



St. Paul Lutheran Church ELCA

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JANUARY 2026

"Some New Year Hymn Reflections"

One of the things that Nancy I regularly do at the end of each day is to read from a devotional book or a portion of Scripture as we call it a day. We have also read songs and hymns in worship books and church hymnals. I highly recommend using hymns for devotional reading. We have found that there is a difference in reading the words of a hymn out loud, as opposed to singing those words. For one thing, the phrasing of the reading may be different from the phrasing of the song - where you need to match the words with a particular rhythm. But reading a hymn out loud can also enable one to pay more attention to the words and their message when one doesn't have to be reading musical notes or concentrating on a melody. I truly believe that the worship books and hymnals of the church are some of our greatest devotional resources.

So, as we begin a new year together, let me share a bit from our red worship book, "Evangelical Lutheran Worship" (ELW). According to my ELW hymn concordance, there are a number of hymns that contain the word "year." Let's see if I can string some of these together to form a devotional newsletter article as we start a new year together.

I know that the season of Advent is past - a season that always goes too fast for me. But not surprisingly there are a few Advent hymns that contain the word "year." (Advent is the first season of the church liturgical year.) One of the verses we sang out together on December 14th was: *"People, look east. The time is near of the crowning of the year. Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table. People, look east, and sing today - Love, the*



Guest, is on the way." I encourage you to hear the words of this hymn call out to you to prepare to meet the Lord when he comes. And when does he come? According to Jesus, Christ is present in every person who needs us and our help. Be prepared to help!

Moving on to the Christmas celebration, here are the words of the fourteenth verse of Martin Luther's "From Heaven Above." *"Glory to God in highest heaven, who unto us the Son has given.' With angels sing in pious mirth a glad new year to all the earth."* There's a lot in these few words, but I ask you to hear the encouragement to sing out in "pious mirth." What a delightful phrase! To sing out in "devout laughter" and "religious fun."

As the new year begins on January first, and the Christmas season draws to a close on January sixth, the beginning of the season of Epiphany, let's hear this verse from "The Bells of Christmas": *"The bells of Christmas chime once more; the heavenly guest is at the door. He comes to earthly dwellings still with new year gifts of peace. Good will."* May you know these gifts within your household. And may you and I share them!

And I found two verses that lift up "hope" as we begin this new year - or as you live life in whatever setting you currently know. First, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who stood up against Adolph Hitler, who was imprisoned, and then executed on the personal order of Hitler himself just before Bonhoeffer's camp was liberated, could pen some wonderful words of hope - as he does in "By Gracious Powers." This is how he concludes his poem: *"By gracious powers so faithfully protected, so quietly, so wonderfully near, we live each day in hope, with you beside us, and go with you through every coming year."*

May we also sing out with Isaac Watts as we look ahead to this year and to all those that will follow: *"O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, still be our guard while troubles last and our eternal home."*

God's peace be with you and yours in this new year!

Pastor Mark S. Luepke

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: Ron Billings, Lori Dewey, Maggie N., John Renner, the Woodworth family. Michelle Klinger, Pastor Bree, Matt Friel, Sandy Julifs, Mike, Dylan Wescott, Phyllis Jacobson, and Betty Steinke.

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 January outing is on Monday, January 26. 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 December , 2025

Budgeted Expenses \$293,589

Offerings/Interest \$179,454

Expenses \$189,277



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



Home Visitation





“Thank you to all of our carolers who took the time to share the love of this season on Sunday, December 21! It was a great group who formed a beautiful choir! We enjoyed the time together and the warm welcome of those we visited. We Wish You a Merry Christmas!”

Lutheran World Relief Quilting

Our next quilting day will be on Wednesday, January 21, from 9:00a – 12:00p in the Social Hall.

We have completed 24 quilts since October. Thanks for the donations of sheets and blankets to use within the quilts. Any donations can be left in the closet by the kitchen. We welcome you to come and join us. No sewing experience is needed since we tie and pin the quilts.

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



Stewardship – Planning with a purpose



The stewardship Committee would like to thank everyone for their response to the Gratitude Sunday campaign this past year. Commitment gives the Church Council a better idea on how to set our 2026 budget and to **plan with a purpose**. If you have not yet returned your commitments, please bring or mail them to the church. Help us continue to grow and become disciples to God to our neighbors.

To those who do not make pledges but continue to give faithfully, we also want to say **THANK YOU** for all your time and treasure. We appreciate all that everyone does, large or small. With all our commitments, St. Paul will continue to grow in God-pleasing ways in 2026 and beyond.

Let’s make 2026 the best by Giving in Response for that God does for us.

Treat your treasures as a trust; God will meet your deepest needs. Use your talents!!

Give generously with a grateful heart!

Thank you to all who made 2025 a very good year for St. Paul. Your contributions of time, talents and treasures went a long way to help sustain our mission.

Happy New Year 2026!!

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, January 12 at 11:30 a.m. at Willy's in Sterling and
Monday, January 26 at 11:30 a.m. at 3 Twelve in Sterling. Come and share life with God and each other at BBT! All are welcome.

