



The St. John's

# PEARL

The Newsletter of St. John's Lutheran Church in Pearl City, Illinois

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it." - Matthew 13:45-46

A congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

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## **From the Desk of Pastor Ekstrand...**

### The Most Offensive Thing Ever

*When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, 'My son'; and he answered, 'Here I am.' He said, 'See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.'*

*Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I heard your father say to your brother Esau, "Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the Lord before I die." Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes; and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.' But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, 'Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.' His mother said to him, 'Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.' So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved. Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.*

*So he went in to his father, and said, 'My father'; and he said, 'Here I am; who are you, my son?' Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.' But Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?' He answered, 'Because the Lord your God granted me success.' Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.' Then he said, 'Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.' So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.' So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him... (Genesis 27:1-27a)*

Have you ever been offended?

There's a great story I've heard, but like many, I am not sure if it's true. It may be no more than a legend, it does nonetheless make for a good story.

It's about a new pastor several years back up in the New England area who had been reminded numerous times about one of the homebound members of the congregation, Mrs. McCallister. As far as anyone knew, she didn't have a first name—it was just "Mrs. McCallister." But with every referral they gave to the young pastor about Mrs. McCallister, a warning also came. You see, Mrs. McCallister was a person who was

very much against the consuming of alcohol. And whenever anyone entered her house, before she would engage in any conversation, she would have her say about what she considered to be the evils of alcohol. They told the young pastor, “Be prepared. The tables will be turned when you visit Mrs. McCallister, because at that time, you’ll be the one listening to the preaching.”

The young pastor made his rounds over the weeks that followed, and soon, there was only one name left on his list. Mrs. McCallister. And so the pastor called her, set up a time to visit, and the next thing he knew, he was on her doorstep, bracing himself. He sat down in her parlor, and as soon as the small talk was out of the way, Mrs. McCallister gave him a twenty-five minute talk about what she saw as the evils of alcohol. And after that was done, the young pastor made what some people may consider to be a rookie mistake for a new member of the clergy. He argued.

The pastor, and you may have already guessed what the argument was that he used, said, “Y’know, I see your point. But in the Bible, we read that Jesus, at the wedding feast at Cana, turned water into wine, and I think that Jesus thought that drinking wine was okay.”

And Mrs. McCallister, retaining her strict, stern look on her face, stared at him for a moment, down her nose. And then she said, “*Yes, and I never liked that about him.*”

As much as we hate to admit it, God’s word sometimes may offend. In Jesus’ farewell discourse near the end of the Gospel of St. John, he warns the disciples that the world will hate them. And believe it or not, no matter how much that idea might offend us, that’s the good news of it all: God’s realm in Christ most certainly functions in an entirely different way from how the world works. Sure, we wouldn’t want the sign on the front of the church building to say: “*Come join our church: even though people hate us.*”

But at the same time, living out the radical love and compassion of Christ may offend the cultural expectations of the world. God’s word is something that just may very well offend our human expectations and sensibilities. It may even arouse disdain.

Here’s another example from this passage from Genesis. Jacob, who already has coerced his brother Esau to sell his birthright for a mere dinner of stew, is preparing to convince his old, blind father Isaac to bless him instead of his brother, his brother who in fact was the firstborn. And it gets worse. It is Jacob’s mother, indeed, even Esau’s mother, who is convincing Jacob to pull this one over on his brother and on his father.

And why? So that a nation, Israel, will come from Jacob. A nation of God’s people. From a liar! That God may fulfill his work in the second-born, just as his second-born of the New Covenant, children of Christ, may be grafted onto the vine which is new life in Christ.

Deceit. Lying. Coercion. God’s plan is only to be carried out by *faultless* people, right? One would most certainly hope that God’s plan wouldn’t be carried out by someone who is as utterly dishonest and imperfect as... well, as imperfect as you or me. Such an offensive thought!

But sometimes God’s word offends. The reality is that God’s plan of salvation and perfection moves forward in the midst of imperfect people. God is not afraid to offend us so that salvation will come. In fact, God carried out the most offensive action ever. An action more offensive than God placing his mark of protection upon the murderer Cain. An action more offensive than when David, a man who has conspired for murder, becomes the king of Israel. An action more offensive than when God operated his plan through the wicked king Nebuchadnezzar. Indeed, an action just as offensive to our sensibilities as the **most unthinkable**.

