

theVine



Winter Edition | 2025-2026



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theVine

The quarterly journal of RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. -John 15:5

Dear Red Hill Family and Friends,

Jesus told His disciples: “I am *the light of the world!*” (*John 8.12*). During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we celebrate the coming of our Lord, the “light” that shines in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome (*John 1.5*)! In January, we enter into the Epiphany season and its focus on the *manifestation* of Jesus’ saving work for the world. The Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany cycles all have in common the truth that, in the midst of a dark, lost, and lonely world, Jesus has come to love and be with us; to be our light that shines in the darkness of this world and in our lives!

In the Bible, light is often used as a metaphor for God’s truth and God’s leading us through His truth. Jesus told His church (you and me) that, through Him, we too are “the light of the world” as we learn and grow as disciples of Jesus (*Matthew 5.14*). What this means for the church at large, and Red Hill Lutheran Church and School in particular, is that we must be true, Biblical communities where *the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Sacraments administered according to the Gospel.*¹

As you read through this edition of *The Vine*, remember that you are a part of our mission to make disciples of Jesus; you are one of Jesus’ “lights,” reflecting God’s ultimate light of love and joy. May the light of Jesus Christ so shine in your life that others may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven! (*Matthew 5.16*)

May you have a Merry Christmas, and very happy New Year!

Thankful for you!

Pastor Seth



¹ This is the definition of a true church, according to Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*. See, Theodore G. Tappert, Ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).



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Keeping Sacred Time: The Church Year

By, Rev. Dr. Seth Britton

As disciples of Christ, we are called to live differently than the dominant culture around us. Christians are called to communicate differently with others, to view our money and resources differently than others, and to view the world itself differently than others. And, from the earliest days of the Christian Church, disciples of Jesus have also been called to view *time* differently than others.

Just as we use calendars in our lives to keep track of our activities and special days, the church throughout the centuries has also “kept track” of sacred days, seasons, and commemorations through the use and recognition of The Church Year, also referred to as the “Liturgical Year.” This practice dates back to the earliest centuries of the Christian Church, following the example set in the Old Testament of structuring the year around the revelatory and salvific acts of God. Lutheran theologian Arthur Just describes the Jewish roots of the holiness of time:

Time was a fundamental part of creation. God created the world in six days, rested on the seventh, and declared a Sabbath day of rest. After the fall, the Sabbath became a day to praise the Creator for His good creation, to thank Him for His ongoing presence in the creation with His mighty acts of salvation, and to petition Him to return as Messiah to restore creation to what God had created it to be...various feasts such as Passover, the Fest of Booths, and Pentecost became part of the rhythm of the Jewish year...¹

As God’s unfolding plan of salvation culminated in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God’s people now viewed time itself as having been fulfilled through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The days, months, and seasons of the year now reflect the life and ministry of Jesus! Just continues...

By resting in the tomb Christ fulfilled the ancient Sabbath day requirements. In His resurrection, He restored creation. Sunday, the weekly celebration of the resurrection, was taken as the preferred day of worship by early Christians. As a church steeped in the historical events of Christ’s

life, the Jewish precedent of feast days during the year, Sunday was complemented by events from Christ’s redemptive life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Church Year developed to give the people of God access to the life of Christ... time has always been a critical commodity, no less so in the Church.²

The western, liturgical calendar is structured around three major feast/festival cycles:

Advent/Christmas/Epiphany
Lent (Holy Week)/Easter/Ascension
Pentecost.

From these three festivals comes a “season,” a period of time that flows from one season to the next. Additionally, each season is reflected by specific, liturgical colors. As theologian William Cwirla describes, “Each season also has its own character determined by its Scripture readings, the hymns chosen to reflect those readings, and devotional practices and pieties, such as fasting, feasting, Advent Wreaths, etc.”³

Here is a brief outline of each season, along with its symbolic color and meaning...

Advent

The season of Advent marks the beginning of the Church Year. The word Advent means “*coming*” or “*arrival*.” Advent is a four-week season of preparing our hearts and souls through repenting and believing the good news that God’s Kingdom has *arrived* in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (His “first advent”). Advent is also a reminder that Jesus is coming again at the end of human history (His “second advent”). Advent concludes on Christmas Eve/Day. **The color(s) of this season can be purple, but is typically blue, symbolizing hope.**

Christmas

During the season of Christmas, we celebrate the wonder and mystery of the *incarnation*: God taking on human flesh. The Immortal became mortal; the Eternal has entered time! Beginning on Christmas Day, there are twelve days of Christmas (typically 2 or 3 Sundays), concluding on the Day of Epiphany (January 6th). The

¹ Arthur Just. *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008).

² Ibid.

³ William Cwirla. “The Church Year.” www.lcms.org.

color of this season is white, symbolizing Jesus' divinity, purity, hope, and joy.



Epiphany

The word, “Epiphany,” derives from the Greek word *ἐπιφάνεια* (*epiphaneia*), meaning “Manifestation.” During the season of Epiphany, the focus is on the *manifestation* that Jesus is the Messiah, Lord, and King—for all people! Epiphany “completes the twelve days of Christmas; more important, this is a festival of the manifestation of God’s Word made flesh...”⁴ Beginning on the “Day of the Epiphany,” January 6th, the Epiphany season is typically six weeks, concluding on the “Sunday of the Transfiguration.” The color of this season is white, symbolizing Jesus’ purity, joy, and hope. (Some churches and denominations utilize other, bright colors to symbolize the “light” and “joy” that Jesus brings into the world).

Lent

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a forty-day season (not counting Sundays) focusing on the passion and ultimate atoning death of Jesus, and our repentance and renewal in light of Jesus’ passion and death for us. “Lent is a time to intentionally confront all the ways the first Adam continues to control our lives, to carry these to the cross... Through this journey we enter into his death and become new creatures in the resurrection.”⁵ Lent ends during Holy Week. The color of Lent is purple, symbolizing Jesus’ royalty and our penitence.

Holy Week

Palm Sunday, also referred to as “The Sunday of the Passion,” begins the solemn week that focuses on Jesus’ passion and ultimate death on the cross. The excitement, joy, and anticipation of Palm Sunday turns

⁴ Hickman, et.al, *The New Handbook of the Christian Year*, 89.

⁵ Robert Webber. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 107.

to fear and abandonment on *Maundy Thursday*. *Maundy Thursday* begins the great “Three Days” or “Triduum.” (*Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter*). The word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word, *mandatum*, meaning “Commandment,” reflecting Jesus’ command to love others as He loves us. On this night, Jesus instituted Holy Communion, is arrested and condemned. On Good Friday Jesus is crucified and buried. As the Sabbath approached, the women who remained, along with the Apostle John, leave the tomb, planning to return to anoint Jesus’ dead body one final time the following Sunday morning. As with Lent, the color of Holy Week is purple, symbolizing Jesus’ royalty and our penitence/sorrow.

Easter

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate with amazement and joy the resurrection of our Lord! Jesus has conquered sin, death, and powers of hell! In the early days of the church, Easter (really, the entirety of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection), was referred to as the “*Paschal Mystery*,” which reflects the church’s understanding that the death and resurrection of Christ is the church’s *Passover*, in Hebrew, *Pesah*. The Easter season continues for forty-nine days. On the fiftieth day, Pentecost, the church celebrates the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit that birthed the church. The color of the Easter season is white, symbolizing Jesus’ divinity, purity, hope, and joy.



Pentecost

Jesus promised that when He *ascended* back to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit. **The Ascension of Jesus** occurs forty days after Easter, ten days before Pentecost (always on a Thursday). The Sunday before Pentecost can be celebrated as *Ascension Sunday*. From Pentecost Sunday to the Sunday before Advent, “Christ the King Sunday,” the church now focuses on its mission of proclaiming the Gospel through Word and Sacrament.

The Pentecost season is also referred to as “Ordinary Time” or “Time after Pentecost.” Liturgical scholar Robert Webber explains that the use of the term *ordinary* “is used in our Christian-year vocabulary because it serves the special nature of extraordinary time (the specific historic, supernatural acts of God in history)...by way of contrast.”⁶ Ordinary time also reflects that each Sunday is “*ordinal*,” or numbered, and each Sunday is a non-festal time of year. The color associated with **Pentecost** is **red**, symbolizing the “**fire**” and “**judgment**” of the Holy Spirit. For the Time after Pentecost (Ordinary Time), **the color is green**, symbolizing the ongoing **growth** of the church, as well as the **disciple of Christ**.

Three special days/Sundays in Ordinary Time are: *Trinity Sunday* (the first Sunday after Pentecost), *All Saints Day* (November 1st and the following Sunday), and *Christ the King Sunday* (last Sunday of Pentecost, as well as the Church Year). These days within Ordinary Time, reminds the disciple of Christ that our God has revealed Himself as Trinity. The Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit has made possible new life, both personal and cosmic, that will last into eternity! In addition, while we live in the “already but not yet” time between the first and second coming of Jesus, we bow to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, worshiping and serving Him alone! In the words of Andrew McGowan, “The development of Christian time is an increasingly detailed affirmation of how the structure of history, and of the cosmos in and through which history flowed, reveals and serves God and calls humans to God’s service.”⁷ Again, Lutheran theological William Cwirla provides a helpful summary:

The church year is an annual pilgrimage, beginning with the anticipation of Christ’s

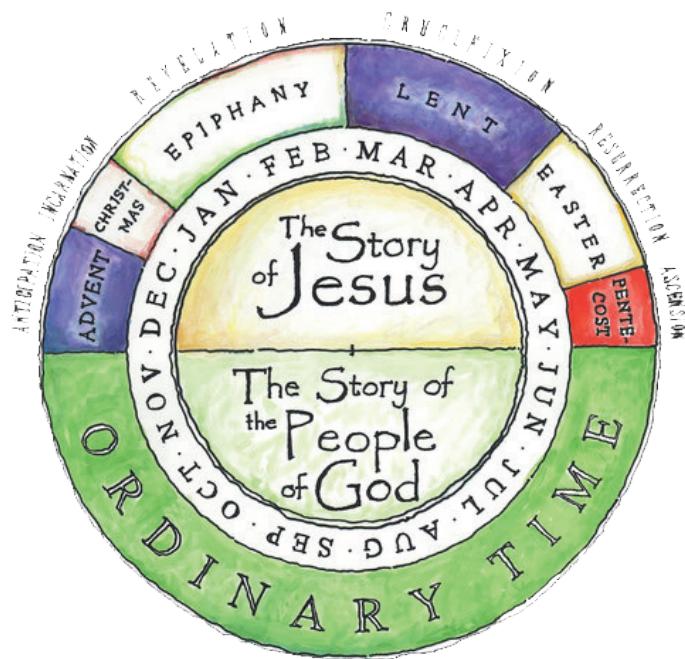
⁶ Webber. *Ancient-Future Time*, 167.

