

# *The Grapevine*

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St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
15 N. Church Street | Thurmont, MD 21788



**Winter 2025-2026  
Edition**



### ***Greetings from Pastor Joe***

*Grace and peace to you - in  
the Name of our Lord Jesus  
Christ*

This time of year always seems to fill me with anticipation. As a little boy, I couldn't wait to race my brothers and sister down the stairs to see what awaited us under the Christmas tree. I was the oldest sibling, so I usually won the race.

My parents wouldn't let us open our presents until after we ate breakfast. Patience is not one of my best virtues. I would do what I call "speed eating" and finish my food before everyone else. I also had to wait until my siblings finished their breakfasts before we could open our presents. I usually sat at the table encouraging them to finish eating like I was cheering on Joey Chestnut in a hot dog eating contest.

One year, I woke my brothers and told them to get up because it was Christmas Day. As we ran downstairs – we immediately stopped in our tracks. There were no presents under the tree. This sent my younger brothers into a crying fit that woke my parents. They told us to go back to bed because it was only Christmas Eve. I told you I didn't have patience.

For 400 years – from Malachi to Matthew – the Jewish people lived in what was called "the silent years." For 400 years God's people had not heard from their God. Talk about needing patience. But that all changed with the birth of Jesus. God may have been silent for those 400 years, but it doesn't mean that God wasn't present. The presence of the living God is revealed in the presence of God's Son on that first Christmas.

As we move forward into the New Year, my prayer is that we feel the presence of our God, not just during Christmas, but throughout the year. My hope is that we feel the presence of God in our everyday lives and when we gather to worship at St. John's each Sunday.

I also pray that we have the patience to wait and see what God has for us as a church family in 2026.

I am beyond excited to celebrate Christmas and the upcoming New Year with you! Our 4:00pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service will be a celebration of familiar lessons and carols. May God bless you during this most festive time and throughout the upcoming New Year.

In Christ,

*- Pastor Joe*

### **THANK YOU!**

I want to extend a heartfelt thank you for helping me celebrate five years at St. John's!

As an unsure intern to a possibly over-confident pastor, we have walked this journey together.

I'm looking forward to celebrating many more anniversaries and life's milestones with you.



# Council News

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*by Chris Kreitz, Council President*

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Happy fall/winter! It's really difficult for me to believe that cold weather is upon us. It seems I was just complaining about the heat! I'm guessing that I'm not the only one that can't be happy regardless of the temperature and since we can't change it, we moan and grumble!

So, about complaining (or not), I want to thank this family of St. John's for being very patient and kind during this transitional period after losing our long time financial administrator due to health reasons. We've overcome some fairly big obstacles in this past year, but they were frankly discussed and decisions were made with consideration, respect, and caring for everyone's opinion. That's what families do. We listen to each other and act with love!

As your outgoing president, I want to personally thank you for your support these past two years. Even with the challenges it was an honor to serve God and the church and I could not have done it without YOU!

Please remember if you have ideas, joys to share, or concerns, you are always welcome at council meetings. Meetings are held the second Tuesday at 12:30pm and publicized in the weekly bulletin.

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## **Current Council Members**

Kelli Donaghue | Carolyn Fraley | Chris Kreitz | Lisa Riffle | Barbarateen Roderick |  
Gayle Spahr

# Preschool News

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by *Wanda Mathias*

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## **St. John's Christian Preschool – Month of December**

The four-year-old class participated in the annual Operation Christmas Child project. The children donated items to be included in shoe boxes, and participated in taking turns picking out items from the donations for each box. Each preschooler shared why they chose that item for the box and how much another child might love it. Fourteen boxes were filled, and the class prayed for the children who might receive the boxes. We thank every family who donated so generously and for donations toward the shipping expense. A bag of extra filler items was also sent along with the boxes to the distribution center in Baltimore to be used there as needed.



The three- and four-year-olds are practicing and learning their Christmas songs for the Christmas Program, to be held on Thursday, December 11 at 10:30 in the Sanctuary.

During the week of December 15, each class will be having a Christmas Party and annual pajama day.

December learning themes will focus on studying the letter "J" (Jesus) and the story of Jesus' birth, Christmas.

Preschool will be closed December 22-January 2 for the Christmas Holiday.

We wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

## **St. John's Christian Preschool – Month of January**

The Preschool will reopen on Monday, January 5, 2026.

During the month of January all classes will be learning about all things winter related. The letter of the month will be "S" - learning about snow, snowmen, snowflakes and shapes.

Focus will also be on recognizing and matching Capital and lower-case letters.

