



St. John's Lutheran Church

Missouri Synod

901 SW Fillmore Street • Topeka, Kansas • 66606-1445 • 785.354.7132 • www.stjohnlcmstopeka.org

VOL. 89 NO. 12 MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2015

LORD, KEEP US STEADFAST IN YOUR WORD!

Rev. Dr. Hartwig, secretary of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) recently released a fascinating statistical report (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2015/statistics-for-2014>). Although Dr. Hartwig warns against comparing 2014 and 2013, still, the picture the stats paint is somewhat bleak.

- From 2013 to 2014 baptized membership is down by 3.1% across the synod
- From 2013 to 2014 confirmed membership has declined by 2.6%
- From 2013 to 2014 weekly attendance at the Divine Service declined by 14% (!)
- From 2013 to 2014 parish giving declined by 4.6%

That said, the decline in membership and attendance likely appears larger than it really is since the response rate to the survey was 92% instead of the previous year's 59%. In years when a congregation fails to report, LCMS simply "rolls over" the stats from the previous year. In other words, the 3.1%, 2.6%, 14%, etc., may actually not represent one-year but 3- to 5-year declines.

And yet, there is a decline. We have as a society apparently entered into a great "falling-away"—or so the stats of the last few years would seem to indicate. This causes some concern for me over the ongoing vitality and vibrancy of the Church at large, the LCMS more specifically, and St. John's in particular.

But I mention this only to say what's more important:

- (a) If we allow the numbers to make us anxious, they'll tempt us to do things contrary to our confession. This we must not do, for then we fail in every way imaginable and lose everything.
- (b) The numbers, however, present us with a great challenge. The fields are indeed white for harvest, and our parish must be thinking about ways boldly to increase our outreach and evangelistic effort. We should also double down on equipping the saints for the dire times ahead and in which we already live. And here's the kicker: We Lutherans have something to offer that no other church has—the full and free forgiveness of sins by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, delivered to us in Word and Sacrament in a rich, Divine Service; the teaching of the whole counsel of God, not a cherry-picked message that maps nicely over shifting social norms; and a system for educating our youth in both catechesis and our schools that is unparalleled in the Christian world.
- (c) The numbers also suggest that we should prepare ourselves now for the possibility of lean years ahead (which is why I'm delighted we'll be undertaking our next capital campaign with the goal of retiring our debt).
- (d) But let's not forget that numbers are just numbers and can't possibly tell the whole story. The numbers above give just a snapshot of the last so many years. Who knows what the Lord has in mind for His Church, and who's to say that the numerical decline doesn't actually mask a wonderful strength (2 Cor 12:9)?

(e) We should therefore make every effort as members of our parish to encourage, foreground, teach, and highlight those ways in which the Lord keeps His faithful—through His Word and Sacraments. In our conversations and by personal example and by the example and conversation of our families we should encourage:

- weekly attendance at the Divine Service, Bible studies, Sunday School and Catechesis
- daily use of the Word of God in the home through personal and family devotions, and
- a robust life of prayer

(f) Finally, we shouldn't despair of ourselves, our congregation, the LCMS, or the Church at large. We have the Lord's promise that the very gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). In spite of the meteoric "rise" of the Church in the 50s and early 60s, we also have His promise that the glory of the Church, that body of Christ assembled of the faithful from every tongue and tribe and nation, cannot be seen now, but is hidden under shame and weakness (Rev 7:14).

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word!



Pastor - Rev. Jon S. Bruss, ext. 104

Deaconess - Linda S. Kinnett, ext. 102

Kantor - Rev. Roger M. Goetz

Visitation Pastor - Rev. Glenn R. Bitter

Day School Teachers - Ashley Jensema, Andrea Kosmicki,

HOLIDAY SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER 2015

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church - 901 SW Fillmore - Topeka, KS

December 2	12:15 PM 7:00 PM	Advent Service Advent Service
December 4	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	LWML Bazaar LWML Luncheon
December 8	11:30 AM	Dorcas Circle Christmas Dinner @ Perkins
December 9	12:15 PM 7:00 PM	Advent Service Advent Service
December 12	9:30 AM	Children's Christmas Service Rehearsal
December 12	2:00 PM 4:00 PM	Caroling Chili Supper
December 13	10:00 AM 4:00 PM	Final Children's Rehearsal Children's Christmas Service
December 14	6:30 PM	Sarah Circle will meet at McFarland's Restaurant
December 16	12:15 PM 7:00 PM	Advent Service Advent Service