⁷ Andrew McGowan. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), 218.

coming in glory (Advent), going through His incarnation (Christmas) and manifestation (Epiphany), contemplating our sinfulness (Lent) in view of Christ’s sacrifice (Good Friday), His victory over death (Easter), His ascension to glory at the right hand of the Father by which our humanity is glorified in Him (Ascension), and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days (Pentecost) as we wind our way to the Last Day and the consummation of all things. In other words, the entire work of our justification and sanctification in Christ is rehearsed every year—from incarnation to glorification.⁸

Not only does each church season reflect the life and ministry of Jesus, it also calls the church, the disciples of Jesus, to remember our sacred task of following Jesus through the *seasons of our lives*; the ups and downs; the triumphs and the tragedies that accompany human life and relationships in this wonderful yet broken world. While the old saying, “Time heals all wounds” is often not true, Jesus’ promise to do so is!

Below is an illustration that describes the Biblical and theological “flow” of the Church Year...



Closely related to the Church Year is the *Lectionary*. The Lectionary is a collection of texts from Sacred Scripture that includes readings from the Psalms, Old Testament, and the New Testament Gospels and Epistles (letters). The readings are arranged according to the Church’s

⁸ Cwirla. “The Church Year.” www.lcms.org

calendar and are intended to be read in the corporate worship services, as well as daily readings for personal or corporate use. In the *Handbook of the Christian Year*, the authors describe the early history of the Lectionary:

Since ancient times, synagogues have had fixed scripture readings appointed for the Jewish feasts and readings for ordinary Sabbaths chosen on the principle of *lectio continua*—that is, continuous reading, through books of Scripture. Such a practice may have been in use when Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth “stood up to read the lesson and was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah” (Luke 4:16-17 NEB)⁹

As the early church continued to grow and expand throughout the empire, the communal reading of Scripture tended toward texts chosen according to occasion and opportunity. While the origins of the Christian use of lectionaries are not entirely clear, according to liturgical scholar Andrew McGowan, a “measure of fixity developed around Easter in particular, then for martyr’s feasts (where the acts of the saints were read). These are likely to have been third-century developments...”¹⁰ By the fourth-century, readings were gathered together to be read in Christian worship assemblies. “Initially, the readings were arranged in a continuous fashion, with each Sunday’s texts picking up where the reading had concluded the previous week. For the festival half of the church year (Advent through Pentecost), readings were eventually assigned that reflected the theme of the day.”¹¹

The most commonly used Lectionary is the Three-Year Series (A, B, C). Each year focuses on one of the synoptic Gospels, interspersed with texts from the Gospel of John, along with supporting texts from the Old Testament, Psalms, and New Testament Epistles. For example, **Year A** focuses on the Gospel of Matthew (With John), **Year B** focuses on the Gospel of Mark (With John), and **Year C** focuses on the Gospel of Luke (With John).

Our sermon series for the 2026 year will follow the lectionary cycle, **Year A**. Consequently, we will be explore the story of Jesus as told by the Gospel of Matthew. Entitled, “*Matthew’s Messiah*,” we will follow Matthew’s

⁹ Hoyt Hickman, Don Saliers, Laurence Stookey, and James White. *The Handbook of the Christian Year* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Andrew B. McGowan. *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014).

¹¹ www.lcms.org/worship/lectionary

account of the life and ministry of Jesus, as well as Matthew’s focus on Jesus as the promised Messiah. According to Biblical commentator, D.A. Carson...

Matthew’s depiction of Jesus focuses on his roles as Teacher...and Son of David (the Messianic king from David’s lineage who would rule Israel)....He is also the “Son of God,” a title that in Jewish circles could mean merely Messiah, but which, especially in Matthew, came more and more to have overtones of divinity...The most significant title for Jesus in Matthew is probably “Lord”—Jesus as both master and God...¹²

It is at the end of Matthew’s Gospel where we are told that Jesus gathered His disciples together to give them, and all Christians who follow, our “marching orders.” Jesus commanded and commissioned His church to teach, “All that I have commanded you.” The church’s job is to recount this history of God saving humanity as revealed through God’s Word. In this way, use of the lectionary offers a balanced telling of God’s salvific story, beginning with Israel and fulfilled through Jesus Christ and His church.

Additionally, use of the Lectionary, as well as the Church Year, is a witness to the continuity of the Old and New Testaments, as well as God’s covenantal faithfulness. From the early days of the church’s weekly Worship until the present moment:

...the church could have decided to try to unpack and elaborate this whole story during each and every time of worship. But that would make for some pretty long Divine Services! So instead, from the very earliest days of the church, Christians have lived by the rhythm of the liturgical year and its accompanying series of Scripture readings, which is called the lectionary. The Church Year and the lectionary give shape, form and order to the church’s telling of the story of Jesus.¹³

It is through the Church Year and Lectionary, we are able to walk with Jesus through His life, death and resurrection, being equipped to love and serve our Lord and our neighbors until that day when Jesus will come to ”judge the living and the dead.”

¹² *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*. D.A. Carson, Ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2018).

¹³ www.lcms.org/worship/lectionary

Epiphany—Jesus has Come for the all People!

By Rev. Dr. Seth Britton

Beginning on January 6th, after the Advent and Christmas seasons and festivities are complete, we enter into the season of *Epiphany*. The term “epiphany” comes from the Greek word ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphania*) which means “appearance” or “manifestation.”

In early church history, the feast of Epiphany originally celebrated the birth of Jesus. However, as the church established December 25th as the day to celebrate Jesus’ birth, Epiphany was associated with the *manifestation* of Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. In Eastern Christianity, Epiphany was appointed as the day to celebrate the baptism of Jesus. In the Western churches, Epiphany became the day to celebrate the manifestation of Jesus through three great, Biblical events: *The visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and the marriage feast in Cana*, where Jesus turned water into wine.

The day of Epiphany is always January

6th (For Lutherans, the Sunday following Epiphany is celebrated as the “Baptism of our Lord” and/or the “First Sunday after the Epiphany”). The season of Epiphany brings us to the end of the Advent and Christmas cycles in our Church Year, completing their rhythms of expectation and fulfillment. During Epiphany, our focus turns toward the *purpose* and *reason* for the birth of this child: He has come to be the Savior for *all people*! This central truth, that Jesus has been *manifested to all and for all people*, is the theme of Epiphany. It is during the Epiphany season that we are to:

...celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles—that is, to all nations. Some Christian traditions celebrate three great epiphanies on this day: the magi’s adoration of the Christ child, Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River, and his first miracle, in which he changes water into wine. The Word and Sacraments are for us

the great epiphany of God’s grace and mercy. We go forth to witness to the light that shines brightly in our midst.¹

In the history of the Western Church, the primary focus during the Epiphany season is on the story of the Magi and their visit to the Christ child. While most often, the story of the Magi is associated with the Christmas story, the coming of the Magi likely happened much later after Jesus’ birth. As scholar and Christian theologian Robert Webber notes:

In the Western church...the day of Epiphany... is always a celebration of the coming of the wise men who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus...Even as our Christmas spirituality was shaped by the dominant theme of the incarnation, so now our Epiphany spirituality will be shaped by the overriding theme of Christ’s manifestation as Savior of the world.²



The coming of the Magi to see the child Jesus is only mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel (*Matthew 2.1–12*). The word “Magi” comes from the Greek word “mágos” (it’s plural is “mágoi”) which is transliterated as “Magi” (“wise men”). From the definitions and the descriptions provided in Matthew’s Gospel, the Magi were probably Persian priest-astrologers who believed they could interpret the stars, particularly the significance of the star that proclaimed the birth of the Messiah.

One of Matthew’s purposes in composing his Gospel was to show how Jesus fulfilled all of the messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. It is in the very beginning of his Gospel where Matthew records that these Magi were guided by a star in the sky. Balaam prophesied about the coming Messiah marked by a star:

¹ *Sundays and Seasons*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2012.

² Robert E. Webber. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004).

“I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob and a staff shall rise from Israel...” (Numbers 24.17).

Of course, the Magi were not Jewish sages. As non-Jews they were *Gentiles*. Psalm 72 speaks of how the Gentiles will come to worship the Messiah:

“The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts, the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay Him homage; all nations shall serve Him” (Psalm 72.10-11).

Matthew recorded that the Magi brought three gifts: *gold, frankincense, and myrrh*. In Isaiah, we read about the gifts that would be brought to the Messiah:

“Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord” (Isaiah 60:6).

In addition to being prophetic fulfillments and very valuable, the gifts from the Magi were also prophetic in themselves. Biblical commentator M. Mills notes that:

The Old Testament frequently links gold to kings, so this gift recognized Jesus as a king, and indeed this is appropriate, for He is the King of kings!...Frankincense was used to compound the exclusive incense for the inner sanctum, the Most Holy place, God’s residence on earth (Exod. 30:34–38), and the Old Testament sees incense as God’s special prerogative (Exod. 30:37; Ezek 16:18)...Myrrh was one of the most valuable gum resins and, besides being used as a spice or medicine (this myrrh is not to be confused with Old Testament myrrh which is a different gum), was particularly used to embalm corpses (it was used in embalming Jesus (John 19:39–40). This gift thus recognized the significance of Jesus’ death, and as His office of Savior pivots on His sacrificial, atoning death, this gift interprets as recognizing Him as Savior, an insight the Magi could have gleaned from Isaiah 53.³

Finally, while the Gospel account does not give names to the Magi, tradition and history has identified the Magi as *Melchior, Caspar* (or *Gaspar*), and *Balthazar*.

Also, we are not told that there were only *three* Magi. This tradition likely came from the number of the gifts given to the holy family as recorded in Matthew.

Of course, it is safe to say that the reason the Magi were not named is because the story is not about them! The story is about God’s unfolding plan of redemption and reconciliation of the *entire world*. All of the people and places described in Matthew, even nature itself (the star), are used by God to *manifest* His Son to the world. And, the very gifts of the Magi themselves manifest the person, work, and power of this infant Savior!

What does the story of the Magi tell us? The Magi are living proof that God fulfills His promises and that Jesus has come for all people! The Magi are a sign of the Gentile nations’ inclusion in God’s salvific plan. The Epiphany season is that brief time in our Church Year where we are reminded that what the Magi discovered is what we have discovered as well; that in this child lay the “hopes and fears of all the years.” That in Jesus Christ we are given many gifts; the gifts of forgiveness, hope, and new life. Martin Luther, commenting on this story of the Magi, reminds us that...

The first thing we should learn from this story...is that the wise men went to search for Christ, the newborn king, they did not find him in Jerusalem. Indeed, if they were to find Him at all, they would need to listen to the Prophet Micah...Thereafter, when they had received the Word...they...took the road to Bethlehem...The second thing that we should learn from this story is how to bear ourselves aright towards our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, that we should cast aside all offence, and together with these wise men witness before the world to the Lord Christ, seek Him from the bottom of our hearts, and adore him as our Savior.⁴

It is significant that Luther begins with God’s Word and ends with our lived response to those words. Epiphany is that annual reminder that we are *disciples*—followers of Jesus on the “road” of our lives. As disciples, we must be constantly equipped by God’s Word and Sacraments so that we can follow faithfully and *manifest* the love of Jesus in and through our lives.

³ Mills, M. *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Dallas, Texas: 3E Ministries, 1999).

⁴ Martin Luther. *Day by Day We Magnify Thee*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

Operation Shoebox Was a Great Success!