We will be closed on Monday, January 19 and Tuesday, January 20.

# Fundraising Committee

by Mary Lou Royer

## **Blessings at Christmas and all good wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year!**

The Fundraising Committee wants to thank all of you for your unending support throughout 2025. We worked hard and, as a result, we have close to \$10,000.00 in our coffers to help wherever the need arises in the Church.

We will "soldier on" in 2026 to raise funds for Church projects and to maintain a positive presence in the community.

Of course, we will kick off the year with our annual flower and bake sale on the day before Easter - Saturday, April 4th. This event has always been a huge success and one that is anticipated by many residents in our little town.

Once again, thank you for all you do and have a very...

"Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!"



# Outreach Update

by Carolyn Fraley

## ***“Loved by God . . . to love others!”***

*A reminder to one and all that this is our St. John’s mission statement.*

- **Thurmont Food Bank** - First of all, a very big “thank you” to those who so generously donated well over 100 food items during October and November specifically to supplement Thanksgiving meals for local area families! Every contribution was a blessing for the constantly growing number of people needing food assistance within the greater Thurmont community.

As we continue with our *monthly* food collections, please note that personal hygiene products are always a welcome donation, as are boxes, bags and cans of pet food. Our weekly church bulletins will continue to specify requested food and hygiene items each month. Thank you, in advance, for whatever you can provide for this truly vital ministry! Just remember to check “expiration dates” ... and no glass jars, please.

- **“Loads of Love”** - Quarters continue to be collected each week in order to assist patrons of Thurmont’s Super Suds Laundromat with the cost of their clothes laundering. This outreach opportunity typically occurs on the last Saturday of the month, depending upon Pastor Joe’s availability.
- **ELCA “Good Gifts” Ministry** - This year’s campaign to support the work of this transformative ELCA ministry officially closed on October 5. From our weekly produce “sales” and from money given via ELCA-provided piggy banks, we exceeded our \$300 goal by raising **\$438.25** - enough to add a second water filter, a second piglet, a second goat, and a third set of mosquito nets to our initial list. A check for the total amount was sent to the ELCA in November, thus enabling St. John’s to provide the following variety of Good Gifts to help transform lives throughout the world:

**2 Water filters - \$60**

**2 Piglets - \$60**

**Mosquito nets for a family (x3 @ \$20) - \$60**

**2 Goats - \$100**

**Seeds and gardening tools - \$50**

**Serve 50 at a feeding ministry - \$100**

We express our heartfelt thanks, again, to Mary Ellen Eyler for supplying the fresh and garden produce throughout the summer months! And, of course, another outpouring of thanks to all who financially supported this far-reaching global ministry again this year!

- **“Operation Gratitude”** - This year our team of volunteers added notes of gratitude and encouragement to 150 Christmas cards, and we sent them off at the beginning of December to the designated distribution center in California. Many thanks to those who helped with this most worthy project (both providers and writers of cards), thereby ensuring that American military personnel (particularly those without families) are not forgotten during the Christmas season.

# Looking Ahead... *Mark Your Calendars!*

by Carolyn Fraley

- **Bible Study** - Our group is taking a holiday break and will resume in January 2026, with a new study topic. We meet with Pastor Joe every Tuesday at 11:00am in the fellowship hall, and we invite you to join us in the New Year whenever possible!
- **"A Cup of Joe with Pastor Joe"** - We continue our weekly get-together with Pastor Joe every Tuesday at Dunkin' Donuts, 9:00-10:00am. It makes a pleasant, relaxing way to begin the day. We hope you'll stop by sometime!
- **Sunday Socials** - A reminder to please join us on the **first** Sunday of each month for food and fellowship following our worship service. You'll be happy you stayed!
- **Terrific Tuesdays** - This important ministry gives parents and children the opportunity to understand the Bible using puppet presentations and crafts. We will meet with Pastor Joe (and his helpers) at 6:00pm in the fellowship hall on the second and fourth Tuesdays beginning in January. Refreshments are served. Come and join the fun!
- **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service** - Please note that this year's service will be held on Wednesday, December 24 at **4:00pm**. We hope you'll make every effort to attend... and invite a friend!
- **Annual Congregational Meeting - January 18, immediately following our worship service, with food to follow.** Please try to be present at this important meeting!
- **Ash Wednesday - February 18** - There will be no service here at St. John's. However, **Elias Lutheran Church will be holding services at 9:30am and 7:00pm**. Please consider joining our partners in shared ministry for one of these services of reflection, imposition of ashes, and Holy Communion.