December 20 (note: only 1 service)	10:00 AM	Divine Service
December 24	7:00 PM 10:00 PM	Christmas Carol Service Christmas Candlelight Service
December 25	10:00 AM	Christmas Day Divine Service
December 27 (note: only 1 service)	10:00 AM	Divine Service

FOR THIS REASON I HAVE COME: 2015 ADVENT SERIES

Pastors Scroggins, Galchutt, and Bruss of Hope, Calvary, and St. John's, respectively, will once again participate in a pulpit exchange for our 2015 Advent series entitled, "For This Reason I Have Come" (see John 12:27). Our special sermon series takes up the objects that surround Christ's first Advent in the womb of the Blessed Virgin that point toward:

- His Passion for us all
- His continued Advent to us through Word and Sacrament
- His third and final Advent, when He will return to judge the living and the dead and to "give everlasting life to me and all believers in Christ."

We'll have our midweek Advent services at St. John's on the first three Wednesdays in Advent, the 2nd, 9th, and 16th of December, at 12:15 and 7:00 p.m.

FROM THE BOARD OF CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

It hardly seems possible, but only a month remains in the "Year of Our Lord" 2015. At this time, the Church Council and the Board of Stewardship wish to remind and encourage everyone to bring your year 2015 contributions up to date. The congregation's financial books for 2015 will be closed for the year on December 31, 2015. As per Federal regulations, contributions intended for 2015 must be received (or postmarked) on or by 12/31/15 in order to be credited in 2015. 4th Quarter/Year-end contribution statements will be mailed near the middle of January 2016. Thank you for your regular and continued support of your congregation's work!

A Reminder! *Please do not use your 2016 contribution envelopes before January 2016.* This will ensure that your contribution statements will be credited accurately. Thank you!

2016 CONTRIBUTION ENVELOPES

Contribution envelopes will be available to be picked up in the breezeway early in December. Please use the instructions on the clipboard located on the tables with the contribution boxes to locate your box of contribution envelopes. If you have any questions regarding contribution boxes/envelopes, please speak with Yvonne Berry in the church office.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VOTING MEMBER?

The new constitution of our congregation defines "voting member" as a communicant member who has reached the age of 18 years and been received as a voting member upon application for such privilege upon approval of the voters of the assembly. This means that, unlike in the past, communicant women age 18 and above are eligible to join the voters assembly. **We encourage all eligible St. John's members to join the voters assembly.** You can contact the office to get instructions on how you can become a voter.

CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS SERVICE
“Carols of Christmas”

December 13, 2015 4:00 p.m.

Children from age three through those in the 6th grade will be leading the congregation in worship. A reception will follow. Rehearsals take place **each Sunday morning at 9:45** in Room 204, and on **Saturday, December 12, from 9:30 – 11:00.**

CHRISTMAS CAROLING
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12 AT 2 PM

All members and friends of St. John’s are invited to join together for an afternoon/early evening of Christmas caroling and fellowship. We will share the joy of Christmas with our shut-in members (at nursing homes only).

Both adults and children are welcome, and lots of voices are needed. Please consider joining us this year. It is truly a joyful and rewarding experience!

After caroling, we will return to the church for a chili supper and fellowship. *Please sign up at the Information Center so we can adequately plan for transportation and chili preparation.*

YOUTH NEWS

As in the past, the St. John’s Youth Group had another great year of sharing time together through activities, Bible study and servant events. We enjoyed the following activities this past year:

- A New Year’s party at the Bruss home (with great food and a very challenging trivia game!)
- Skiing at the Snowcreek Ski Resort in Weston, MO
- A Roadrunner’s hockey game
- Ice-skating at the Kansas Expocentre
- Bowling at Gage Bowl (Christ-n-Bowl)
- Helping with the St. John's golf scramble (our annual youth fundraiser)
- Attending the Higher Things Lutheran Youth Conference (in Seward, Neb.)
- A picnic and swimming at Shawnee North Family Aquatic Center
- Go-kart riding and mini-golf at the Topeka Sports Center
- Gary’s Corn Maze and Pumpkin Patch
- Powerplay in Shawnee, KS
- Open Youth Room and Christmas party (coming this December)

In addition to social events and opportunities for Lutheran study, we also participated in a few servant events this year: we raked leaves, adopted a family of 8 (and bought them all Christmas presents) and worked on quilts for the Linus Project. We give thanks to God for this wonderful youth group and all the people who help to make it possible!

