



inTouch

Engaging and re-engaging members & friends of St. John's

Shining My Little Light

WRITTEN BY ROGER HELLMAN

In our last *inTouch* edition, we considered God's many blessings through youth ministries at St. John's in our first 150 years. Now, let's dream into our next 150 years!

Let's begin our dreaming process by recalling a simple little song that was learned by many of us at some point of our faith journey: *This Little Light of Mine*.

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

Let's recall Mother Teresa's concern for our world: "The problem with the world is that we draw the circle of our family too small." And let's remember the Baptismal promises we make to our children at this most critical step of their faith journey: to support and pray for each child of God placed in our presence.

Some of you shared your desires and dreams for Youth Ministries at St. John's. The important aspects of what we desire for our children are not so different than what we deem important for each member of our congregation:

- Go, embrace all in God's love.
- Proclaim Yeshua as your Lord and Savior.
- Trust God to lead our Youth Ministry as God's faithfulness is sure.
- Believe that we are created, designed and empowered to carry on God's will in our world.
- Tune into the larger church—together we can make a huge difference in our world.

- Remain in awe at God's majestic nature and, at the same time, understand that the Creator desires an intimate relationship with each child.
- Know that you are created in God's image and you are precious and loved just as you are.
- Understand that God's Word is intended for them, rely on it to guide you through today's world.

As we proceed through and prepare for the 22nd Century, let's consider how we can assure that our dreams become a reality.

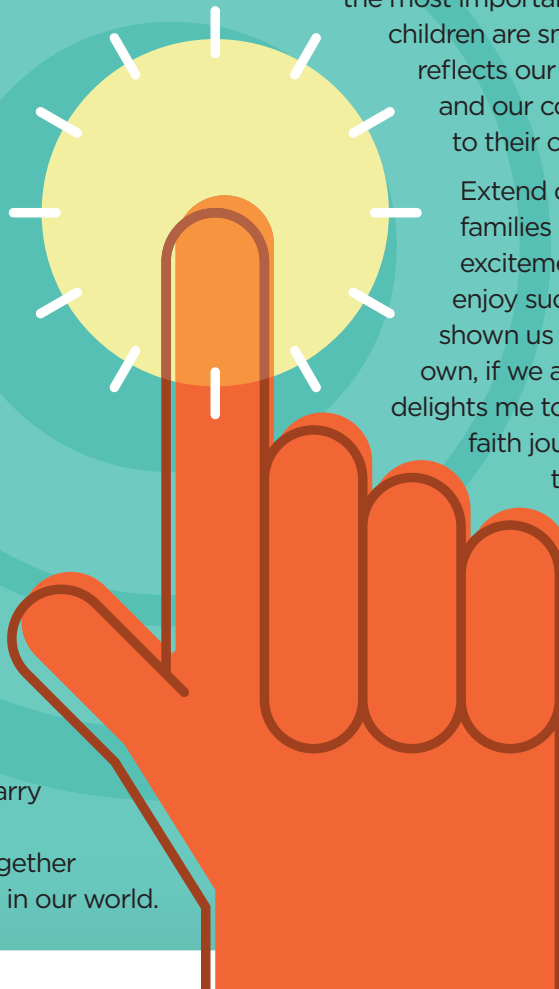
Shine your light. No matter where you are on your faith journey, shine your light so others will see. This is the most important aspect for our Youth Ministries. Our children are smart, they want action—action that reflects our true beliefs. It's a confusing world and our congregation should not add to their confusion.

Extend our family circles. Some of our families have wonderful bonds and excitement in their homes, some do not enjoy such happiness. The pandemic has shown us that while we can survive on our own, if we are to thrive, it will be together. It delights me to witness each step of our children's faith journey; from the joy of Baptism through graduation and beyond.

While I am glad to see 25 youth involved routinely in our Sunday School activities, I would rejoice to see more!

Embrace our larger church. The ELCA is wonderful! We are blessed with inspired leadership, and guidance is available. I admire the fact that this guidance comes with recommendations. The

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE





This is Christ's Church. There is a place for you here.

WRITTEN BY JULIE KNUTSON

We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace.
Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person—questions, complexities, and all.
Join us as we do God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world.

ELCA STATEMENT

St. John's is blessed to be part of this mission by the ELCA. We are informed, challenged, inspired, and moved to action. Bishop Elizabeth Eaton often sends messages to us about who is in need of prayers and how to better care for our neighbors. I am grateful to have the ELCA as support and leadership.