Are you ready to be offended? Are you ready to hear of an action that makes the selfish ambitions of the world cringe with distaste? Are you ready to hear of something that utterly contradicts everything that the world teaches us about how to get somewhere and how to be somebody? If so, imagine this action:

*That we: you, them, me; people who deserve absolutely and entirely nothing, receive the promise of salvation and perfection through the free grace given by the suffering of another, by Christ on the cross, by God himself.*

**That** should offend our and the world’s expectations more than any. And thanks be to God for that. In Christ,  
Pastor Ekstrand

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Bibles: Sunday, Jan. 27

We are also aware that some older youth were not awarded these precious gifts from our Fellowship Club. If your child 6th grade and up has not yet received one, please alert Pastor Ekstrand by January 6. These will be distributed at the January 27th service.



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### ***FIRST COMMUNION CLASSES & FIRST COMMUNION SUNDAY***

#### ***Baptized members 4<sup>th</sup> Grade and up***

**Classes:** Sunday, January 13 & 20; 11:00 am-noon

**First Communion Sunday:** Sunday, January 27; 9:00 am

Non-communicating members from 4<sup>th</sup> Grade and up are invited to gather with Pastor Ekstrand on January 13 & 20 to explore what it means to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the amazing grace conveyed to us through the Body and Blood of Christ.

We will meet in the Nave immediately after the Sunday School/Educational Hour. Participation in BOTH sessions are required for inclusion at First Communion. If you have a difficulty with attending any of the scheduled class dates (participation in the class setting is preferable to individual instruction), please contact Pastor Ekstrand as soon as possible to make alternate arrangements. A sign-up sheet will be posted on one of the Narthex bulletin boards.

*First Communion will be received on Sunday, January 27, 2019.*

### **MEN'S BREAKFAST**

7:30 am, Wednesday, January 9,

BROTHERS INN FAMILY RESTAURANT

103 IL-64, Lanark, IL

***Feel welcome to join Pastor Ekstrand for a time of food, fellowship and casual conversation in the midst of another busy week!***



### **Women's Gathering Ministries . . .**

**Starting the EMAIL Prayer Chain:** To start the email prayer chain, contact Karen Bremmer at ([815 443 2478](tel:8154432478) or [815 821 4698](tel:8158214698)) or email at [rkbremmer@gmail.com](mailto:rkbremmer@gmail.com) You may also contact the church office at [815 443-2215](tel:8154432215) (please leave a message as they are checked after hours, etc.) or email at [prshadmin@gmail.com](mailto:prshadmin@gmail.com). You may also contact Leann Heimerdinger at ([815-443-2191](tel:8154432191)) or cell at ([815-541-3081](tel:8155413081)) or email at [jamleading@gmail.com](mailto:jamleading@gmail.com). If you are not receiving the Prayer Chain email and would like to be included, please contact the church office.

### **The Women's Gathering Activities:**

*Throughout the month we will be collecting baby wipes for Mother Hubbard's Kiddie Cupboard and any pasta products (canned, boxes, or noodles) for the Pearl City Food Pantry. Bring the items to church and place in the bins in the back of the church. Any and all donations appreciated.*

**January 6th-***Prayer Shawl Outreach after church services in Luther Hall.*

**January 8th-***Mexican Train Dominoes at 9am in Luther Hall. All are invited to join the group and play.*

**January 15th-***Woman's Gathering Bible Study in Luther Hall. 9:45-Fellowship and coffee*

*10:00-Bible Study-The Gospel of John: Come and See-Seeking and Finding Faith*

*Leader is Lori Kempel*

*Co-hostess-Kris Eden and Janet Ferguson*

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### **Joy Choir News . . .**



The Joy Choir resumes rehearsals on Thursday January 3. We sing on Sunday January 13. Thanks to all the moms and grandmas that helped at the Christmas party! Happy New Year!



Thank you! Special appreciation to the many members who keep the St. John's Property looking great. A number of individuals volunteer their time throughout the year and we want you to know your services are appreciated. Bob and Darla Hasselman: Donated their time, equipment and the cost of the cement work for the new zero entry sidewalk at the southwest ramp door. The cement had a terrible crack that was heaving. We are so thankful for the zero entry now as so many people use it!

- Fred and Earlene Domberger: They mow both the church property and the parsonage grounds every week all summer long! Unfortunately, they also have to pick up a lot of trash on the grounds when mowing.
- Dennis Kruse, Lois Hunsaker and Crew: Dennis and Lois have done shrub trimming, cleaning, etc., at St. John's. In addition, Dennis and crew removed the tree from the Northwest corner of the building.
- Theresa Albers: She continually works in the landscaping throughout the summer keeping the annual and perennial plants looking great!
- Property Committee: The Property Committee completes various task like gutter cleaning, snow removal, handles water issues and more "behind the scenes" tasks!