By Bailey Darley, Philanthropy Coordinator

As we enter this season of gratitude, we want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to our incredible church and school family. Because of your generosity, compassion, and joyful teamwork, over 1,050 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes were donated by church and school families this year! Each one represents hope, love, and the message of Jesus shared with a child across the world. What a beautiful expression of thanksgiving in action.

Your willingness to give reminds us that grateful hearts naturally overflow into service. We are truly thankful for you and the way our RHL community continues to reflect Christ's love in meaningful and tangible ways.

As we turn our hearts toward the Christmas season, we invite you to partner with us in blessing foster families through Olive Crest. We will be collecting grocery and gas gift cards to support these families through the holidays.

If your family is looking for additional ways to serve this December, we also encourage you to explore opportunities at Orange County Rescue Mission, located just down the street from RHL.

Your generosity makes a difference. Your kindness reflects the heart of Christ. And your willingness to serve continues to bless our community and beyond.



Mom's Book Club: A Community of Encouragement and Connection

By Stephanie McArthur, Exec. Dir. of Ministries

This past Fall, our Mom's Book Club met on Friday mornings in the CLC, sharing coffee, treats, and meaningful conversation. This season, we explored Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World by Kristen Welch, a book that sparked honest and thoughtful discussion about parenting in today's fast-paced, demanding world.

Our gatherings were about more than the book. They were about connection, encouragement, and support. Moms of infants, toddlers, elementary-aged children, and middle schoolers came together to share their experiences, learn from one another, and offer encouragement. Each meeting reminded us that parenting, while one of life's greatest joys, can also be exhausting and challenging—and that walking alongside other moms makes the journey richer, lighter, and more joyful.

One of the most important things about our book club is that no one is required to read the book. Life as a mom is busy. Sometimes our days feel too full, and our to-do lists never end. The heart of our group is community: being together, listening, sharing, and encouraging each other through the ups and downs of motherhood.

We want to extend a warm invitation to all moms—new moms, experienced moms, moms with kids of all ages—to join us when we resume in January. Whether you want to glean wisdom from the discussion, share your own experiences, or simply enjoy connecting with other moms who understand the joys and challenges of raising children, there is a place for you in our group.

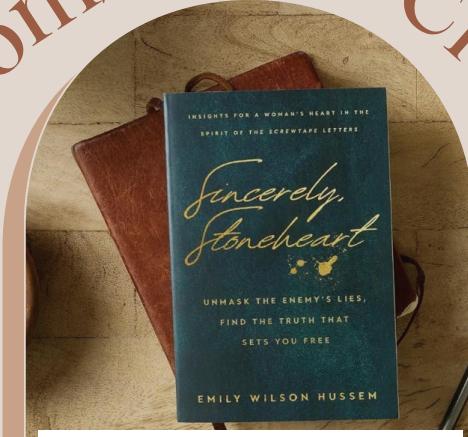
Our January book will be "Sincerely, Stoneheart" by Emily Wilson Hussem. Register today to find out more information.

Being a mom can feel isolating at times, but you don't have to do it alone. Our Mom's Book Club is a safe, welcoming space where you can be refreshed, encouraged, and reminded that we are all in this together. Come for the conversation, stay for the community, and leave knowing you are supported and celebrated as a mom.

We can't wait to see you in January! Scan the QR code or email Stephanie McArthur to sign up!

Red Hill Lutheran Church & School

Moms Book Club



RESUMING JANUARY 2026
CHILDCARE PROVIDED

Scan the QR Code to Register



The Quilting Team

By Patti Sullivan, Altar Guild Coordinator

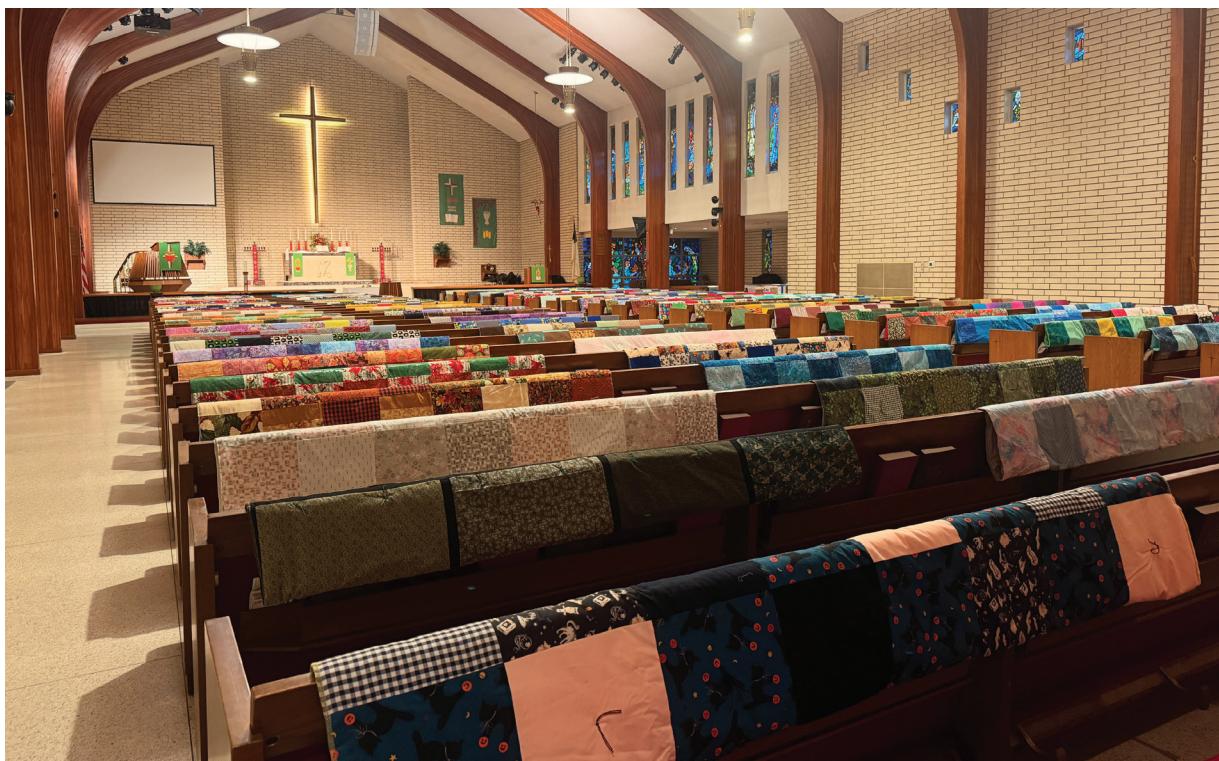
The Quilting Team has done an amazing job this year. Our Quilting Team of ladies has also grown this year with more ladies bringing their time and talent to this ministry. I believe this is why we were able to make more beautiful and colorful quilts this year. The Quilters only meet for a short time here on Mondays throughout the year. The total number of quilts created this year was 484. We sent 346 quilts to Lutheran World Relief in October 2025.

At the end of our time this year, we were pretty low on quilting fabric. Our supplier Robert Kaufman left California. They had moved their warehouse to Tennessee. The move could have left us scrambling, as we became low on fabric for next year. We put out the word in the bulletin and through prayer, that we were in need of fabric. I can tell you that the good Lord answered our prayers and worked a miracle for us. We now have our shed full of fabric and will be able to resume our sewing (homework) in 2026,

In between our Quilting Sundays, Nancy Pace, Sue Raybourn, Jill St. George and I came to Red Hill during Wednesday Chapel to offer quilts to school parents. We had successful sales on that morning as well.

I would like to share a story of our Quilting Sunday purchase. Carol Hill, our awesome and dedicated leader, had her eye on a quilt she had designed. She had the panel, designed it and put it together. She was hoping it would go to a girl in the church family and not have to send it overseas. Well, after the 10:15 service on the Quilting Sunday, a family came out of church with a little girl about eight years old. When she saw this quilt, she ran over to it and hugged it. When her parents saw how happy this quilt made her, well of course they bought it for her. Carol saw how happy it made her and Carol herself was smiling too! I, too, was watching and she hugged her quilt all the way to her car.

We are taking a break for the holidays so with rested bodies, hands and souls, we will get back to our sewing (homework) in January 2026, create new and beautiful quilts for the Lutheran World Relief Fund and Redhill Lutheran Church and School.



Following our Lord's Command to Disciple and Baptize

By Beth Stoffregen, Director of Youth and Family Ministry



On Sunday, November 2nd, we held a Baptism Class for anyone in our RHL church and school community interested in learning more about the Sacrament of Baptism or desiring to be baptized. The class was led by Pastor Seth, and whole families were invited to attend.

In preparation of this class, our Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) Team partnered with all of our school teachers and staff to share the invitation with every school family from preschool through 8th grade. Wanting to help families engage meaningfully, we provided baptism materials for both adults and children ahead of time. These age-appropriate resources allowed parents and children to explore the significance of Baptism together before attending the class.

We are thrilled to share that, as a result of these efforts, several individuals have expressed a desire to be baptized in the coming weeks and months.

We are reminded of the words of Martin Luther regarding baptism in Luther's Small Catechism, *"Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word."*

We also follow our Lord's command found in Matthew 28:19-20, *"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."*

We thank the Lord for the work He is doing in the hearts and minds of all our families and we pray for His continued faithfulness to Red Hill Lutheran Church and School as we strive to know Christ and make Him known to everyone, everywhere.

For anyone interested in knowing more about the Sacrament of Baptism, or desiring to be baptized, contact Pastor Seth Britton via email at sbritton@redhillchurch.org or Director of Youth and Family Ministry, Beth Stoffregen, via email at beths@redhillchurch.org.

“DiscipleU” Learning and Growing in God’s Word

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship (EHD) Course

Sundays, January 4th through February 8th

9:15 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. in the Christian Life Center (CLC)

At Red Hill, our mission is to make disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is first a *response*—a response to the call of God through the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus made following Him possible through His life, death, and resurrection. Second, discipleship is a life-long commitment to Jesus and His way of living. As such, discipleship encompasses our whole selves: body, mind, spirit, and soul.

Consequently, spiritual maturity, another way of describing growing as a disciple of Jesus, encompasses our thinking as well as our *emotions*. This is why one of our core values is to integrate emotional health with our discipleship. Emotional health and spiritual maturity are *inseparable*. At Red Hill, the process through which we learn about and equip emotionally healthy disciples of Jesus disciples is through the *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course*.

The *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Course* (EHD) explores the biblical foundations of who we are created to be as *image bearers of God*. EHD involves our relationships with God, self, and others, focusing on how our needs, vulnerabilities, patterns of communication, and ways of understanding our emotions influences those relationships. Emotional Health flows from our identity in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit transforming the deep places in the soul, where our true self, as created in the image of God, exists (*Matthew 5.21-48; Ephesians 2.11-22*). In this class, we will explore these biblical and theological concepts...

