



The St John Lutheran Newsletter is a monthly publication of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, a congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Volume 4 Issue 1

Weekly Schedule:

- Service 9:00 am
- Adult Bible Study/
Sunday School
10:15am
- Confirmation 12:00pm
- Monday Night Bible
Study 6:00pm
- Wednesday Coffee
Time 8:30am
- Wednesday Scripture
Study 9 am
- Wednesday Night
Senior High Youth
Group 5:30pm

Special Activities:

- Elders January 1 @
6pm
- Council Meeting
January 8 @ 6pm
- Voters Meeting
January 11 following
Church service

From the Desk of Rev. Samuel Beltz

As our congregation continues to grow it is important to be on the same page. am going to try and address some observations and questions that have arisen over the last few months. One has to do with Forgiving Sins. The main questions are: 1) How does the pastor have the authority to forgive sins? and 2) How should forgiveness sound in our daily lives?

Confession and Absolution in the Biblical Story

First, it will be helpful to define our terms. Confession is the act of acknowledging our sins before God and/or one another, and Absolution is the term Christians use for the act of forgiving those sins. To absolve someone means to pronounce that person clear of blame and guilt—it means to promise that the sins that were committed in the past will not be held against the sinner or affect the relationship moving forward.

One major question that needs to be answered is the question of authority. Who has the authority to forgive sins? If the person who is pronouncing someone free from guilt doesn't have the authority to do so, the act of absolution isn't valid. For instance, when a judge pronounces someone not guilty, his authority as a judge gives power to his declaration, "not guilty." Because he has been assigned that authority by law, the judge's words effect freedom from guilt before the court of law and the judicial system of his jurisdiction. However, if your uncle were to bust into the courtroom and start declaring, "He's innocent!", that judgment would not carry any weight or power.

God sent Jesus to absolve sinners of their sins. Recall the break and the tension between the Old Testament and the New Testament. At the end of the Old Testament, God declared through the prophet Malachi that the great and glorious Day of Judgment was approaching (Malachi 3–4) and Elijah would prepare the way. At the beginning of the New Testament, John the Baptist filled Elijah's shoes by proclaiming a baptism of repentance because that the reign of God was at hand. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11–12).

But to everyone's surprise, when Jesus began his ministry, he didn't come with fire and the winnowing fork. He came with mercy and forgiveness. God sent Jesus to search out the lost and the sinners and forgive their sins (Matthew 9:9–13).

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January Duties:

Elder

Sean Strothman

Altar Guild

Regina Hoy
Evie McKain

Acolyte

Evan Anderson

Processional Cross

1/25 Abram Beltz

Greeter

Karen Westercamp

Hospitality

12/7

Ushers

1/4 Curt Jager & Gabe Hoy
1/11 Toni Karavitis & Marty Goerge
1/18 Lawrence Smith & Alan Pickett
1/25 Adam Mc Kain & Nolan McKain

A big THANK YOU to all members who served as organists, Hospitality servers , and cleaning crew last month.

This is just another part of STEWARDSHIP in action at St. John.

LWML NEWS

LWML There will be no meeting in January. Next meeting will be February

All Women are welcome to join us.

Mite box Sunday is the first Sunday of the Month. Please remember to bring your mites and put in the LWML box.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Nolan McKain	1-02
Alfred Carr	1-06
Stacy Van Voorst	1-08
Dana Glasnapp	1-09
Jim Westercamp	1-14
Jackson Fynaardt	1-14
Abram Beltz	1-14
Jami Sickels	1-15
Adam Duffy	1-17
Samuel Beltz	1-21
Frances Carr	1-24
Oliver Carr	1-24
Shari Barnhart	1-26
Rod Hacker	1-27
Jennifer Fynaardt	1-29
Gunnar Glasnapp	1-30
Kolby Kitzman	1-31



Please include in your prayers daily



Sean Strothman, Luke Letzring, Rod Hacker, Karen Westercamp; Tamra Van Haften



Prayers for the Mocks for: strengthening of relationships at our local church with both existing and newcomers, **wise technology decisions** the improve effectiveness of both Luther Academy and the Eurasia Region, **language learning, activities and friendships** for Eva and Moriah



For those in Isreal, Ukraine, Russia, Uvalde and other places suffering from acts of senseless violence;



For those serving in our Armed Forces and for our Police Officers and Fire Fighters; may they remain safe in their service;



For the many that continue to struggle with isolation and loneliness; For those directly and in directly affected by the conflict in Ukraine; For the many who continue to struggle with natural disasters and bad storms;



For our Church, that God would continue to grant us new members and make us a good gift to each other and our community;



For us as a congregation to faithfully receive God's good gifts this day.