# Worship Assistants' Schedule

## December 2025

| DATE  | ASSISTING MINISTER<br>(and Lector) | WELCOMERS                       |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 12/7  | Kelli Donaghue                     | Kandy & Steve<br>Hauk           |
| 12/14   | Lisa Riffle                        | Harriet & Randy<br>Valentine    |
| 12/21   | Stacey Brown-Hobbs                 | Kenny Favorite &<br>Mike Kreitz |
| 12/24<br>Christmas Eve<br>Candlelight Service<br>4:00pm | Chris Kreitz                       | Kandy & Steve<br>Hauk           |
| 12/28   | Lisa Riffle                        | Harriet & Randy<br>Valentine    |

# Worship Assistants' Schedule

## January 2026

| DATE  | ASSISTING MINISTER<br>(and Lector) | WELCOMERS                       |
|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1/4   | Chris Kreitz                       | Kenny Favorite &<br>Mike Kreitz |
| 1/11  | Stacey Brown-Hobbs                 | Harriet & Randy<br>Valentine    |
| 1/18<br>Congregational Meeting<br>follows the service | Lisa Riffle                        | Kandy & Steve<br>Hauk           |
| 1/25  | Kelli Donaghue                     | Harriet & Randy<br>Valentine    |

# Worship Assistants' Schedule

## February 2026

| DATE | ASSISTING MINISTER<br>(and Lector) | WELCOMERS                       |
|------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2/1  | Kelli Donaghue                     | Kandy & Steve<br>Hauk           |
| 2/8  | Stacey Brown-Hobbs                 | Harriet & Randy<br>Valentine    |
| 2/15 | Chris Kreitz                       | Kenny Favorite &<br>Mike Kreitz |
| 2/22 | Lisa Riffle                        | Kandy & Steve<br>Hauk           |

**\*\*Please Note\*\***

**If you cannot be present on the assigned date,  
be sure to trade with another assistant. Thank you!**

Actress Audrey Hepburn once said *“You have two hands: One to help yourself, the second to help others.”* As a follower of Jesus Christ, we are all called to service to others and service in and to the church. The role of the Assisting Minister (AM) is a reminder that we all share in the Priesthood. The role of the AM goes beyond simply assisting the pastor. The AM is also a visible sign that worship happens when we all participate. We honor those who serve as AMs, and give thanks to God for their leadership in our church.

Our Welcomers play a very important role and in essence are the very face of the church for members and visitors alike. Welcomers are usually the first faces people see when they enter the church and they are responsible for creating a positive first impression. If our first impression is a poor one, most likely our visitors will not return. Welcoming goes beyond distributing bulletins. The very definition of the name is to make others feel welcomed by being attentive to their needs (especially first-time visitors), and to offer assistance and direction when needed. Welcomers play a crucial role in making sure visitors feel seen, valued and welcomed. We thank God for our Welcomers as they continue to bless our church by serving in this vital ministry.

# Birthdays & Prayers

## December Birthdays

12/2 Tracey Bradley  
 12/7 Kate Donaghue  
 12/12 Julie Balias  
 12/13 Tyler Hauk  
 12/15 Tina Mumm  
 12/16 Pastor Joe Herb  
 12/17 Fred Balias  
 12/19 Kelli Donaghue  
 12/20 Kyle Mueller



## January Birthdays

1/5 Teresa Unger  
 1/11 Angela Fox  
 1/13 Gary Mathias  
 1/23 Ross Smith, Jr.  
 1/24 Connie Fox  
 1/26 Randy Spahr  
 1/27 Jean Zentz  
 1/29 Christine Kreitz



## February Birthdays

2/7 Allison Delauter  
 2/14 Matthew Fox  
 2/18 Lisa Nolan-Humerick  
 2/21 Mallory (Donaghue) Wyatt  
 2/25 Ricky Eylar

## Prayers

**Please remember to pray for our Members:**

|                           |                      |                     |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Luke Bradley              | Dan & Tracey Bradley | Fred & Julie Balias |
| Chester & Jean Zentz      | Steve Hauk           | Brian Getz          |
| Nancy & Donald<br>Creager | Connie Fox           | Denny Edwards       |
| Steve & Mary Ann Erlitz   | Robbie Freed         | Ross Smith, Jr.     |
| Dottie Valentine          | Mike Kreitz          |                     |

*For pastoral care, contact Pastor Joe @ 443-255-5229 or [jherb1@yahoo.com](mailto:jherb1@yahoo.com)*