- The Problem of Emotionally *Unhealthy* Discipleship and Spirituality
- Know Yourself that You May Know God
- Go Back to Go Forward
- Journey through the Wall
- Enlarge Your Soul through Grief and Loss
- Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office
- Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult
- Go the Next Step to Develop a “Rule of Life”

Please join us as we explore the nature of emotional health as we strive to follow Jesus—all so that we may glorify Him through *our lives and relationships!*



Journeying to the Lord's Table

By Beth Stoffregen, Director of Youth and Family Ministry

Have you or your child asked the question, “*What is communion?*” or “*Why is communion important?*” Or, perhaps, “*I was recently baptized... now what?*”

In Luther’s Small Catechism, Martin Luther stated, “*The Sacrament of the Altar’ is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.*”

Scripture gives us this foundation in Luke 22:19-20, “*And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’*”

On Sunday, January 25, 2026, our Church will offer a First Communion Class for children in 2nd Grade and older who desire to learn more about the Sacrament of Holy Communion or for those who have been baptized and are expressing a desire to receive their First Communion. This class will be held at 11:30am in the Christian Life Center (CLC) and will be led by Pastor Seth. Families from both our congregation and our school are invited and encouraged to attend.

The Rite of First Communion is scheduled for Sunday, February 1st, during our 10:15am worship service.

Registration for the class will open in early January. To help prepare the hearts and minds of all participants, we will provide age-appropriate class materials for both adults and children once class registrations have been received.

If you are interested in attending or if you would like more information about this class, please contact Director of Youth and Family Ministry, Beth Stoffregen, via email at beths@redhillchurch.org.

First Communion Class

January 25th, 2026 at 11:30am in the CLC

The Journey of the Altar Guild Ministry

By Patti Sullivan, Altar Guild Coordinator

The journey for Altar Guild begins with a new church year in September at Red Hill and the new ministry year kick-off was celebrated with a Ministry Expo. The Altar Guild participated in the kick-off with a fall themed table in the CLC with information leaflets letting new and/or regular attending church members know how they can become part of our ministry. The Ministry Expo was a huge success. All of the ministries of Red Hill were represented at the Expo and, all attendees were able to learn about the various opportunities for ministry as well as enjoy lots of good food, beverages and desserts.

Our journey in Altar Guild continues through October but focuses on the end of October when Red Hill celebrates its annual Oktoberfest and Trunk or Treat. As head of the Altar Guild Ministry, I decorated my car for the Trunk or Treat. The theme of my Trunk or Treat was *Patti's Pumpkin Patch*. I also had a lot of Red Hill members join me on this very fun Sunday. My daughter, Stacey, who is also on staff here at Red Hill, also participated with her decorated car which was themed *Candy Lane*. I was glad to have Stacey share this fun event, too. It is a blessing and a privilege to be a part of Red Hill's ministry.

Our journey into November, as well as during the



remainder of the whole year, finds the sanctuary prepared for the weekly services of the 8:00 Traditional service and the 10:15 service Contemporary service which often may include a baptism. When the end of November comes upon us, the Altar Guild members will begin our busiest time of the year. The Altar Guild team will begin preparing the sanctuary. We begin by removing the altar flowers and placing the Cornucopia. It is used in place of the altar flowers for the Thanksgiving Eve service at 7:00pm. When we focus on the Cornucopia, it is a time-honored symbol of abundance, prosperity and gratitude for blessings. It symbolizes Thanksgiving Day representing the abundant harvest for which the Pilgrims were thankful. We are blessed to have this privilege of abundance and to be blessed to worship at Red Hill Lutheran Church and School.

Our journey continues in December, and after following our focus of abundance, the Altar Guild members and custodians go to work. We begin preparing the sanctuary early Saturday morning. Yes! The Saturday right *after* Thanksgiving and the days of eating and drinking with family and friends. Decorating the sanctuary for Christmas is always an "all hands-on deck" process. The Altar Guild members are very dedicated with helpful hands, decorative ideas and are faithful servants of Red Hill Lutheran Church and School.

The book of Matthew 25:21 states, "*His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*

Another verse in the bible says, Mark 10:45 – The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve.

In Deuteronomy 10:12 it says, "What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God to walk in all his ways to love him to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

And in Psalms 100:2 "*serve the Lord with gladness*".

Jesus was the example of a servant. So, we try to follow his lead by being faithful servants too.

Decorating the sanctuary for Christmas brings the members of the Altar Guild to a truly, fun time of gathering with each other. It is a special and busy time at Red Hill Lutheran Church and School. The red poinsettias are the focal point of the altar. It is to symbolize God's presence and his sacrifice for us. The poinsettias have Christian symbolism related to the life of Jesus.

The star-shaped arrangement of leaves is said to represent the "Star of Bethlehem. The red blooms symbolize the blood of Christ, and the white varieties represent his purity.

It is to the altar that we bring our gifts of love, service and devotion. The altar influences the Chancel area by making it as beautiful and as attractive as possible. The Advent wreath is also placed in the Chancel area. The concept of the Advent wreath originated among German Lutherans in the 16th century. However, it was not until three centuries later that the modern Advent wreath took shape by Joann Hinrich Wichern (1808-1881).

The four candles on Advent wreath symbolize the light of Christ entering the world. Each candle symbolizes hope, peace, joy and love. The Christmas wreaths that hang on the walls of the sanctuary were given a beautiful makeover and have added to the beauty of the sanctuary. The sanctuary also has beautifully decorated Christmas trees, one in the Chancel area and one in the Narthex. To complete the decor of the sanctuary, more poinsettias were placed around the pulpit, lectern and the aisles.

When all the decorating is done, our focus will be on the meaning of Christmas. The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the themes of hope, salvation and new beginnings. The celebration of God entering human history brings us a message of hope and peace to a struggling world and signifying the start of a life of love and redemption.

The Altar Guild will continue their journey looking forward to a bright New Year in 2026. And the Altar Guild members will be prepared and ready to take on the New Year. It is a blessing and a privilege to lead and organize these dedicated, faithful and creative members of the Altar Guild. They are a blessing to me as well as to Red Hill Lutheran Church and School.

Wishing you a blessed and Merry Christmas!

JOY TO THE WORLD!

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven and nature sing,

And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

ISAAC WATTS, 1674-1748

Rejoice in the Lord always;

And again I say, Rejoice.

Let your moderation be known unto all men.

The Lord is at hand.

Philippians 4:4-5

In the days of Isaac Watts, the author of this hymn, there was in England extreme prejudice against newly-composed hymns. Congregations were strictly devoted to singing the Psalms in worship. So Watts reworked certain Psalms in freer and more spontaneous versions. In 1719, he published *Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*, creating a new style of church music.

"Joy to the World" is based on Psalm 98, which tells of the Messiah's coming and kingdom. The reader may be able to see Watts's first stanza in Psalm 98:2-3 – and the arrival of a victorious King. The second stanza is drawn from verses 4-8 – through the praise of all creation. The fourth stanza is seen in verse 9 – God's righteous and loving reign.

Watts strayed a little from Psalm 98 when he wrote the third stanza to this hymn – "No more let sins and sorrows grow/Nor thorns infest the ground." This seems to be a direct command from the divine King Himself. Then Watts returns to the psalm, imitating the last sentence in verse 3 – "He comes to make His blessings flow/Far as the curse is found."

Set to a tune by the greatest of all English composers, George Friedrich Handel, "Joy to the World" can powerfully fill the heart with the joy of Christ's coming, especially when sung standing with a congregation on Christmas Eve!

“Wednesdays in the Word”

Wednesday Morning Bible Study

“Anchored: The Book of 1 Peter”

Teacher: Pastor Seth

Wednesdays 7:00am to 7:45am in the Sanctuary (In person, Livestreamed and Recorded).

You are welcome to join us on Wednesday mornings as we study the Bible verse-by-verse! Our current study is entitled “Anchored: The Book of 1 Peter.” In an ever-changing world, we need a hope and a promise that will never fail...an *anchor for our soul!* This is our relationship with Jesus Christ!

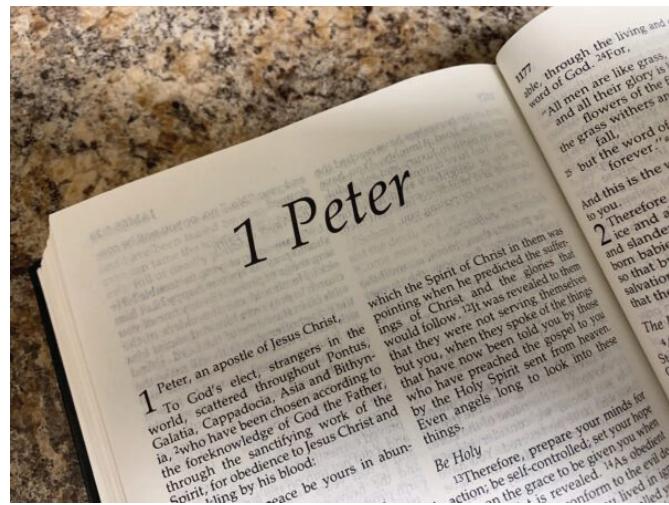
In the early decades of the First-Century, the Apostle Peter himself experienced the tensions, conflicts, sufferings, and persecutions Christians were facing *because* of their faith in Jesus Christ. While Peter’s initial audience were believers and churches in the provinces of Roman Asia Minor, Peter’s encouragements and commands are given to us as well and just as true today! As believers and follower of Jesus, we are to hold on and stand strong, *anchored* to Jesus Christ!

The readers of the Apostle Peter’s letter were confused and discouraged by the persecution they were encountering because of their

faith. Peter exhorted them to stand strong, repeatedly reminding them of Christ’s example, the riches of their inheritance in him, and the hope of his returning again to take them to heaven.¹

As we continue our study of 1 Peter, we are examining the history and circumstances of the early church and how God called His people then, and continues to call His people now, to be faithful and persevere through times of conflict, challenge, and even persecution. As Jesus’ disciples, we can live *hopefully* and *confidently* because we know Jesus is on the throne! As New Testament scholar, T.R. Schreiner writes:

¹ Introduction to 1 Peter, *Harper Collins Bible* (ESV Version, 2002).



When believers live in such a way, they indicate that they are placing their hope in God rather than in the joys and comforts of this world. Another way of describing 1 Peter is to say that those who hope and trust in God and in his future reward will have the strength to endure whatever comes their way in the present. When believers set their hope on the future, they reveal that their salvation comes from the cross of Christ, who bore their sins (2:24; 3:18)... Since the end is coming soon, believers should imitate Jesus Christ and follow his example of suffering, for all those who suffer will also experience a great reward.²

The goals of this study are to gain a deeper understanding of the context, content, and message of 1 Peter, as well as the challenges and threats the church faces in every age. Moreover, through this understanding, to encourage and equip disciples of Jesus today, to persevere through the changes and challenges of this world through living godly lives, being good citizens in the community, and being a faithful worker, spouse, and friend.

The overall purpose of all of our Bible studies is to gain *a deeper understanding* of Jesus so that we can be obedient to Him as His disciples in this world. We would love for you to join us in this task!

You are always welcome to join us at any point in our study of God’s Word!

² T.R. Schreiner. *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003).