YOUTH CATECHESIS RETREAT

Save the date: Friday, February 5, beginning at 6:00 p.m. and continuing through Saturday, February 6, at 8:00 a.m. This is the time for the annual retreat for the catechesis students in grades 6 through 8. Worship, learning from other pastors, fun and games, lots of food, and meeting other Lutheran kids in northeast Kansas, all are packed into this overnight retreat. Don’t miss it!

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

We meet on Tuesday mornings at 9:00 in the Undercroft, so come join us! We are on break now until January 5, when we will resume an overview of the Old Testament, beginning with *Exodus* 25 – 40, *Leviticus* 24, and *Numbers* 6 and 15 where we learn about public worship and discipline of the Israelites in the wilderness. It is interesting to note that our worship today is rooted in the ancient worship prescribed by God.

CHRISTMAS BASKETS & POINSETTIA DELIVERY

As we have for the past couple of years, we ask those who have traditionally brought food to instead donate to St. John's Welfare fund. This will make it financially possible for the St. John's to purchase a gift card for members who would have received a food basket in the past. Please make your check payable to St. John's Lutheran Church, "**Welfare**" on the memo line.

The Crisis Response Team, under the Human Care Team and The Board of Missions, prepares and delivers meals and purchases groceries and gift certificates for members who are in need of assistance throughout the year. If you would be willing to help deliver poinsettias during the Christmas season, please contact Deaconess Linda lkinnett@stjlcms.org or call the office at 354-7132.

MONTHLY BREAKFAST DECEMBER 13

Instead of a sit-down breakfast in Luther Hall, this month we will scale back by having coffee and pastries in the Courtyard between services. You do not need to bring anything.

DOORSTEP NEWS

The holiday season is upon us and this month it is time to look ahead to helping our neighbors in need again. Families and individuals will begin signing up for the Christmas Bureau this month in hopes of being adopted for Christmas. These families and individuals have to qualify by income and provide documentation for all household members when signing up. Doorstep will again adopt 250 households with approximately 750 individuals to help at Christmas. Doorstep does not do this alone. They need help again this year with gifts, money and time. Doorstep provides gifts and new clothing for each person in the household, a blanket or quilt for each household, health kits and a food basket. Look at the Christmas Store flyer included in this newsletter to see how you can help. Doorstep needs monetary donations to purchase the food and to buy clothing and gifts when they are lacking in donations. You can bring these donations to Doorstep (10th & Buchanan) Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. – 3 p.m., or drop them off in the Doorstep box here at St. John's. Another way to help which you will find heartwarming and rewarding is to help escort our adopted families around and help them shop. Last year they severely lacked in escorts and could use your help. Christmas Store dates are December 13-17. The attached flyer will let you know what opportunities are available each day.

FLOWER CALENDAR

The 2016 Flower Calendar is now posted. If you would like to provide flowers for a particular service this coming year, please sign your name and phone number by the date of your choice. The calendar is located on the bulletin board outside of the church office. Someone from the church office will call to remind you that you are responsible for flowers the week preceding the service you chose.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN REPORT

The Voters Assembly approved the hiring of Whittenburg Church Consultants (WCC) to help us with what we hope to be the final budget campaign at a cost of \$21,000. Pastor Rossow and Donna Linnemeyer with WCC will be here December 12th and 13th for a series of meetings to become familiar with St. John's as they customize their proven campaign program for our church. If you are asked to serve as part of one of the campaign teams we ask that you give prayerful consideration to the request. We believe that the success of this campaign will have a very significant effect on the future ministry at St. Johns.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Sarah Circle will meet at McFarland's Restaurant at 6:30, December 14. We invite all ladies to join us for dinner, fun and fellowship. We are doing an ingathering for Door Step for personal hygiene items, for both women and men. These are items that Door Step runs short on. If you would prefer you may give a cash donation for these and we can shop for you. Please RSVP to Nancy Taylor, ntaylor713@aol.com or 221-3371 so we have an accurate count for reservations. We are looking forward to seeing you there.

It's Mite Box Time again.

December, Mission Grant #4, Renovation of JEM Seminary Buildings. Grant Amount: \$120,000

To provide funding to renovate the buildings of Jonathan Ekong Memorial (JEM) Seminary in Nigeria so they are safe and serviceable under the burden of larger student numbers. The buildings, built in the 1940s, are in need of resurfacing the floors and walls, replacing roofs and ceilings, replacing all electrical and plumbing installations, painting, and treating the termite problem. The Lutheran Church in Nigeria is the oldest partner church of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in Africa.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE CARING MISSION YEARLY REPORT

Our Lutheran World Relief (LWR) projects are completed for this year. We are happy to report the new LWR sewing group under the leadership of Dianna Sims, Betty Fincher, Barb Porter, Nancy Scheuerman and others have completed 21 quilts this year. Also, 21 personal health kits, 67 school kits and 18 lbs. of soap were collected over the spring and summer. These projects were taken to the LWR truck at Christ Lutheran Church on October 9, 2015. This LWR truck takes LWR projects to the LWR warehouse in Baltimore, MD. From there LWR quilts and kits are shipped to different countries where they are needed the most. Our "THANKS" to all St. John's members and all the ladies who worked or donated to make this a success. Again, obviously, these ladies have taken St. Paul's words, "do not grow weary of doing good" to heart.