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And that's exactly what Jesus did. With the authority of God (what greater authority can there be than the jurisdiction of the creator?), Jesus simply pronounced people forgiven (Matthew 9:1–8), "Take heart son; your sins are forgiven..."

When those who questioned Jesus' authority had enough of him, they crucified Jesus as a blasphemer. But God raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating Jesus as his Son, that is, the one who possesses the creator's authority. Then Jesus sent out his disciples to continue his mission, which we will explore more below.

In Lutheran theology, the Office of the Keys refers to that special authority Jesus ordains for His Church to forgive the sins of repentant individuals or to retain the sins of the unrepentant. This is primarily drawn from several key New Testament passages where Jesus authorizes or deputizes

His disciples to exercise absolution in his stead. Among our congregations in the LCMS, that authority is vested in the pastor for public administration. That is, as a congregation we elect one man to exercise this authority for the sake of good order and proper care.

1. Matthew 16:19

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"

This verse is foundational, where Jesus addresses Peter (representing the Church) and promises the keys as a metaphor for authority over sin and access to heaven. Lutherans interpret this not as exclusive papal power but as a gift to the entire Church through its ministers.

In his commentary on this passage, Luther emphasizes the communal nature of the keys, stating, "Further, 'And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'" He uses this to argue against restricting the keys to a single authority like the pope, instead applying them to the preaching of the Gospel and absolution.

2. Matthew 18:18

"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Here, Jesus extends the binding and loosing authority to all the disciples, reinforcing that this power is for the Church as a whole to exercise in matters of doctrine, discipline, and forgiveness. It underscores the congregational aspect in Lutheran practice, such as in excommunication or restoration.

Luther connects this to the efficacy of the Church's actions, writing in his Small Catechism explanation: "believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself."

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*Continued from page 3***3. John 20:21-23**

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending You.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’”

This post-resurrection commission directly ties the Holy Spirit to the act of forgiving or retaining sins, forming the basis for Lutheran practices like private confession and absolution. It’s often paired with the above Matthew passages in catechism teachings.

Luther’s Small Catechism defines the Office explicitly: “The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.” He further affirms its reliability: “If my repentance is not sufficient, his Word is; if I am not worthy, his keys are: He is faithful and true. My sins shall not make a liar of him.”

What we see here is that Jesus authorizes sins to be forgiven. In general forgiveness is to be practiced among all Christians and any time necessary and where properly authorized. In particular the Pastor exercises The Office on Christ’s behalf among the particular congregation he is elected to serve. He is also authorized to help and guide an individual Christian if they have need navigating the practice of forgiveness in their life.

Pastor Samuel Belts

**Camp Io-Dis-E-Ca Summer
Camp 2026!**

**Registration opens January 19
— Camp starts June 10!**

Get ready for another unforgettable summer filled with adventure, faith, and friends.

2026 Theme: *Free To Serve* Join us as we explore what it means to serve joyfully — in our cabins, on the trail, and in our daily walk with Christ.

Spots fill fast, so mark your calendars and get ready!

See you at camp!



IDE Middle School Retreat & Snowlympics –

January 30–31, 2026

The 2026 IDE Middle School Retreat and Snowlympics will take place **January 30–31**. This year’s presenter will be **Pastor Thomas Van Hemert** from St. John Lutheran Church in Marengo, who will speak on “**All About Worship: Why Do We Do What We Do?**”

Students will have the opportunity to grow in their understanding of worship while also enjoying fellowship, fun activities, and the annual Snowlympics.

Dates: January 30–31, 2026

Sign-Up: Please sign up on the **church bulletin board**.

We encourage all middle school youth to participate in this meaningful and enjoyable retreat!

January 2026

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Elders Meeting 6:00pm	2	3
			Bulletin items due			
4 9am Divine Service with Communion 10:15am Bible Study/ Sunday School 12:00 pm Confirmation	5 6:00 Monday Night Bible Study	6	7 8:30am Coffee Hour 9:00am Scripture Study 5:30pm Youth Group Bulletin items due	8 Church Council Meeting 6pm	9	10
11 9am Divine Service with Communion 10:15am Voter's Meeting 12:00 pm Confirmation	12 6:00 Monday Night Bible Study	13	14 8:30am Coffee Hour 9:00am Scripture Study 5:30pm Youth Group Bulletin items due	15	16	17
18 9am Divine Service with Communion 10:15am Bible Study/ Sunday School	19 6:00 Monday Night Bible Study Registration for Camp opens	20	21 8:30am Coffee Hour 9:00am Scripture Study 5:30pm Youth Group Bulletin items due	22	23	24
25 9am Divine Service with Communion 10:15am Bible Study/ Sunday School	26	27	28	29	30	31
				Junior High Retreat at Camp		