Students Leading the Way: A Creative Journey Toward Accreditation

By Lisa Tarkoff, Assistant Principal

At our school, we believe students thrive when they are rooted in meaningful work that serves a larger purpose. This fall, our ASB students partnered with our Digital Storytelling class to create a project that not only showcased their creativity but also supported our entire faculty. Together, they produced a student-led video that highlighted the journey of our upcoming ACSI accreditation. Their work became a centerpiece of our Thanksgiving Professional Development and a reminder that God equips our students with gifts that bless our whole community.

This cross curricular project began with student brainstorming. ASB leaders and Digital Storytelling students met to map out the purpose of the video, brainstorm the storyline, and plan how best to encourage teachers as they prepare for the accreditation process. They structured the video around the Hero's Journey, a literary framework they had studied earlier this trimester in their Language Arts classes. By applying this familiar narrative arc, students were able to create a storyline that felt both engaging and inspiring. Their goal was to help teachers see themselves as the heroes of the accreditation journey, working together to strengthen our school.

Once the storyline was in place, students moved into script writing, drafting dialogue that would communicate the heart of the message. They selected characters and captured backgrounds around our campus that matched each stage of the Hero's Journey. Using Adobe Character Animator, the ASB and Digital Storytelling students brought those characters to life. They recorded voice overs, animated scenes, and collaborated closely as a team to refine the pacing and emotional impact of each moment. Every decision was made by the students, from character design to final edits, giving them full ownership of the creative process. Throughout the

project, students practiced key Habits of Mind that supported their collaboration.

They demonstrated Creating, Imagining, and Innovating as they crafted a unique vision for the video and experimented with digital tools to bring it to completion. They Listened with Understanding and Empathy as they incorporated feedback from peers and teachers. They Persisted through technical challenges, learned to Think Flexibly during the editing process, and Communicated with Clarity and Precision as they coordinated responsibilities across classes. Their work reflected a high level of care and creativity, and their final product showed what students can achieve when they are empowered to lead.

When the video premiered at our Thanksgiving Professional Development, it served its intended purpose. Teachers laughed, reflected, and felt encouraged for the journey ahead. The video provided a fresh reminder that accreditation is not simply a requirement to fulfill but a shared mission rooted in growth, excellence, and unity.



Caring for One Another: How Our Deacon Team Serves You

At Red Hill, we believe that caring for one another is one of the clearest expressions of Christ's love. Scripture reminds us that the Church is called to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), to pray for the sick (James 5:14), and to serve with compassion just as Jesus did (Matthew 25:35–36). Our Deacon Team exists to live out this calling by providing practical, prayerful, and compassionate care to those in our congregation and community.

If you or someone you love is walking through a season of illness, loneliness, transition, or simply needs encouragement, our Deacon Team is here for you. Whether the need is short-term or ongoing, we offer several ways to come alongside you and the ones you love:

- Hospital and Home Visits

Our trained deacons are available to visit those who are hospitalized, recovering at home, or unable to attend worship. These visits may include Scripture reading, conversation, prayer, and presence—simple acts of care that remind you that you are not alone.

- Communion

For those who cannot attend worship in person, our deacons are happy to bring Communion to your home or care facility, following the church's guidelines for reverent and meaningful administration of the sacrament, and delivering Christ's promise to you.

- Prayer Support

If you would like someone to pray with you or for you—on Sundays or during the week—our prayer team is available and confidential. You are welcome to share specific requests or simply ask for prayer as needed.

- Personal Check-Ins & Ongoing Care

Sometimes what we need most is a listening ear. Our deacons are prepared for compassionate, confidential conversations and can also help connect you with trusted community resources when additional support is needed.

To request care, simply contact the church office, speak with Pastor Seth, or connect with any member of our Deacon Team. We are honored to care for you.

A Place for You: Join the Work of Care

In addition to direct visits and prayer ministry, we have several other meaningful ways you can serve within our Congregational Care ministry. Some roles are ongoing, while others are occasional—but each one blesses our church family in powerful ways.

Consider joining us in one of these ministries:

- Deacon Team – Provide prayer, visits, compassion, and direct care to those in need. (Training is provided.)
- Birthday Card Ministry – Send handwritten cards that remind people they are remembered and loved.
- Funeral & Memorial Support – Assist with receptions, hospitality, and care for grieving families.
- Meal Ministry – Prepare or deliver meals for individuals or families experiencing illness, surgery, or crisis.
- Sunday Prayer Team – Offer prayer after worship services for anyone seeking the Lord's comfort or guidance.

If God has gifted you with compassion, a listening heart, or simply a willingness to serve, we would love to help you discern where you might fit. No experience is required—only a desire to share the love and mercy of Jesus.

We Are Here for You—And There Is a Place for You to Serve

Our Deacon Team strives to reflect the heart of Christ by practicing mercy, encouraging community, and caring for those in need. Whether you find yourself needing support or you feel called to offer it, we pray you will reach out.

To learn more or to get connected, contact Stephanie McArthur or speak with Pastor Seth.

Together, as we serve and care for one another, we become a living witness of the love, compassion, and hope of Jesus Christ.

Exciting Updates to Our Patio & Hospitality Ministry

By Stephanie McArthur, Exec. Dir. of Ministries

Over the past few months, our patio has been undergoing some wonderful improvements—simple changes that make a big difference in how we connect with one another each Sunday. As a congregation committed to being a warm and welcoming church family, we want every person who steps onto our campus to feel seen, valued, and invited into our community.

You may have noticed a few of the newest additions. Our fresh donut displays are already bringing smiles to both kids and adults, creating a cheerful gathering point after worship. We've also added new informational flyers highlighting various ministries—small groups, service opportunities, care ministries, Bible studies, and more—so that everyone has easy access to connection points that help them grow in community together. And with the new directional signage around the patio, it's now even easier for guests and longtime members alike to navigate our campus with confidence.

These updates are just one part of the story. Our heart for hospitality is lived out through people—through the warm smiles, conversations, and personal touches that transform a simple Sunday morning into a meaningful experience.

And that's where we still need your help.

We are actively seeking new Hospitality Hosts to join our team. If you're friendly, approachable, and enjoy helping others feel at home, this is a beautiful way to serve. Hospitality Hosts assist with serving donuts after each of our services, greet visitors, answer questions, and invite people into the life of our church family. Even serving once a month makes a tremendous impact.

If God has gifted you with a welcoming spirit—or if you simply want to take a next step in connecting with others—we would love for you to prayerfully consider joining the hospitality team. For more information, or to sign up to serve, please contact Stephanie McArthur or Shannon McNeil.

Together, let's continue creating a patio space where community flourishes and everyone who arrives knows they belong.



Honoring Our First Responders: A Community Luncheon

By Stephanie McArthur, Exec. Dir. of Ministries

In November we had the joy of hosting a special luncheon to honor the incredible men and women who serve our community as First Responders. From the Orange County Fire Authority, Orange County Sheriff, Falck Ambulance, California Highway Patrol, and Tustin Police Department, sixty First Responders joined us for a time of appreciation, fellowship, and good food.

Our event was made possible by an amazing team of volunteers, from preschoolers and middle school students to congregants who came alongside to serve. Early in the morning, our middle school students filled goodie bags with snacks and thank-you cards, while preschoolers added a cheerful touch with a heartfelt “thank you” sign. Volunteers decorated the patio with red, white, and blue balloons, prepared tables, and set up drinks and delicious Mexican fare to welcome our guests.

As First Responders arrived, volunteers greeted them with smiles, offered refreshments, and helped them find their seats. Each guest was thanked personally for their tireless work in keeping our community safe. Prayer cards were made available, and many shared ways we can support them through prayer in the coming months.

The luncheon was more than a meal—it was an opportunity to build connections across our church and school community, as students and volunteers served side by side, learning what it means to honor and encourage those who protect and serve. Together, we celebrated their dedication and reminded them that they are seen, valued, and appreciated.

This luncheon is part of our ongoing Community Mission and Outreach initiatives, reflecting our commitment to walk alongside our community in meaningful ways. We invite you to continue lifting up these First Responders in prayer and mark your calendars for our next luncheon in March.

Thank you to everyone who served, prayed, and participated in making this event a heartfelt expression of gratitude.

Your time and love truly made a difference.





Get Connected in 2026: Join a Small Group at Red Hill!

At Red Hill, we believe life is meant to be lived in community. That's why in 2026, we are inviting everyone—school families, teachers, and congregants—to be part of a Small Group. Small Groups are more than just gatherings; they are places where faith is strengthened, friendships are formed, and God's love is shared in practical, meaningful ways.

Why Small Groups Matter

We were not meant to walk through life alone. Small Groups provide a space to grow in understanding, care for one another, and experience the joy of belonging. They are a safe place to ask questions, share struggles, celebrate victories, and learn how God's Word applies to everyday life. Being part of a Small Group allows you to experience faith in action—not just on Sunday mornings, but every day through meaningful relationships and shared experiences.

A Place for Everyone

Small Groups come in many shapes and sizes, so there's a place for everyone. You might faithfully attend DiscipleU Sunday morning and continue the discussion with a small group, sing in a choir that becomes your community, or meet in a home-based Bible study. There are groups for men, women, couples, families, mixed ages—anyone who wants to connect, grow, and serve together.

Benefits of Being in a Small Group

- **Grow in Understanding:** Explore God's Word in a supportive environment where questions are welcome.
- **Build Meaningful Relationships:** Find encouragement, accountability, and friendship with people who genuinely care.
- **Serve Others Together:** Small groups are a place to live out what it means to serve your neighbor by helping others and making a difference in our community.
- **Invitational:** Share the life-changing message of Christ's work with friends, neighbors, and family by simply inviting them into your group.

Living Life Together

At Red Hill, Small Groups aren't just about meeting—they're about living life together. Whether your group studies, serves, or simply enjoys fellowship, the goal is the same: to walk alongside one another in faith and love. When we connect in Small Groups, we grow stronger as individuals and as a church family.

Your Invitation

No matter your age, stage of life, or experience, there's a Small Group for you. If you've ever wanted a deeper connection to your church family, a safe place to ask questions, or simply a group of people who will pray for you, 2026 is the perfect year to join a Small Group. Imagine the impact when everyone at Red Hill is connected. Imagine the encouragement, growth, and friendships that will flourish. This is your opportunity to be part of something bigger, experience community, and grow together in our walk with Christ.

Scan the QR Code or Email Stephanie McArthur at smcarthur@redhillchurch.org to get connected. Our goal is to have 100% of the people that call Red Hill their home to be connected in a Small Group!



SMALL GROUPS
Living Life Together
Beginning January 2026
Scan the QR Code for more information.

Women's Retreat

By Stephanie McArthur, Exec. Dir. Of Ministries

In the month of November, women from all different walks of life gathered together for our Women's Retreat. It was a weekend filled with rest, laughter, worship, and the kind of connection that reminds us we truly aren't meant to walk through life alone.

From the moment we arrived at the Hyatt Mission Bay, it was clear God was already moving. Even when technology gave us a few unexpected challenges on Friday evening, He gently reminded us to trust His provision instead of our own preparations. By Saturday morning, everything was running smoothly again—and many of us found ourselves smiling at how faithfully God shows up even in the small things.



