy Julifs, Mike, Pastor Bree, Dylan Wescott, Phyllis Jacobson, Betty Steinke, the family and friends of Larry Wahler and the family and friends of Marv Arians.

Please contact Sue in the church office if you have a prayer request for the congregational prayer list.

Church Announcements

CLEO (Church Ladies Eating Out)

CLEO meet monthly at 5:30 p.m. at a designated restaurant. The September outing is on Monday, December 29. Watch the bulletin announcements to see where they will be going. If you are unable to attend because of bad weather or personal reasons, please join us the next month. If you need a ride or have any questions, please contact Judy Bartel at 815-751-6768. All are welcome!



St. Paul Year Budget Report

2025 Budget \$293,589 (\$24,466 Monthly)

Totals through November 21, 2025

Budgeted Expenses \$269,126

Offerings/Interest \$137,804

Expenses \$172,639



Please keep our home visitation members and friends in your thoughts and prayers. If you would like the address for anyone listed here, please contact Sue in the church office.

Shirley Dodd	Lori Dewey	Katherine Janssen
Sandy Julifs	Viola Koster	Cliff Miller
Sandra Sweitzer	Dale Worley	



Lutheran World Relief Quilting

Our next quilting day will be on Wednesday, December 17, from 9:00a – 12:00p in the Social Hall.

We can always use materials to use within our quilts. Donations can be placed in the closet by the kitchen.



If you have questions regarding the quilting contact Dawn Waite (815-631-8142) or Debbie O'Brien (815-441-0257).



Stewardship – Thank You!

It's important to realize that you are living inside one of your answered prayers.

While you wait for your next on.

There always a place for gratitude

Gratitude Sunday was November 16, 2025. Thank you to all who returned their Time and Talent sheets and made their plans for their 2026 giving. If you have not done so, you can still turn them into the church office. Thank you....your commitment to St. Paul is appreciated.

Please prayerfully consider how you can help support life-giving ministries at St. Paul with your giving and volunteering your time and talents. Thank YOU!

Dearest Lord, teach us to be generous:

Teach us to serve you as you deserve:

To give and not to count the cost.

Amen



Musicians! Please share your gifts with us Christmas our Christmas Eve. service! The Christmas Eve. candle light service is at 8 pm. Please contact Dawn Zeigler.

Caroling! Watch the bulletin announcements for the time and date. Everyone is welcome!



NEW INFORMATION! A Stable Lamp is Lighted

This Advent Study Guide and related materials are available on the table at the back of the sanctuary by the Head Usher table. The large colored sheet is a guide for each day's reading/activity/song. The two large white sheets can be colored, and the characters can be cut out and then added to the stable each day. A finished sample is there to look at. There is a bulletin insert with a Stocking the Streets shopping list. You are welcome to participate in this at your choosing.

All of us at ELCA World Hunger bring you warm Advent greetings!

The simple act of making a hospitable, warm, cozy place — even in a stable — moves the sky, the stars and the stones to tremble. ELCA World Hunger's seasonal packet has resources for creating a place of care, rest and reflection for you and your family so that you feel prepared to strengthen your community.



Would your family like to light the Advent wreath and share the reading and litany in worship this Advent? Families are needed to assist with Advent Wreath Lighting and Litany on December 14 during worship. In addition, readers are needed for the 8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve worship service. Please let Sue know if any dates work for your family. Thank you in advance!

Please join us for BBT in December!

Breaking Bread Together or BBT is a time of sharing life, God's love and a meal together! These are no host gatherings for all interested parties. BBT is meeting twice this month:

Monday, December 8 at 11:30 a.m. at The Luxx (4001 E. Lincolnway, Sterling). We will meet at the restaurant.

Monday, December 22, at 11:30 a.m. a potluck will be held at Immanuel. Bring a dish to share. Come and share life with God and each other at BBT!

**Breaking
Bread
Together
BBT**



LSSI Holiday Hope Chest

Thank you to all who have taken names. Just a reminder that gifts will need to be returned to the church (unwrapped) by Thursday, December 4th.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at: 815-718-5223. Thank you. ~ Carolyn Duncan



Menz Group will meet at St. John's Lutheran Church in Sterling on Monday, December 1 at 6:00 p.m.

If you have not had a chance to fill out and turn in your 2026 Planned giving card and Time & Talent Sheets, you can do so at any time either in person or by mail. If you didn't receive one or would like one, please let Sue know.

Have
You
Pledged?



Contributions for 2025 must be turned in to the church office by the morning of December 29th, to be counted for 2025. Thank you!



Offering envelopes for 2026 will be available for pick-up **December 14**. Please dispose of 2025 envelopes at the end of the year as your number for 2026 may be different. If you cannot find your envelopes or you would like some, please contact the church office.



Christmas Cookies needed

A sign-up sheet is posted by the Coffee Fellowship to bring cookies to share following the Christmas program on December 21. Thank you in advance for signing up.