**Breaking
Bread
Together
BBT**



January Tri Church Activities & Meetings

- 5 – Men's Group at St. John's, 6:00 p.m.
 - 11 – Confirmation at St. Paul, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
 - 15 – WELCA kick-off at Immanuel, 5:30 p.m.
 - 20 – WELCA Bible Study at Immanuel, 9:00 a.m.
 - 26 – Monthly meeting at Immanuel, 6:00 p.m.
-

Menz Group will meet at St. John's Lutheran Church in Sterling on Monday, January 5 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. To date, we have had 33 giving cards turned in with a total amount of \$97,068.00.



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.

Coffee Fellowship

If you would like to sign-up to celebrate a special event, the sheet is on the kiosk in the Fellowship Hall. Coffee time begins at 10:00 a.m. during the Sunday school hour.



Altar Flowers

The sign up chart is on the wall by the church office. If you would like to order in memory of in honor of someone, sign-up and let Sue know if you will be ordering them yourself or if you would like her to order for you.

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!**



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	Marilyn Geiger	<u>Happy 56th Anniversary</u>
3	Greg Zeigler	January 3, 1970
	Andrew Spaulding	Bob & Judy Bartel
15	Vicki Sauter	<u>Happy 66th Anniversary</u>
17	Ron Gerken	January 24, 1960
18	Mary Betz	Ron & Karol Gerken
	Rebecca Giles	
17	Donna Palmer	<u>Happy 58th Anniversary</u>
20	Berta Beyer	January 26, 1968
	Jim Lincoln	Mike & Debbie O'Brien
	Eliana Avelar	
22	Cathy Cox	
	Jacob Straw	
25	Evan Lobdell	
26	Nancy Frank	
	Chad Arians	
29	Paige Reitzel	
30	Hope Howell	
31	Karol Gerken	
	Bev Julien	
	Amy Zeigler	



Part of the ministry we share includes providing a worship space that gives glory to God. Especially in this, one of our highest festival occasions, we decorate with particular detail. Thanks to the following people for the donation of poinsettias, a symbol of the season:

Pat Glafka in memory of James Glafka, Paul and Ono Andersen

Jerry & Khe Crofts in memory of Heather Crofts

John Renner in memory of Julie Renner and parents, Ronald & Julia

Dianne Stern Miller in honor and in memory of all families

Leta VanZuiden in memory of Merwyn VanZuiden, Harry & Ann Landheer, Richard Landheer

Nancy Beck in memory of loved ones

Ron & Janie Billings in memory of our parents

Gary Fields in memory of Marcia Fields

Bob & Judy Bartel & family; Dave & Donna Kendall & family in memory of Ruth & Don Stern and Mabel Rohde

Jim & Cheryl Gorman in memory of Geraldine Chismarick, Bob & Shirley Gorman

Sharon & Dale Worley in memory of our parents

Verges & Noreen Aageson & family in memory of Ken & Miriam Chubb, Dr. Carl & Minna Wiederanders

Sandra Julifs in memory of Harold Julifs

Sandra Julifs in memory of Steven Julifs

Julie Randy DeJonge in memory of Bob Woessner, Bob Wasmund, & Rhonda DeJonge

Patty & Mark Arians in memory of our parents; Mary & John Doty, Vernon Johnson, Marv & Betty Arians

Ron & Karol Gerken in memory of Lisa Gerken Lee

Jeff & Jul, Jacy & family, Jennifer, and Jessica Woodworth in memory of son and brother, Jacob Woodworth

Shirley Dodd in memory grandson, Jacob Woodworth

Debbie Riggins in memory of Ed & Barb Hussung, Harry & Winnie Riggins

Audrey & Cathy Cox in memory of Dick, Harold, Hazel & Bob Cox

Mike & Debbie O'Brien in memory of Rocky Hasbrouck, Jim Herzing

Greg & Dawn Zeigler in memory of parents, Charles Steinke and Sandra Zeigler

Ann Beswick in memory of Loren Beswick, Bob & Lila Gomsrud

Ann Beswick in memory of Ruthie T. Loud, Ted, Tom & Marion Beswick

If you ordered a poinsettia and would like to take it home, you may do so following the worship service.



Youth News!

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

Thank you to all our Musicians, Sunday School Teachers, Parents, and Students for a wonderful Christmas Program!



Bethel, Immanuel, St. John's & St. Paul QUAKE PARTICIPANTS (Youth and chaperones)—Make plans to join us for the Pre-Quake Extravaganza on Sunday, January 18 from Noon-1:15 pm at Bethel Reformed (230 E 23rd St., Sterling). Lunch (pizza, veggies & dessert) will be provided. We will begin our Bible exploration of the theme for this year, designing our conduct covenant, playing a couple games, discuss what to bring and so much more! Please make every effort to attend as the Quake experience will be built on our Pre-Quake Extravaganza. We, indeed, have hope in Christ as an anchor!



Children's Offering

The January children's offering will go to the Sauk Valley Food Bank. Sauk Valley Foodbank supplies food to our local pantries so they are able to provide food to families in need during the week. We also run mobile pantries at various sites in Sterling and Rock Falls throughout the week where we give directly to families.



Tri-Church Confirmation

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

Community Announcements

The Sauk Valley Diversity Alliance will be hosting the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace and Justice Celebration Event on Sunday, January 18, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. at First Church of Nazarene (411 13th Avenue, Sterling). The Theme is Mission Possible: Building Community. Please join us for a couple of hours filled with celebration, inspiration, education, music, fellowship, and community service. We would like attendees to bring a canned food item to donate to a community food bank. We will have a soup and dessert fellowship following the event.



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** 

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