The ELCA asks us to study, learn, engage, and take actions of prayer. Searching <https://blogs.elca.org>, you will find many topics to help stretch your faith into the world around us. Some of the blog topics are: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Disability Ministries, World Hunger, Administration Matters, Congregational Vitality, Advocacy, Disaster Response, Peace Not Walls, Racial Justice, Young Adults, Worship, and For What Shall We Pray. It is a very easy blog to navigate and is updated weekly.

The information is fresh and is written by Lutherans sharing their experiences from congregations around the world.

The ELCA often pushes us to look outside of ourselves and congregation. The social statement: "Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action" helps us to see ways to include more people in a compassionate faith journey. It is sometimes uncomfortable but that often causes us to grow, become more diverse in our thinking, and learn about our neighbors. Without that push, we might not have accepted women or people who identify as LGBTQIA+ as clergy, blessed equality in marriage, learned of more inclusive language for God, become part of the larger church, or acted upon the statement at St. John's of "All Are Welcome."

There are many resources available to keep our congregation moving

forward in ministering to all people in this changing world. Many opportunities are waiting for us. Visit www.elca.org to find information about the Youth Gathering in New Orleans in 2024, the Civic Life and Faith study, the Congregations Lead Initiative of support for congregations and pastors in a changing world, and the link to *Living Lutheran* magazine, which is full of good messages of hope for our Lutheran church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America signage at St. John's tells our community of our commitment to embracing you as a whole person with dignity. Our actions carry out that mission with support from the ELCA. "God's Work. Our Hands," celebrates 10 years in September. God's work is alive at St. John's. It is good to be part of the ELCA.

Shining My Little Light

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

church understands each congregation and member has intellect. We need to stay in conversation.

Immerse yourself and our children in God's Word. Expect a smoother ride by trusting the guidance provided. If you are not in a small group Bible Study, now is the perfect time to seek one out.

Our children learn by our example. When we praise God, they praise God. When we study, they study. When we are thankful, they are thankful.

Most importantly, pray! Pray for our children every day. Ask God for courage, not only for the children, but also for you.

My Lord and Savior, there is nothing more dear to my heart than our children. Show me what I can do and how I can become involved in St. John's Youth Ministries. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, to your honor and glory. Amen

There are so many opportunities around us. Let's shine our lights for all to see!



MISSION IMPACT

WRITTEN BY DIANE HALLER

Red Cross Blood Drive

The Red Cross Blood Drive was held Saturday, May 20, with 49 units of blood collected. Since October of 1997, St. John's has hosted 62 Blood Drives, yielding 3,167 units of blood! We have grown from one to three blood drives per year. The essence of the Blood Drive remains the same: people helping people, fellowship, and the best "free" breakfast in town! Red Cross offers many essential services that meet the emergency needs of others.

Hopedale Growing Project

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of partnering with Hopedale Mennonite Church for the Hopedale Growing Project. This Spring, St. John's raised \$8,640 for land rental on which Hopedale Mennonite Church farmers planted a soybean crop. St. John's contribution and proceeds from the crop, less expenses, will go toward a project teaching sustainable farming techniques in Mwenezi, Zimbabwe. Proceeds will be distributed after the fall harvest, which celebrates the bounty of God's creation and the blessings of community.

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School was held June 12-15 for ages 5 through 5th grade. The theme this year was Spark Studios. A daily offering collected more than \$2,000 towards the Zambia Education Fund. Kids and adults alike had a memorable week bringing glory to God!

Zambia Education Fund

The Zambia Education Fund was created by the St. John's Mission Outreach Team in 2011 to help the pastors of a Lutheran synod in Zambia. These pastors serve poor congregations and have very small incomes. In June, members of St. John's donated \$12,000 to this fund. The money will be sent to Zambia through the Chicago office of the ELCA in time for the 2024 school year.



WRITTEN BY DAWN CONWAY

Mary: Recently the Central/Southern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) held its annual Assembly. This year elections for a new bishop were held due to Bishop Roth retiring after serving two consecutive six-year terms.

Martha: How does the election process work? Is it based on experience?

Mary: The Spirit works through the many pastors in the synod to nominate others who they believe could fill this leadership role. Then the potential candidates are notified and given time for discernment. The initial ballot at the Assembly contains the names of those who agreed to be considered.