It's that time of year

Church Council meets monthly, serving the church through leadership. People of God, the nominating committee will soon be seeking nominees for council. You

have two options: Option #1 – Prayerfully consider serving on Church Council in 2026; Option #2 – Pray that God will raise up leaders in our congregation willing to serve on Church Council. NOW is the time to be choosing and enacting option 1 or option 2. **Thank you for your diligence in this!**



WELCA TRI-CHURCH KICK OFF EVENT

Calling all Women of
Immanuel * St. John's * St. Paul

This is our Year!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026

5:30PM

IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

At this kick off party you will be able to
connect with other women spiritually, in
fellowship and in service.

- Form WELCA Groups/Circles
- Fellowship
- Supper
- Craft



**Take this opportunity to make a difference in your
faith life and grow the WELCA Tri-Church Initiative**

**Sign up in your church office by January 5, 2026
to help the committee plan for food
and supplies for this kick-off event.**

Women ^{of the} **ELCA** 



Women of the ELCA

Triennial gathering

We invite you to this life-changing event.
Come. Be inspired. Then begin living out
your faith in new and invigorating ways.

July 16-19, 2026
Des Moines, Iowa

Triennial Gathering
Des Moines, Iowa
July 16-19, 2026



Register online at welcatg.org

For more information, please contact
Sandy Swanson | NIS Convention Rep | 309-525-0864 | sandykayswanson@yahoo.com

Available for Presentations



Tri Church Corner: Cledy's House of Hope

As a God's Work Our Hands project for Tri Church, there is much to learn about Cledy's House of Hope, a sober living facility for women in Rock Falls. In the October newsletter, information was provided on who can live at Cledy's and for how long, along with the process for getting into Cledy's House of Hope. This month, information on the basics of living at Cledy's House of Hope is shared.

Describe the inside of Cledy's House of Hope.

- Formerly Rock Falls Rehabilitation Nursing Home, Cledy's is a 42-bed facility offering 15 fully furnished studio style units shared by two residents. In addition, there are six single bedroom units. The facility includes a communal kitchen, a laundry room and a gathering space. There is also a transition unit where women live upon arrival and until a room assignment is made.

What is the program structure at Cledy's House of Hope?

- Every resident begins at level one with stricter rules and requirements - for example, early curfews, no overnight stays outside the facility and daily reflections to help establish accountability. With consistent positive behavior, up-to-date house dues and abiding by all the rules and requirements, residents can advance through the remaining levels. By doing so, this gives the residents later curfews, overnight passes, and fewer required support meetings. By level four, residents earn the most independence while still taking part in drug testing, meetings, and regular check-ins with staff.

How much does it cost to live at Cledy's House of Hope?

- Residency costs \$150 per week for levels 1 and 2 and \$175 per week for levels 3 and 4. This cost includes all utilities, internet and garbage removal services, with residents supplying their own groceries. Levels 1 and 2 are occupied in a studio style apartment while levels 3 and 4 are upgraded to a 1-bedroom apartment each occupied with 2 residents.

More information about Cledy's House of Hope will continue in the February newsletter. You can also learn more at the Sauk Valley Voices of Recovery website www.svvor.org.

Deb Keaschall
Tri Church Convener

BIRTHDAYS FOR OUR CHURCH MEMBERS & FRIENDS

If you don't see your name on this list or there is a correction to be made,
please let Sue know in the church office.

2	Dawn Grell	<u>Happy 52nd Anniversary</u>
9	Kjersten Ivarson	December 8, 1972
13	Thomas Engstrom	Bill & Carolyn Duncan
	Holden Gale	
14	Ruben Garcia	<u>Happy 2nd Anniversary</u>
	Jonathon Waite	December 31, 2023
16	Paige Lobdell	Brian & Liz Klein
17	Ryan Petty	
20	Brody Platz	
24	Lana Shore	
	Lilianna Segura	
29	Chad Joynt	
	Macy Saathoff	
	Jacob Beyer	
30	Geraldine Spaulding	
	Makenzie Bartel	
31	Grace Steinke	



Advent & Christmas Worship Opportunities

Sunday, November 30– First Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion
No Sunday School

Sunday, December 7 – Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion
10:00 a.m. Christmas Program practice @ St. Paul

Sunday, December 14 – Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion
9:30 a.m. Children's Christmas program @ St. John's
10:00 a.m. Coffee Fellowship

Sunday, December 21 – Fourth Sunday of Advent

9:00 a.m. Children's Christmas program @ St. Paul with Holy Communion
10:00 a.m. Coffee Fellowship
No Sunday School

Sunday, December 24 –Christmas Eve.

4:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Worship at Immanuel in Rock Falls
6:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship at St. John's in Sterling
8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship here at St. Paul
11:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship at Immanuel in Rock Falls

Sunday, December 28 – First Sunday of Christmas

9:00 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion – Lessons and Carols
No Sunday School



Money is being collected for a Christmas Love Gift for Pastor Mark. If you would like to donate, please do so by bringing or mailing your cash or check made out to St. Paul to the church office designating "for Pastor's gift" by Sunday, December 21.