(We are truly sorry if we missed someone-certainly not intentional.)

### From the Calendar Committee . . .

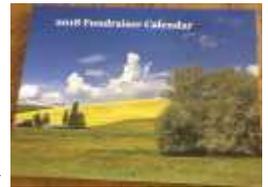
Nov. 28— Dec. 19 Calendar Raffle Winners

November 28: Gerald Harnish, Freeport, IL

December 5: Dan Koch, Argyle, WI

December 12: Twila Simler, Pearl City, IL

December 19: Luke Glendenning, Pearl City, IL



**Calendar Committee Report:** Currently there has been 458 calendars sold. That means you have a 1 in 9 chance to win one of the 52 weekly drawings in 2019. What a wonderful gift to give, and then have them win the \$200.<sup>00</sup> weekly prize.

We will keep selling calendars in January, so stop and get some additional ones.



**Mexican Train Dominoes:** We plan to play Mexican Train Dominoes on the second Tuesday of the month at 9 am in January due to the holiday. Invite a friend and join us on Tuesday, January 8 from 9-Noon in Luther Hall. All are invited. You don't have to know how to play to join in on the fun!

**Prayer Concerns (November 25 - December 16, 2018):** Bob Lyvers, Vivienne Dascher, Dave Carter, Peggy Lauber, Audrey Wilcox, Nicole Merboth, Cliff Robertson, Ed Hulkonen, Keith Kness, Doug Paton, Cathy Kness, Mildred Mayer, Jim Heimerdinger, Rita Eden Turgeon, Monica Sandell, Bob Evans, Hannah Raders, Landon Raab, Mark Nussle, Kenneth Musser, Elsie Rupnow, Nancy Boop, Paula Gerke, Carol Tippet, Elizabeth Rath, Allen George, Jane Boop, Nola Boyle, Sharon McDonald, Marie Berning, Brett Ellinor, Libby Peterson, Daphne Frey, Doug Gille and Carol Fisher.

The family and friends of Gene Kohl, Elizabeth Renter, Hannah Westfall, Ken Wood, Ken Morris, Bruce Johnson, Asa Wilcox, Marjorie Peoples and Peg Dauphin.

### Pearl City Food Pantry Needs . . .

The Pearl City Food Pantry supplies and funds are very low. They could use your help with the following food items or make a monetary donation at the Pearl City State Bank: Boxes with packets of Oatmeal (flavored), pudding (regular size, regular and sugar-free), Jello (any flavor but orange in regular or sugar-free), packets of instant potatoes, macaroni and cheese, Rice-A-Roni, Pasta Roni, canned spaghetti and meatballs or ravioli, noodles, canned diced tomatoes, kidney beans-light and dark, tomato sauce (15 oz cans), soups (except tomato or cream of broccoli), individual 4 packs of pudding and fruit, canned fruits (pineapple, mandarin oranges and fruit cocktail), canned vegetables (carrots, beets, mushrooms, potatoes), canned meats (chicken, tuna, SPAM), brown sugar, ketchup, mustard and black pepper.

If you would like to donate items from your garden or bread, please deliver items directly to the food pantry on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month between 8:45 and 9:15 am. All non perishable food items may be brought to St. John's or delivered directly to the food pantry on the 1st Saturday of the month between 9 and 11 am.

From the Christmas Program Committee. . .

Thank you so much for all those who participated in the St. John's Christmas Program on December 16. Your dedication is appreciated. The program was fantastic and everyone did so well. Our ornament sales have totaled \$97.00. All was donated to the St. John's Current Fund! Special appreciation to the committee: Karen Bremmer, Brianne Freedlund, Monica Baier, Ann DeZell and Deb Bremmer.



From the Stewardship Committee. .

**Attention Thrivent Members:** Are you a Thrivent member? If so, you are eligible to receive monetary assistance with events here at St. John's. Please contact DJ Scott or Dianne Handsaker, Parish Administrator, for information on what is needed for events and how to receive Thrivent Action Team Dollars and/or Thrivent Choice Dollars. Thrivent members may apply for at least \$250 per year and some members may apply for a total of \$500 (or more) per calendar year.

From the Social Ministry Committee . . .



**The Mitten Tree:** The Social Ministry Committee once again is asking you to bring new mittens, gloves and hats for the Mitten Tree. Items may be brought to the church through January 6. All Mittens, hats, scarves and gloves will be given to the Pearl City School for children of all ages in need. Thank you!