Throughout the weekend, we explored what it means that God remembers His people, and how we, in turn, remember His goodness in our own lives. Through messages, group conversations, and quiet moments of reflection, we shared stories of His faithfulness and the places we've seen Him carry us, redeem us, and gently lead us.

We also spent time rediscovering God's invitation to rest. In the middle of busy schedules, family needs, work demands, and the pressure to keep going, the retreat gave us space to slow down—really slow down—and breathe. Whether during worship, small groups, or time alone overlooking the bay, many women described the weekend as a much-needed pause that helped them reconnect with Jesus in a deeper way.

There was plenty of joy woven into our time together too—shared meals, late-night conversations, prayer with new friends, and moments of worship that lifted our hearts. One of the most beautiful parts of the retreat was seeing women of every age and season of life encouraging one another, praying for one another, and reminding each other of the hope we have in Christ.

If you weren't able to attend this year, we would love to invite you to join us next fall. Whether you come with a group of friends or on your own, you will be welcomed into a community of women who are learning, growing, and resting in God's peace, together. We hope you'll mark your calendar and plan to be part of this special weekend next year—you won't want to miss what God has in store.



the grapevine



Just as in years past, Oktoberfest and Trunk or Treat at Red Hill was a huge success! Red Hill members including kids, parents, friends as well as members of the surrounding community enjoyed the Oktoberfest-style food prepared by our dedicated grilling team,

followed by a Cake Walk, Trunk or Treating, a balloon artist, cotton candy and popcorn, and much, much more! Oktoberfest and Reformation Sunday Worship are always an annual highlight and day of celebration here at Red Hill,



Preschool Family Playdate

By Beth Stoffregen, Director of Youth and Family Ministry

On Saturday, September 27th, our RHL Nursery and Preschool T.O.T.S. Ministry Team hosted a Family Playground Playdate for our church and school families with babies and preschool-aged children. This time together proved to be a blessing to all who attended.

The event took place on the school playground right here on our RHL campus. Some preschoolers were thrilled for the chance to explore the “big kid” play structure. Others used the balls provided to spark spontaneous soccer and football games. Still more enjoyed lawn games and even created their own obstacle courses using hula hoops, platform walkers, and balance beams. A few even challenged their parents—and each other—to races around the track!

The smiles were everywhere. When asked about their favorite part of the morning, the answers varied depending on whom you asked.



Some of the comments from the children were: “*I get to play on the big kid playground!*” or “*Look at my Jesus crosses!*” and “*Let’s build an airport!*”

From the parents: “*Having the chance to talk with other adults, knowing my child is in a safe environment.*”

From our team: “*Seeing so many smiles on the faces of kids and parents, watching dads connect over a cup of coffee, and hearing moms laugh and share the latest achievements of their children.*”

Midway through the morning, we paused for a quick group photo before everyone eagerly returned to playing and connecting. One thing is certain: it was a joy-filled event for all.

Mark your calendars for our next Preschool Family Playdate on Saturday, January 24, 2026! We’ll be gathering once again on our campus playground, and we look forward to having you join us.



Rooted in Service: Growing a Community of Generous Hearts

By Bailey Darley, Philanthropy Coordinator

At the center of our mission is a desire to reach and serve our local community. When we extend compassion to others, we not only meet practical needs, we grow spiritually as a community.

Proverbs 11:25 reminds us, “*A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*” As we give, God works in us, shaping our faith and strengthening our trust in His provision. Every act of service becomes an opportunity to bless others while experiencing God’s goodness ourselves.



This year, we have already joined hands with several local and global partners to support their most urgent needs. In August, our school collected school supplies for La Semilla Learning Center, which serves 30 students in Santa Ana through daily after-school programs that help them learn, grow, and thrive.

In September, our Preschool–8th Grade students raised enough money to provide two new uniforms for every child in the program.

In October, we launched our annual Change for Change campaign, supporting World Vision’s clean water initiatives. Access to clean water transforms entire communities by strengthening health, expanding education opportunities, and improving local economies. Mrs. Wright’s 2nd grade class filled four jars of change, earning the joy (and bragging rights!) of dunking our Principal, Dr. Paul Marquardt, along with several brave staff members, under the splash tower.

November brought another opportunity to serve through Operation Christmas Child, a ministry of Samaritan’s Purse that brings the gospel to children worldwide through Christmas gift boxes.

Together, our church and school packed over 1,050 boxes, sending hope and joy across the globe.

As we approach Christmas, our community is collecting gift cards for Olive Crest, an organization dedicated to supporting children and families in crisis. Olive Crest works to keep children with their biological families whenever possible, while also caring for foster and adoptive families. Gift cards will help provide Christmas meals, essential items, and special holiday gifts. Suggested cards include: Gas cards, Target, Walmart, Albertsons, Grocery Outlet, Trader Joe’s, Smart & Final, Stater Bros, Visa gift cards, Starbucks, and local restaurants.

This Christmas season is a great time to support local communities, especially as so many have struggled with financial hardship this year. If you are looking to serve above and beyond, I highly recommend looking into Orange County Rescue Mission. Located less than 3 miles down Red Hill Ave., OCRM serves hundreds of unhoused neighbors in our community. There are opportunities to donate canned and packaged foods, volunteer for holiday events, and financially support the mission. Check out resuemission.org for more information.

Looking ahead to the New Year, we will begin raising funds for our annual meal packing event with Mission of Hope on January 29 & 30 — one of our most impactful service projects. Last year, our church and school raised \$20,500 to help combat global hunger, and we are praying boldly for an even greater impact this year. Throughout January, students and church members will launch creative fundraisers to help meet our goal. If you would like to join a meal packing team, please contact the church office for details.



ASB Wraps Up a Busy 1st Trimester!

Under the guidance of Ms. Deana Occhipinti, Red Hill's ASB kicked off the 2025 school year with a bang! In August, ASB welcomed new students and faculty with "Welcome" posters, bags, and cards, led student sessions at the inaugural NEST Day for new middle school students and families, and hosted a Middle School Social, "We Love NYC!" — complete with themed snacks, games, dancing, and fun. ASB donated over \$200 from raffle ticket sales to La Semilla and turned leftover snacks into a "Twisted Thursday" fundraiser to support Faith Families, Pep Rallies, and other student events. ASB also celebrated faculty and staff by delivering monthly birthday cards to share appreciation and encouragement.

In October, ASB met with the RHLS school board to share their plans and hosted Red Ribbon Week, featuring a pep rally and dress-up days promoting school spirit and a drug-free community. They continued their study of Habitudes by Tim Elmore, created Faith Families lessons for the K-8 community rooted in biblical leadership and participated in a special SEL session with Mrs. Elizabeth Crow on Nehemiah.

November brought the kickoff of their Kindness Campaign, "RHLS is Clipped Together by Kindness." ASB made kindness- and Bible-themed clothespins and distributed them to students, encouraging a culture of kindness and service throughout the school. Meanwhile, the ASB tech team livestreamed chapels, produced monthly CCQ and promo videos, and helped educate and inspire students.

The trimester ended strong with over 20 lbs of change donated to World Vision's "Change for Change" fundraiser and participation in the annual Operation Christmas Child shoebox drive.

ASB looks forward to putting more biblical lessons into action, spreading kindness, and serving RHLS in Trimester 2!





Red Hill Lutheran Church & School Hosts Transformative Three-Day Professional Development Experience

By Lisa Tarkoff, Assistant Principal

As part of Red Hill Lutheran Church & School's ongoing commitment to academic excellence, spiritual formation, and continual growth as a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School, faculty and staff gathered November 24–26, 2025, for a rich and energizing three-day professional development event. The week reflected the heart of RHLS—deep learning, joyful community, and a shared mission to cultivate students who grow in wisdom, character, and faith.

Day 1: Preparing Our Classrooms, Craft, and Hearts

The week began Monday with targeted, grade-level professional learning designed to strengthen both instruction and environment.

- **Preschool** teachers conducted classroom development assessments, refining spaces with the intentionality that defines RHLS early childhood education—places where curiosity, wonder, and the love of Jesus flourish side by side.
- **K–5 teachers** participated in Renaissance Learning trainings, exploring Lalilo, Freckle, and STAR through the lens of data-informed instruction and differentiated support.
- **Middle School and Specialty teachers** advanced curriculum development in ATLAS, aligning units with schoolwide learning outcomes, the Habits of Mind, and the mission of forming disciples who think critically and compassionately.

Later that day, the entire faculty gathered in the CLC for an introduction to the ACSI Accreditation Process—our cycle of continuous improvement and spiritual formation. Teachers then received guidance for completing the ACSI Christian Philosophy of Education Course and began collaborating on Modules 1 and 2. These shared discussions helped anchor our practice not only in pedagogy, but in biblical worldview, calling, and purpose.

The day ended in true Red Hill fashion—with joy, fellowship, and community-building at Villa Haven Restaurant. Staff enjoyed lunch together and a lively BreakoutIQ trivia competition, complete with Tri-1 Habit of Mind raffle prizes celebrating teachers who embody the RHLS culture of growth, persistence, and joy in learning.

Day 2: “Teach Like a PIRATE” with Dave Burgess—Igniting Passion, Creativity, and Inclusive Learning

Tuesday delivered the high-energy highlight of the week: a full-day workshop with nationally acclaimed educator and author **Dave Burgess**. Known for his dynamic presence, innovative ideas, and love for empowering teachers, Burgess brought an unforgettable mix of inspiration, humor, and showmanship to RHLS.

In his keynote, **Teach Like a PIRATE**, Burgess challenged teachers to craft classrooms so engaging that students, metaphorically, “knock down the walls to get in.” His message resonated deeply with RHLS educators who already lead with passion, creativity, and a heart for ministry. Importantly, Burgess’s strategies reinforced and enhanced our Universal Design for Learning (UDL) efforts, helping teachers design lessons that meet the diverse needs of all learners, engage multiple modalities, and provide choice and flexibility in learning pathways.

Teachers then joined his fast-paced breakout session, **Teaching Outside the Box: A Crash Course in Creative Brainstorming**, equipping them with tools to think divergently, remove self-imposed limits, and breathe new life into lesson design. The synergy between Burgess’s message, RHLS’s commitment to the Habits of Mind—especially *Creativity, Risk-Taking, and Thinking Flexibly*—and our schoolwide UDL framework made the day both empowering and deeply aligned with our mission to ensure every student can succeed.

Educators left renewed, affirmed, and excited to bring more wonder, purpose, and Christ-centered creativity to their classrooms, while thoughtfully designing learning experiences that honor the strengths and needs of every child.

Day 3: Finishing Strong and Preparing for the Season of Hope

Wednesday offered teachers dedicated time to reflect, complete Trimester 1 report cards, and finalize Modules 1 and 2 of the ACSI Christian Philosophy of Education course.

Preschool teachers added an extra touch of Christmas joy by decorating their classrooms and updating student portfolios—a hallmark of RHL's warm, community-centered approach to early education.

The quieter pace of the day allowed the faculty to breathe, prepare, and prayerfully transition into the Thanksgiving and Advent seasons—times of gratitude, anticipation, and reflection on God's faithfulness.