ST. JOHN'S WELFARE FUND

The account used to assist members who occasionally find themselves in a financial crisis is running low on funds. If you would like to make a donation, please make out your check to St. John's Lutheran Church and mark it "Welfare Fund."

LWML BAZAAR AND LUNCHEON

It's that time of year again. Please mark Friday, December 4, 2015 on your calendar for the St. John's LWML Bazaar and Luncheon. It's time to think about what you can bring to this event to insure we have another successful bazaar. The ticket price for an adult will be \$8.00 and \$3.00 for a child. Booths will open at 10:30 a.m. and the Luncheon is from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

In addition, we also will have one of the largest "Cookie Walks" in Topeka. The price for the cookies will be \$6.00 a pound. As in the past few years, we will be selling woodworking items, homemade craft items, gift items, paintings, quilts, etc. We will again be offering a baked goods area and the Sweet Shop.

SHARE THE HARVEST

It didn't get scheduled in November, but this year, St. John's members will again have an opportunity to "Share their Harvest". This donation will go to local agencies to assist the needy in the Topeka area. Donation will be accepted through December 13. Through "Share the Harvest" we will be able to direct those in need of assistance to a local agency that we support. Last year, \$1259 was distributed in support of *Topeka Rescue Mission (25%), Let's Help (25%), Doorstep, Inc. (25%), and St. John's Human Care (25%)*. We deeply thank you for your contribution to this human care effort. "*Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever.*" Psalm 107:1

TOPEKA LUTHERAN SCHOOL - FOLLOW-UP

Thank you to many of our faithful donors and friends for your response to the recent TLS appeal for additional contributions. **We are especially grateful for the generosity of Pastor and Mrs. Roger M. Goetz of St. John's Lutheran Church, who have offered to match all donations to the TLS Daily Fund (excluding Thrivent donations) made from 11-1-2015 through 1-31-2016, up to a total of \$20,000.** Pastor and his wife Betty, a former teacher at TLS, have shared that this offer is being made for two reasons:

1. In thanksgiving to God for the high quality of education their daughter (Class of 1988) and grandson (Class of 2007) received at TLS which has been academically more rigorous than that offered in area public schools; and more importantly:
2. In recognition of the solid education in the Christian faith provided at TLS, which is unavailable in public schools

Please consider making a contribution - through January 31st, your donation to TLS Daily Fund will be essentially doubled with this generous match.

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR DECEMBER 2015

December 6:	<i>"The Birth of John Foretold"</i>	Luke 1: 5-25
December 13:	<i>"The Birth of Jesus Foretold"</i>	Luke 1:26-38
December 20:	<i>"Mary Visits Elizabeth"</i>	Luke 1:39-56
December 27:	<i>"The Birth of John"</i>	Luke 1:57-80

No Sunday School on December 20 and 27 – one Divine Service at 10:00

Note: During the Sunday School hour on December 13, the children will rehearse in the church nave for the Christmas service.

Bible Words for December:**Early Childhood**

December 6: *The Lord will do the thing that He has promised.* 2 Kings 20:9

December 13: *The Lord has chosen you.* Deuteronomy 14:2

December 20: *My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* Luke 1:47

December 27: *With God all things are possible.* Matthew 19:26

Elementary Grades

December 6: [Jesus said,] *“Repent and believe in the gospel.”* Mark 1:15

December 13: *Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!* Luke 1:28

December 20: [Mary said,] *“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”* Luke 1:47

December 27: *All the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ].* 2 Corinthians 1:20

Thank you, parents for bringing your children to Sunday School and church.

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Parents, this command from God’s Word is for you, and the Sunday school is here to support you in the nurture of your children’s spiritual growth. Please accept God’s invitation to bless your children through the Sunday school and worship service each week.

**THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

[Jesus said] *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* Matthew 28:19–20a So that we may obtain faith in Christ, God instituted the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Through the gospel and sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel. The Augsburg Confession, Article 5.