# Birthdays & Prayers (*continued*)

## **Family and Friends:**

Don Ardery - MM Griggs  
P.J. Donaghue - Kelli Donaghue  
Angie Bowders - MM Griggs  
John Oravec - Kelli Donaghue  
Theresa Tracey - MM Griggs  
Mandy Valentine - Harriet & Randy Valentine  
Ethel Brauer - Carolyn Fraley  
Melinda Bitner - Sara Hahn  
Alan Cornett - MM Griggs  
Cindy Parks - MM Griggs  
Carl Thayer - Carolyn Fraley  
Nancy & Tommy Fraley - Carolyn Fraley  
Cameron Palmer - MM Griggs  
Jim Latham - The Tankersley Family  
Becky Gorby - Ashley Tankersley  
Irene Denning - Lisa Riffle  
Dennis McGrew - Lisa Riffle  
Angela Ashenfelter - Tonyia Miller  
Michelle Myers - Harriet & Randy Valentine  
David Sanders - Tina Mumm  
Michael Allshouse - Gayle Spahr

Katie Wisnor - MM Griggs  
Yvonne Mbella - Tracey Bradley  
David Tracey - MM Griggs  
Darrell Johnson & Family - MM Griggs  
Debbie Fornwald - Carolyn Fraley  
Carol Hobbs - Gayle Spahr  
Sharon Harrison - Sara Hahn  
Sidney Kalega - Gayle Spahr  
Jim Reid - Carolyn Fraley

*(Please notify the office of any changes to the Prayer List. Thank you.)*

## **In Service to our Country:**

Josh Waldron      Nickalas Kath

*We offer our heartfelt sympathy to the family and friends of Edward McKissick, who passed away on November 3, 2025. Edward was the beloved stepfather of Kenny Favorite.*

# St. John's in Photos... *Look at us!*

## Photos from our *First Sunday of the Month Social*



Photos from our *First Sunday of the Month Social (continued)*



## A Servant's Heart and a Green Thumb



Saint Peter says in 1Peter 4:10 *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”* It’s very obvious when taking a look at the beautiful flowers in front of the church, Barbarateen Roderick is sharing her gift of a green thumb. With a servant’s heart, Barbarateen gets her hands dirty planting seasonal flowers and plants to enhance the beauty of St. John’s. You are encouraged to stop and take a look at her work!

Besides using her skills to beautify our church, Barbarateen is also a member of our church council.

Thank you for using your gifts to serve St. John’s!

## St. John’s - A Multi-Generational Church

Few communities consist of only one primary generation. It’s not healthy for the community and it’s certainly not healthy for a church. St. John’s is blessed to have multi-generational families within our congregation. Long-time member Gayle Spahr and her son Randy, granddaughter Molly and great-grandson Sawyer recently enjoyed worship together at a Sunday morning service.



In his Christmas message to the church, Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry delivers a children's sermon, describing the night when Jesus was born. Curry emphasizes that "whispers make us stop, listen and pay attention."

(Copied from ELCA YouTube channel.)

## *Have you ever heard a whisper?*

"Hello!"

Can you all whisper back to me?

Whispers are quiet, gentle, almost like a secret. You have to lean in close to hear them. And I wonder if it's possible for the heavens to whisper at Christmas?

One silent night, far away, in a town called Bethlehem, the stars twinkled brighter than ever. And the angels were there, too. It was as if the whole sky was whispering: "Something wonderful is happening ..."

Let's all look up at the ceiling like we're looking at the stars.

Can you twinkle your fingers like stars?

Now let's whisper together, "Something wonderful is happening ..."

The heavens weren't shouting. They weren't making a big noise. They were whispering, because whispers make us stop, listen and pay attention.

And what was the whispering about? A baby. A tiny baby lying in a manger.

His name was Jesus.

Can you pretend to rock a baby in your arms?

The night Jesus was born, the shepherds heard the whisper in the sky when the angels sang. The Wise Men sensed the whisper in the star that guided them. And Mary and Joseph felt the whisper in their hearts: "This child is special. This child is God's gift."

Sometimes we think God only speaks in loud voices or through big miracles. But Christmas reminds us that God often whispers. God whispers love and kindness and peace.

Can you think of one kind thing you could whisper to someone this week?

So, this Christmas, listen closely. The heavens are still whispering: "Jesus is here. God loves you. Share that love with the world."

Let's all whisper together: "Jesus is here."

Now say "God loves us" in a joyful voice!

Amen.



The Rev. Yehiel Curry  
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America





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Please submit articles for *The Grapevine* by **February 6, 2026**.

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

15 N. Church Street

Thurmont, MD 21788

*"Loved by God ... to love others!"*

Ministers: The People of St. John's | Sunday Worship 8:30am - All are welcome!