A Week that Strengthened Excellence and Community

We are profoundly grateful for the passion, professionalism, and Christ-centered hearts of our Red Hill Lutheran educators. This three-day professional development experience deepened instructional excellence, enriched our spiritual foundation, strengthened community, and reinforced our commitment to inclusive teaching practices through UDL.

Together, we continue the sacred work of shaping young minds and hearts for Christ, guided by purpose, inspired by creativity, and united in mission.



Middle School Bible Highlights: Building Faith with Purpose

By Bailey Darley, Philanthropy Coordinator

This trimester, Bible students across all middle school grades have been growing not only in their knowledge of Scripture but also in their ability to think and communicate with clarity, precision, and purpose as we aim toward developing a Christian Worldview

6th Grade began the year studying Lutheran Core Doctrine, exploring foundational beliefs such as The Gospel of Salvation, The Trine God, and The Priesthood of All Believers. Students demonstrated their understanding through creative video projects that clearly explained each doctrine in their own words.

Recently, 6th graders also focused on the Habit of Mind: Communicating with Clarity and Precision as they studied The Story of the Bible as the foundation of the Christian worldview. Students began by retelling weekend stories to practice communicating accurately, then reflected on why clarity is essential when expressing beliefs. Using “God’s Arrow” as a visual timeline, students mapped key events from Scripture while watching The Bible Project’s “The Story of the Bible” video. Finally, they began working in groups to act out different parts of the biblical story by carefully reading Scripture so they can communicate God’s story faithfully and precisely to others.

7th Grade launched the year with an in-depth study of The Canon of the Bible, exploring how and why certain books belong in Scripture. Through discussion and hands-on activities, students learned that the

Bible is trustworthy and divinely inspired, equipping them to communicate their faith with confidence and clarity.

8th Grade began their year with an understanding of Apologetics. In

our Theology unit, students are asking the big question: “Is it reasonable to believe in God?” 8th graders have been learning how to engage thoughtfully with theological ideas and different worldviews, developing the skills to reason, explain, and defend their faith with both intellect and compassion.

In addition to these classroom studies, each grade is preparing to lead a chapel service this trimester, using their learning to teach and inspire our school community through Scripture, skits, and creative storytelling.



Performing Arts at RHLS

The Christmas Season is always a special and magical time in the RHLS Performing Arts Department (PAD). Students and faculty get to hone new instrumental, choral, and acting skills and present them to audiences, while sharing the GOOD NEWS of Jesus's birth. PAD teachers delight in the journey of teaching RHLS students traditional Christmas music and preparing them for their first performances of the school year.

Actually, Christmas arrives at RHLS in early October! PAD teachers begin introducing music, materials and scripts to classes BEFORE Halloween. Students rehearse and practice in their weekly classes, and teachers begin the many processes of producing a show! Rehearsal schedules, musical arrangements, solo and spoken part assignments, choreography, costumes, props, sets, student line-ups etc. all fill the to-do lists of our hardworking team of PAD teachers. Students, *in grades Kindergarten-8*, learn to work together creating instrumental and choral music and dramatic offerings.

RHLS is excited to perform again for our friends and families and will share the JOY of Christ's birth in the following productions, under the direction of our talented and passionate PAD staff:

Mr. Ben Hunter (Instrumental Music)
Mr. Daniel Ujifusa (Choral Music/Classroom Music/ Handbells)
Ms. Deana Occhipinti (Theatre Arts/Drama/Spirit Squad)
Mr. Isaiah Coughran (Praise Band Director)
Mrs. Noah Rivera (Praise Band)
Mrs. Bailey Darley (Preschool Music)

Friday, December 19th - "Wow! A New Nativity"
(10:30 AM @ Sanctuary)
featuring RHLS Kinder-2nd graders

The performance and enrichment opportunities don't stop there! Our band and drumline students had the chance to play the National Anthem during Angels Band Night, as well as pep tunes at an actual high school football game!



The Spring will see our classes and ensembles going to festivals and invitational across Orange County. A few of the classes even auditioned for the opportunity to participate in workshops with the talent at Disneyland. We will update our community as we get more details. RHLS is proud to have its own student-led Praise Band. In addition to leading worship every Wednesday for Chapel, each morning, before the Praise Band ever strikes a chord or sings a note together, they pray and read scripture together. This is the rhythm of their time together. They spend time feeding our souls and shaping minds, so that they can give out – sing out! – the love of God which we see in Christ Jesus! That is especially the case as they enter into the "Christmas Season." As a Praise band, we want to celebrate and announce what an amazing and profound gift God has given us in Jesus becoming man and living with us! And as Jesus found it important to read the scriptures (Luke 24:32) and to share in them together, we as a Praise Band want to share them with you through song. We pray you have a joy-filled Christmas full of music and laughter.

It is such a blessing to be on this journey with our students! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from the RHLS Performing Arts Department!



Knowing Who He Is

Tim Rivera, Student Ministry Coordinator

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Philippians 3:12–16

Paul does a great job at describing what it feels like to walk the Christian life. This is the mindset we hope to instill in every high school and middle school student here at Red Hill Lutheran Church & School.

It's easy for students to think, "I've heard the stories; I know the characters; I know who Jesus is." But knowing *about* Jesus is not the same as truly *knowing* Him. The Greek word for this deeper kind of knowing is **ginosko**—to learn, come to know, perceive, or even feel. It's more than head knowledge; it's heart knowledge.

Like Paul, students face many challenges and need the hope of Jesus to guide and strengthen them. Our goal is to help each student pursue a real and personal relationship with Jesus so they can continue to grow in their faith in this thing we call life.

This fall, we focused heavily on building community—reminding students that they are loved, cared for, and truly seen by Jesus. *Pumpkin Palooza* was a blast,

with students consuming as much sugar as possible and painting pumpkins.



At *Friendsgiving*, we reflected on the joy Jesus brings and how we can seek Him for our joy so we can shine as lights to the world (Matthew 5:14–16). We enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving-style meal that everyone helped contribute to. Our *White Elephant Christmas Party* is right around the corner, and we couldn't be more excited! Students will exchange gifts, share laughter, and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas as we anticipate the arrival of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

As we head into winter, there are many exciting things happening in

student ministry. All high school and middle school students are encouraged to pick up an Advent calendar designed to help them embrace the way Jesus lived and encourage a hopeful waiting as we celebrate His birth.

Beginning in January, student ministry will move to shorter meeting hours. This change will allow us to be more intentional with our time—creating space for deeper conversations, stronger relationships, and a clearer focus on Jesus. We appreciate your flexibility as we continue shaping a ministry that best serves our students and helps them know Jesus more fully.

New Midweek Schedule (Starting January):

- High School Ministry — Tuesdays, 6:00–7:30pm
- Middle School Ministry — Wednesdays, 6:00–7:30pm

Aside from midweek meetings, we have several fun events planned to help students grow in their walk with the Lord and, as Paul says, “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” More details will come as each event approaches.



Upcoming Events:

- January 16–19: Student Ministry Winter Camp
- January 29: Student Ministry Meal Packing Event

We have so much to look forward to, and our prayer is that every student who enters this ministry will know how deeply Jesus loves them and understand that, because of Him, we have the greatest gift of all—salvation.

Red Hill Lutheran Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) is here for the whole family. Thank you, Red Hill Church and School families, for entrusting us with a part in the spiritual development of your youth. We know it's not always easy, but with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). We can hold fast to the truth that the Lord is at work in the hearts of our students and will raise them up in His perfect timing.

Parents, we love you; you're amazing. Students, we love you too!

God bless you, and have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Celebrating Connection at Our 2025 Ministry Expo

By Stephanie MacArthur, Executive Director of Church Ministries

This past September, we kicked off our ministry year with a wonderful celebration of community at our 2025 Ministry Expo! It was a joyful day filled with laughter, learning, and connection, as our church and school families came together to explore the many ways to get involved.

The event featured a variety of ministry tables, each offering a glimpse into the vibrant life of our church. From service opportunities to small groups, children's programs, and outreach efforts, there was something for everyone. Families, and individuals, enjoyed visiting tables, collecting information, and participating in our popular punch card activity—a fun way to encourage engagement and exploration.

We were thrilled to see our spaces come alive with colorful balloons, lively displays, and friendly volunteers ready to share their passion for ministry. Our raffle prizes were a hit, especially the kid-friendly craft basket, bringing smiles to young attendees.

Ministry leaders shared wonderful feedback about the enthusiasm of new people hungry for ways to get involved in their ministries. They also provided valuable insight on how our church and school can come alongside those who call Red Hill home, offering meaningful ways to connect, serve, and grow in community together.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all our ministry leaders, volunteers, and participants. Your enthusiasm and commitment are what make our church a place of connection, growth, and service. We look forward to another exciting year of ministry together!





The Season of Lent

By Rev. Dr. Seth Britton

On Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026, the holy and solemn season of Lent begins! The word *Lent* originally meant “spring” and is to be understood as a holy, “springtime of the soul,” reflecting on Baptism and its foundation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is a period of six weeks (or 40 days) preceding the annual observance of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Good Friday and Easter). Lent is also set apart as a special season of fasting, penitence, and prayer.

This Lenten focus on Baptism reflects the ancient church’s practice of a forty-day preparation for catechumens (literally, those under study), leading to their Baptism at the Easter Vigil (the Saturday evening before Easter). Additionally, the significance of the forty-day period of time echoed the forty days which Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness. In the early church (as well as today), Baptism was (and is) the Sacrament of joining one’s life to Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection from death. Consequently, the cross of Jesus becomes the revelatory symbol of the Christian’s new life as a disciple of Jesus. The cross reveals how far divine love will go to forgive human sin, and the cross reveals how life is to be lived under God’s control—a daily dying to self in order to live for Christ.

Again, Lent begins with the sacred day of Ash Wednesday. The name, Ash Wednesday, reflects the custom that prevailed in the early church of sprinkling ashes on the heads of penitents on the first day of Lent, as a public declaration of humiliation and sorrow for sin. In the early church, ashes were not offered to everyone but were only used to mark the forehead of worshippers who had made public confession of sin and sought to be restored to the fellowship of the community for the Easter celebration. However, over the years, others began to show their humility and identification with the penitents by asking that they, too, be marked as sinners. Ultimately, the imposition of ashes was extended to the whole congregation in services similar to those that we have today in many Christian churches on Ash Wednesday. Ashes became symbolic of that attitude of penitence reflected in the Lord’s Prayer: “...Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Luke 11:4).

Examples of this symbolic practice of using ashes in scripture would be the Prophet Daniel, King David, and the people of Nineveh, to which Jesus Himself refers to in Matthew 11:21.

You may notice that from Ash Wednesday to Easter there are actually forty-six days. How do we arrive at forty days? There are six Sundays in Lent, and as all Sundays are considered “feast days” in honor of the Resurrection, they are not counted in the forty-days. To make up for these Sundays, six days are added to the beginning of the season.

The liturgical color associated with the Lenten season is purple. The color symbolizes both the pain and suffering leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, as well as the suffering of humanity and the world under sin. At the same time, in antiquity, purple was also the color of royalty. Jesus Christ is our suffering King who dies for His people! Moreover, as will be celebrated on Easter Sunday, Jesus’ resurrection confirms Jesus’ lordship, and His defeat of the powers of death and hell!