From the Worship & Music Committee. . .

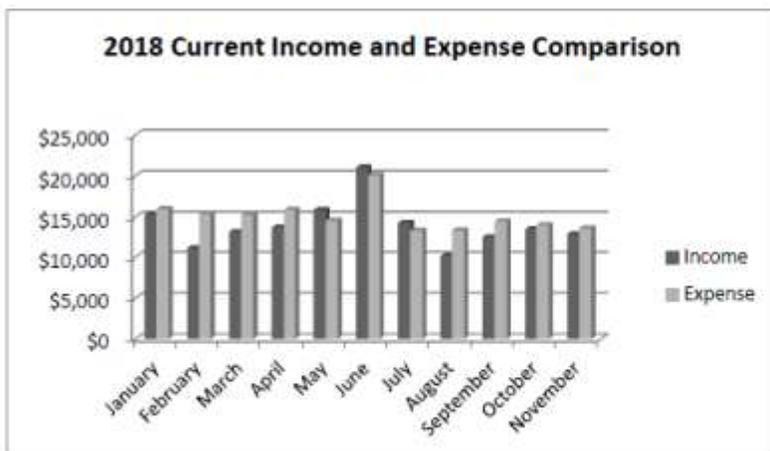
Everyone's help is needed to take down the Christmas trees after worship on December 30<sup>th</sup>. The garland and lights will remain up for Epiphany, but the other Christmas decorations need to be removed. Thanks in advance!

From the Office. . .

**Annual Book and Meeting:** The Annual Meeting of the St. John's Congregation will be held on Sunday, January 27<sup>th</sup> immediately following worship. All reports are due to the office by January 2<sup>nd</sup> for inclusion in the Annual Book. Annual books will be assembled on January 10th.

**2018 Current Income and Expense Comparison by Month**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Total
Income	\$15,283	\$11,112	\$13,160	\$13,718	\$15,856	\$21,053	\$14,269	\$10,174	\$12,479	\$13,504	\$12,907	\$153,515
Expense	\$16,022	\$15,380	\$15,235	\$15,862	\$14,599	\$20,099	\$13,376	\$13,382	\$14,467	\$14,009	\$13,653	\$166,084
Difference	-\$739	-\$4,268	-\$2,076	-\$2,144	\$1,257	\$954	\$893	-\$3,207	-\$1,988	-\$504	-\$746	-\$12,568



Income includes \$ 12,250 transferred from Fundraiser account.



Enjoy the  
Christmas Season!  
Join us at  
**St. John's for**  
a Service of Carol s  
and Readings  
Sunday, Dec. 30  
at 9 am

*Save  
The Date*

**The St. John's Annual**  
Congregational Meeting  
will be held after worship  
on January 27, 2019.  
Annual Books will be  
ready for pick-up starting  
Friday, January 11.

**Free Cookbooks: "Taste of Home" hardcover cookbooks to giveaway.**

**Contact Jerilyn Strohecker at 815-369-2748.**



*From the Christian Education Committee . . .*

**Sunday School Teachers Needed:** Teachers (1-2) are needed for Sunday School for the months of March, April and May of 2019. Let Dianne, Parish Administrator, know if you are able to teach for a month in 2019!

*Grace Meal News. . .*

**December Grace Meal:** Stanley & April Eberle would like to thank everyone who helped with the December Grace Meal: Dennis Kruse, Lois Hunsaker, Kris Eden, Kathy Williams, Linda Albright, Joan Klatt, Sharon Knoup, Doris Kness, Katelyn Little, Rich and MaryAnn Kliman, Butch and Carol Garnhart, Leann Heimerdinger, Tracy Downs and Ila Carlson. We also want to thank everyone who ate in Luther Hall or took a carry-out home. 72 dined in Luther Hall and there was 72 carry-outs/deliveries.

*Thanks again, Stan & April Eberle*

**January Grace Meal:** The January Grace Meal will be served by the St. John's Church Council and will be a meatloaf dinner.

*Visited Another Church . . .*

- Keith and Theresa Albers worshipped with family at Saint James Evangelical Lutheran Church, Verona, Wisconsin, for the First Sunday of Advent on December 2.
- Paul and Dianne Handsaker worshipped at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Freeport, IL, on Sunday, November 25 and December 2.