Martha: Was St. John's represented at the Synod Assembly? If so, were they able to vote for the new bishop?

Mary: Yes, St. John's had the following voting representatives: Pastor David, Deacon Lyn, Cynthia Davis, Barb Haab, Jolie Hoffman, David Johnson, and Joel Murphy. After a series of ballots, the two nominees who received the most votes were presented in the fifth and final ballot. Pastor Greg Bushboom, Lead Pastor from St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Springfield, was elected.

Martha: How will this leadership transition impact St. John's here in Bloomington?

Mary: God has many future plans for our congregation and the others in this Synod. We must trust that God will provide guidance to the new bishop as he accepts this call to lead. If we listen and watch with open hearts, we, too, will understand what plans are for each of us individually and collectively as a congregation.



Scan the QR Code to read the article about the new Bishop.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT **Emily Lewis**

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH HAINES



I felt inspired after speaking with our newest staff member, Emily Lewis—Miss Emily is what the kids call her.

Emily has lived a life steeped in children and their needs. Her first job was caring for children at her Grandma's church; then in junior high as Friday morning nursery staff. She's worked at Rader Family Farms in the Corn Maze; she learned how to chop stray stalks of corn for the perfect maze. She even taught me a new term—Agri-tainment!

Emily attended Unit 5 schools and graduated from Normal West. She is now working on her Associates' degree from Heartland.

She's worked with non-profit Project Transformation Tennessee, working with churches suffering dwindling attendance. She's also served summer reading programs to help close the reading gap for children. During the pandemic, she coordinated virtual reading buddies. In 2021, she was a House Pastor to promote spiritual growth among the interns in Nashville. Quite the resumé!

Children seem to be the family business! Her mom is the director of Noah's Ark Preschool and Emily volunteered in the classrooms.

Her duties at St. John's are working on activities for Joy Zone. The model recently changed to free-floating stations, allowing kids to learn through art, building, cooking, or science. Junior and senior high youth often help, giving the children more "safe" people to talk to if they need somebody less intimidating than adult to talk to.

Miss Emily is involved in children's ministry planning, providing curriculum to Thrive guides, service nights, Thrive group learning events and Chaos.

Emily is hopeful for the future as that's what our children are—the future. While the pandemic stunted the groups, junior high youth are beginning to invite their friends to activities which should continue growth into high school. She's aware that priorities are changing and hopes parents will help their families recommit to children's spiritual lives.

Her Grandma inspired her faith through demonstrating Christian love. Emily learned how to recognize when a child needs a break and how they interact with one another. She enjoys the innocence of young children and marvels at their growth. Over the years, she's learned how to focus on the social and mental well-being of a child.

Emily's favorite vacation spot is Branson, Missouri, spending time with family and Silva, North Carolina, for the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. One of her favorite hobbies is watching sports, particularly anything University of Tennessee! She also loves horses, a good hammock, and music concerts.

Miss Emily, we're so happy you're here!

From Mourning to Joy

WRITTEN BY GUDRUN

The journey of life can often find us facing unexpected turns and unplanned sorrows. The death of a loved one or the end of a marriage can leave us emotionally and physically drained. Having a loving community of fellow believers walking with us in these moments can be an important step in the journey of healing.

GriefShare and Divorce Care are two resources providing a Christian/Biblical perspective to what participants are going through. Through video teaching and discussion, individuals can see how Jesus makes a difference in their experience.

St. John's member Jim Dumouchel shared the following about his experience as a GriefShare participant, "The one thing that all attendees shared is that we were on a grief journey. Some losses were recent and some were several years ago. We were all at a different place along

the path. As for me, I have been on the journey for three years. I had tried two individual counselors and a group session. All helped me move forward, but I still lacked something. GriefShare is scripture based and helped clarify several of my deepest feelings, so I could continue to move forward. I am not finished, but GriefShare gave me the tools I need."

Likewise those who participated in Divorce Care were in various stages of separation/divorce. Each person had the opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, and questions as they needed in a safe and caring shared community.

The words of Galatians 6:2 call us to bear one another's burdens. By walking alongside the broken hearted we are answering the call of Christ. GriefShare and Divorce Care have allowed us to do this in a way that honors the individual's unique experience and journey of healing.