In addition to the change in color that you will see in our sanctuary (from white/green for Epiphany) to purple during Lent, you will also see our “old rugged cross” in the chancel area. This cross is both a visible symbol of the beginning of Lent and a constant reminder of what Lent is all about. However, it will not be long until the cross is taken over by a flower-filled chancel that will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus! As you can see, even our sanctuary conveys the journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday!

Often, people ask, “Do Lutherans “give up” things for Lent? The answer is: Lutherans can if they choose to do so. The small sacrifices we make can help us to be mindful of the total sacrifice that Jesus made for us! Sometimes, rather than focusing on giving up things like chocolate or some favorite food, Lent can be a time of adding something to one’s spiritual journey; drawing near to God by extraordinary acts of penitence, charity, and spiritual devotion. During Lent, we are able to focus on deepening our discipleship, purifying

our heart from sin, and deepening our desire to follow Jesus more closely. Simply put, Lent provides the believer a time to spiritually assess one's heart and relationship with Jesus. As theologian and Pastor Alan Jones writes:

Lent is a time “for honesty, a realistic assessment of the human heart” (as the late Dean of Westminster Michael Mayne described it). We are invited to enter into the compelling story spelled out in these days, spelled out in a shared meal, and in God’s self-giving love which “contains and unites our lesser stories, and has the power to pull them together and make sense of them.”

Most importantly, as we journey through the Lenten season and participate in Lent’s call for a “realistic assessment of the human heart,” our understanding of the passion that led Jesus to the cross becomes more poignant and the joy of Easter more profound because of our Lenten pilgrimage.

Again, in the words of Alan Jones...

Lent gives us an opportunity to allow for a panic-free emptiness to grow within us. Prayer is learning to wait there in patience, to be still, to stop clutching at and fussing about life - perhaps to do a little less harm. Thomas Merton wrote, “If we attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressiveness, our own ego-centered ambitions...Lent is a time for us



to aim at a certain end - the love of God - and recover that space where there is no clutching and fussing but the grace on which the peace and felicity of the world is built...The scene is being changed. A good time.

Our hope and prayer for you is that during this Lenten season, you will “recover that space where there is no clutching and fussing but the grace of God...” Amen!

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Loved By God Ministries
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November 2025 Newsletter

Family Update



Happy Holiday season to you all! We hope that you are all having a wonderful time of thankfulness and family! As we head into Christmas this year, I try to often think of all that it meant for God to give us all His only Son. What an absolutely amazing undeserving gift that we get to have, if we accept it! This past month has gone by so fast, and we praise the Lord that things are going well. This past week we went to the village, where our school is, 3 different days to spend with family. The village was having a huge party, so all Barto's siblings were there. We had a really wonderful time together and we were able to visit with the elders and people in the village for a while. Since we moved away, we don't get to see them all very often, so it was a special time. The girls especially loved playing with their cousins and friends. Barto has a little over a month left with his online business class program he is taking; he has been learning a lot

and really enjoying it. We really believe this program is going to open doors to more conversations with people about Jesus. Thank you for everyone who has been praying for my back, I am having a lot more good days than bad! Which is a huge blessing. And thank you to those who reached out personally to encourage me, it means so much to receive emails and messages from you all.



“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:1-2

School/Gardening Projects Update

The school year is going well, the kids will soon be having their semester exams so we will be able to see their progress this year so far. Pray with us, for the Lord to always give us wisdom in how to help these kids grow in their education and to know Christ personally. The older grades just planted onion seeds to start their garden project this year. We still have some more things needing done with the pump and put up more fencing to have that project completely going, but it is exciting to see things coming together!



For all the other garden projects, all of them are growing their seedlings now and we are setting up fencing for them to be able to start, we are happy to have the opportunities in new places to do these projects and to grow in more relationships with people. Pray with us for the Lord to give us the right words and actions to show these people the love of Christ. May the seeds that are planted not just be vegetables but be seeds of the Word of God that can grow into the hearts of the people and for their families and communities to know Jesus for generations to come! Thank you, Jesus, because we believe and know You are always at work, will never fail us, and You love all these people

so much!

We are super blessed to share that the Lord has provided two new school sponsors this month! He also provided for a well to be drilled for a village in need! We still would like to raise \$1,000 more for the other half of different well for another village so we can drill soon. If you would like to be a part of that, let us know! It is truly amazing to watch the Lord provide and to be able to trust in Him completely for all He wants to do.

*“As for me, I will **ALWAYS** have hope; I will praise You more and more. My mouth will tell of Your righteous deeds, of Your saving acts all day long—though I know not how to relate them all. I will come and proclaim Your mighty acts, Sovereign **LORD**; I will proclaim Your righteous deeds, Yours alone. Since my youth, God, You have taught me, And to this day I declare Your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your mighty acts to all who are to come. Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things.*

Who is like you, God?” PSALM 71:14-19

Help us save a stamp and sign up for our E-newsletter!

IMPORTANT REMINDER AGAIN: Please make all donations out to Loved by God Ministries instead of Shepherds Way. We still have the same PO Box and PayPal. If you have any questions, please email us!

Other Ways to Help and Prayer Requests:

Ways to Help

- Classroom sponsorship-\$50 a month
- One New Well to Drill in another village-- \$1,000 (This is just for the drilling and pipes)

Prayer

- Our family to stay safe and healthy
- Finances to stay strong
- Garden projects in each village
- Construction projects

- Security issues and terrorism in Burkina; The political issues in Burkina/safety for new president and military
- For the safety of our teachers, students, their families, and the villages we serve in
- For our students' hearts and the people in the village to be open to the gospel; relationship building
- Starting a Middle/High School in the future
- God's wisdom for all that He wants us to do
- School year to be fruitful- and kids to stay healthy

Thank you all again for your amazing support, help, encouragement, and prayers. We are incredibly grateful for all of you. Lord, be with all of those who read this letter, for them to know You are an amazing Father who always provides, protects, and lavishes His love on His children. May You bless each of them greatly in Your mighty Name! Amen.

“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” -Mark 10:43-45



Keep the SON in your eyes,

The Yelkounis

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69001

Loved By God Ministries—PO Box 914—McCook, NE



The Hollands

MINISTRY UPDATE

Revival at Fall Retreat

Our biggest event of the fall is Fall Retreat! Around 100 students spent their weekend with us in the mountains! They got to spend time with the Lord, grow in their relationships with their peers, and have fun! Thank you for praying over it!

The biggest highlight for us was getting to see **three guys trust Christ at Fall Retreat!** Duncan, Beckett, and Rowan gave their life to the Lord! We would love to share how the Lord has had His hand in each of their lives, but we only have space for one story, so we will share about Rowan. Rowan is a freshman at MSU, and he grew up in a church that did not preach the gospel. Coming to college, he did not have a grasp on who Jesus is. I (Ryan) met with him before our Fall Retreat, but Rowan had other priorities in his life. Honestly, after our first meeting, I wasn't sure if I would ever see him again. But Rowan started coming to my bible study and then took the step to attend Fall Retreat. The first night at our retreat, our speaker talked about when he trusted Christ. He shared that anyone could make the choice to follow Jesus. Rowan asked me to disciple him that night. I was taken aback. From my previous interactions with him, he did not seem serious about his faith. He seemed like a guy who would come to Cru a couple of times but get into the party scene and move away from his faith. Sadly, this is the reality for many college students. But God did something in Rowan's life that first night at Fall Retreat. Rowan told me that moment was the first time he truly understood who Jesus was. **He said he had gone to church more times than he could count, but it was the first time it felt like he had a relationship with God.**

We have been meeting up regularly for the past month and I am shocked by his growth. The guy who showed up to that first meeting almost three months ago is not the guy I get to sit across from every Thursday afternoon. He is growing so much in his relationship with Christ and I am excited to see what God will do in and through his life. Praise God!



Fall Retreat 2025

Thank you for your faithful support and prayers!

In Him, *Ruth and Ryan Holland*

connect with us!

giving: give.cru.org/1113442

contact: ryan.holland@cru.org & 503-575-6068 // ruth.holland@cru.org & 714-733-3127

address: 311 Magdalene Way Unit B. Bozeman, MT 59718

OCT / NOV 2025

Montana State University



Prayer & Praise

Pray for Duncan, Beckett, and Rowan as they explore and grow in their new relationships with Christ.

Pray for safe travels and a fruitful time at home for the holidays for us and our students. We are traveling to Oregon for Thanksgiving and SoCal for Christmas!

Winter conference is coming up (Jan. 16th-19th). Pray for our students to take the step to go and for their financial support.

Praise:
New life in Christ! The deep desire our college students have to know the Lord better and share their faith.

Let us know how we can be praying for you this holiday season.

Love God, Love People- A Commitment to Philanthropies

By Bailey Darley, Philanthropy Coordinator

Jesus teaches us God's greatest command is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30) As we focus as a church and school this year on what it means to love God with our everything, this includes looking to Jesus' next instruction: "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:31) To love God with all we have is to love others well. This is our focus as we seek to support philanthropies year round.

This September, we are loving students in our community through La Semilla Learning Center in Santa Ana. La Semilla's mission is to create a faith-based environment which fosters academic growth and strengthens parents in their roles at home and in the community. La Semilla serves 30 students in Santa Ana with an after school program every day that helps them learn and grow. We are supporting La Semilla's students by collecting whiteboard markers, Sharpie markers, heavy-duty tape, staplers and staples, Clorox wipes, and tissues, which are La Semilla's most needed items. Students are also raising funds to purchase school uniforms for La Semilla students.



Looking forward, we will turn our attention to our global "neighbors" around the world. In October, we will support well building efforts through World Vision. Clean water is one of the world's most important resources and one communities cannot thrive without. RHL students will be competing in a "change for change" drive, collecting coins to support World Vision. In November, our church and school community will team up to pack Operation Christmas Child boxes. This is a favorite for many families as we send the love of Jesus to children around the world through Christmas gifts. Look for specific information coming about what to pack and boxes and when to bring them.



As we partner with these philanthropies in the months ahead, may we remember that every act of generosity, from donating supplies, giving financially, to lifting up these ministries in prayer, is an expression of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Together, as a church and school family, we have the opportunity to reflect Christ's love in both our local community and across the globe. Let us faithfully support these efforts, trusting that God will use our gifts and prayers to bring hope, joy, and the good news of Jesus to those who need it most.

In Memoriam

As the year 2025 comes to a close, we have said goodbye, but will forever lovingly remember, the following saints, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who went to be with Jesus this year.

Rosalind Black

Dorothene Moser

Rosedith Werley

Wally Blanchard

Poppy Blanchard

Mike Blanchard

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24



Dates to Remember

December 24th

Christmas Eve Worship with Live Nativity

3:00pm and 5:00pm

Candlelight Service with Strings and Carols

7:00pm

Christmas Day

10:00am with Holy Communion

January 1st, 2026, New Year's Day

Campus Closed

January 6th, 2026, Epiphany

January 19th, 2026, MLK JR. Day, Campus Closed

February 19th, 2026, Ash Wednesday Worship

12:00 and 7:00pm