Youth News!



CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Students and families: Thank you for being a part of our combined Christmas program this year! St John's and St. Paul have paired up so we can have an even bigger group of students for our 2025 program. Our practices will take place at both churches, alternating locations. We will perform the Christmas Program twice. First at St. John's on December 14th,

then at St. Paul on December 21st. The practices have begun.

Tri-Church Confirmation

Confirmation SCHEDULE		2025-2026
DEC	7 th 11:00am-2:00pm	Class @St. John's
JAN	11 th 11:00am-2:00pm	Class @St. Paul
FEB	1 st 11:00am-2:00pm 13 th -15 th (TBD)Quake	Class @Immanuel
MAR	1 st 11:00-2:00 11 th 7:00-8:00pm	Class @St. John's Buddy Bag Packing @Wesley United
APR	19 th 11:00-2:00	Class @St. Paul
MAY	3 rd 11:00-2:00 13 th 7:00-8:00pm	Class @Immanuel Buddy Bag Packing @Wesley United



Children's Offering

The December children's offering will be for the God's Global Barnyard through the ELCA Good Gifts. A gift to God's Global Barnyard will be used where needed most to support livestock, agriculture and other sustainable-development projects, which help farmers and families with the resources they need to thrive.

Community Announcements



Every child deserves a family

LSSI Foster Parents Needed—Make a difference in the life of a child by becoming a foster parent through Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI). Foster parents can be married or single, and once qualified, they receive ongoing support, training, and a monthly stipend. LSSI has two programs, traditional foster care and therapeutic foster care. For more information, visit LSSI.org/fostercare.

Christmas Community Concert

You are invited to join in FREE Christmas Concert of music provided by local talent, great fellowship and a great array of treats on Thursday, December 4th at 7:00 p.m. at the Big Red Church (311 2nd Avenue, Sterling)



From the staff at St. Paul Lutheran – to all of you!

Sue Dirks

Pastor Mark Luepke

Joanie Whipple

NANCY EILERS

Dawn Zeigler

Gabby Law

Julie Woessner DeJonge

**Join us for a Benefit Dinner to support
Kathryn Rowzee
on Saturday, December 13, from 4:30-7 p.m.**

(or until we run out of food)

at Immanuel Lutheran Church (501 8th Ave., Rock

Falls). The menu offers two different meal options:

A. Smoked Pork, Scalloped Potatoes, Salad & Dessert

B. Spaghetti, Salad, Bread & Dessert

Both meal options come with a beverage choice of coffee, lemonade or water. *Carry-outs will be available.*

A free will offering will be received to support the medical expenses of Kathryn Rowzee. Kathryn, who studies at the University of Dubuque, is in the midst of high grade cancer treatment and partial loss of her leg.

Make plans to come enjoy food, fellowship and support for Kathryn Rowzee on Dec. 13!

Special thanks to Thrivent for the Thrivent Action Team Grants towards supplies so that donations toward Kathryn's care can be maximized!



TELEPHONE PRAYER SUPPORT GROUP

We welcome your prayer requests and also your praise reports:

(Want to be a part of this? Call the church office.)

Church office – 815-625-3069

Janie Billings

Judy Bartel

Greg Zeigler

James 5:16 *Pray one for another.*

DIRECTORY OF STAFF and CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL

Pastor Mark Luepke

pastormark@stpaulsterling.com

Sue Dirks, Parish Secretary

(815) 535-3574 – sue@stpaulsterling.com

Gabby Law, Children Ministry

(815) 981-6470 – gabby@stpaulsterling.com

Dawn Zeigler, Music Coordinator

(815) 275-3775 – dawn@stpaulsterling.com

Julie Woessner, Children's Music Leader/Worship Song Leader

(815) 441-8084 – 4woessner@comcast.net

Nancy Eilers, Custodian – (815) 441-4435

Joanie Whipple, Custodian – (815) 499-2012



2025 Congregation Council

President – Greg Zeigler

Vice President – Mary Ordean

Treasurer – Chrissy Zollinger

Secretary – Stacey Avelar

Christian Education/Youth

Stacey Avelar ('27)

Stewardship

Greg Zeigler ('27)

Social Outreach

Stacey Avelar ('27)

Lay Ministry & Worship

Chrissy Zollinger ('27)

Julie Woessner ('27)

Property & Management

Dan Bartel ('26)

Members-at-large

David Carrillo ('27)

Mary Ordean ('26)

Rayce Gale ('27)

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

1701 Sixteenth Ave.
STERLING, ILLINOIS 61081

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**– DATED MATERIAL –
PLEASE DO NOT HOLD**



LOVING – SERVING – SHARING

DIRECTORY

Office (815) 625-3069

Office Hours: Monday – Thursday; 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday – 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Pastor Mark's hours – Tuesdays – 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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Facebook: St. Paul Lutheran Church – Sterling, IL