*Duties of the Church for January 2019*

Date	Greeters	Ushers	Lector	Comm. Asst.	Acolyte
Jan. 6	Jeff & Gina Boop Family	Joel & Lori Kempel	Joan Stewart	Lee Harbison Kathy Williams	Mary Baier
Jan. 13	Joyce & Terry Kempel	Jane Boop	Jerilyn Strohecker	Marion & Kris Eden	Kyle Niehaus
Jan. 20	Jim & Pam Richards	Jayson & Kim Williams Family	Stacey Block	Stacey Block Michele Schiess	Jayden Downs
Jan. 27	Chad & Deb Bremmer Family	Jim & Leann Heimerdinger Family	Theresa Albers	Joel & Lori Kempel	Jacob Liev

**Organist:** Karen Bremmer/Kathy Hillmer

**Counters:** Chris Kempel, Kelly Lawler and Meghan Lawler

January Birthdays

- |                       |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 3 Sarah Hass          | 13 Linda Erbsen       | 25 Nicole LaVanway |
| 4 Lee Block           | Benjamin Hass         | 26 Alex Brinkmeier |
| Claire Brinkmeier     | 19 Richard Brinkmeier | 27 Lane Kempel     |
| 5 Jan Voss            | 20 Stuart Hershey     | 28 Laura Gray      |
| 9 Austin Block        | Deaken Hofmaster      | 29 Myles Freedlund |
| 11 Verlin Richtemeyer | 21 Mark Melville      | Sawyer Williams    |
| Jodi Revels           | 22 Lincoln Voss       |                    |
| 12 Brooke Hass        | 23 Sarah Jane Myers   |                    |

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p><i>December 30</i> 9 am Worship followed by taking down Christmas decorations.</p>	<p>31</p>	<p>January 1 6:30 pm Al-Anon <b>Happy New Year Office Closed</b></p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3 SCRIP Orders Due</p>	<p>4 <b>Pastor's Day Off</b></p>	<p>5</p>
<p>6 SCRIP Orders Due 9 am Worship Service 10 am Prayer Shawl Ministry 10:15 am Dig In Sunday School 10:15 am Confirmation 11 am Luther Hall Rented 11 am Christian Education Meeting 6 pm 5th Quarter 7:30 pm Genesis</p>	<p>7 5:15 pm Helping Hands/Health Ministries Meeting 6 pm Audit Committee Meeting 7 pm 4-H 7 pm Bible Study</p>	<p>8 9 am: Mexican Train Dominoes 6:30 pm Al-Anon</p>	<p>9 7:30 am <b>Men's Breakfast</b></p>	<p>10 9:30 am Bible Study 10:30 am Assemble Annual Books 3:15 pm Joy Choir Rehearsal</p>	<p>11 <b>Pastor's Day Off</b></p>	<p>12</p>
<p>13 8 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9 am Worship Service 10:15 am Dig In Sunday School 10:15 am Confirmation 10:15 am Property Committee 10:15 am Stewardship &amp; Outreach Committee Meetings 10:15 am Memorial &amp; Finance Committee Meeting 11 am: First Communion Class 6 pm 4-H Meeting 6 pm 5th Quarter 7:30 pm Genesis</p>	<p>14 6 pm Girl Scouts 7 pm Bible Study</p>	<p>15 9:45 am <b>Women's</b> Gathering Bible Study 6:30 pm Al-Anon</p>	<p>16 7 pm Council Meeting</p>	<p>17 9:30 am Bible Study 3:15 pm Joy Choir Rehearsal</p>	<p>18 <b>Pastor's Day Off</b></p>	<p>19 <i>Luther Hall used for Grace Meal Prep</i></p>
<p>20 February Newsletter Deadline 8 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9 am Worship Service followed by Healing Service 10:15 am Dig In Sunday School 10:15 am Confirmation 11 am SPLAT Youth to Deliver Grace Meals 11 am: First Communion Class Noon Community Grace Meal 6 pm 5th Quarter 7:30 pm Genesis</p>	<p>21 7 pm Bible Study</p>	<p>22 6:30 pm Al-Anon</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24 9:30 am Bible Study 3:15 pm Joy Choir Rehearsal</p>	<p>25 <b>Pastor's Day Off</b></p>	<p>26</p>
<p>27 9 am Worship 10:15 am Dig In Sunday School 10:15 am Confirmation 10:15 am Book Study 6 pm 5th Quarter 7:30 pm Genesis</p>	<p>28 6 pm Girl Scouts 7 pm Bible Study</p>	<p>29 6:30 pm Al-Anon</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31 9:30 am Bible Study 3:15 pm Joy Choir Rehearsal</p>		