
First St. John Journal

Volume 39, Issue 1

January, 2026

*Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for
sorrow. Jeremiah 31:13*

If you're looking for someone to be the life of your party, Jeremiah would be the last person you'd invite. He spoke harsh words of rebuke to the Jewish people when they failed to live up to God's expectations. But he also was the bearer of words of hope, reminding them that God had not abandoned them.

The Hebrew people had been in exile for decades. They had, no doubt, begun to think that God had forgotten them, that they would be strangers in a strange land forever, and their only songs would be laments. Jeremiah's words bear witness to three Babylonian military invasions in the years 597, 587 and 582 B.C. that resulted in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, the dissolution of the only remaining Israelite kingdom, Judah, and the exile of thousands. The other Israelite kingdom, Israel, had already been destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

But it turns out that God hadn't abandoned the people of Israel at all. Rather, Jeremiah tells them, freedom is coming soon. In the 30th chapter, Jeremiah writes this: "But as for you, have no fear, my servant Jacob, says the LORD, and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for I am going to save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and no one shall make him afraid." Though much of the rest of the book of Jeremiah contains bad news, chapters 30 and 31 together have become known as the "Book of Consolation."

So, as we think today about what we need to be delivered from, about whether God even knows or cares about the burdens we bear, Jeremiah's picture of a God who keeps promises and who cares about the downtrodden should give us hope. If God can rescue the Hebrew people from Egypt and then later from exile in Babylon, and if God can rescue Jesus from death, why should we doubt that God can rescue us, too?

As this new year begins, we, like the people to whom Jeremiah was writing, are looking for consolation, inspiration, and hope. We confess where we have fallen short of the standards God has set for us, and we look ahead with hope that we can better measure up to those divine expectations. We grieve for what has gone wrong and for our individual contributions to all of that. But we can commit ourselves anew to being the people—the Easter people—God has called us to be so we can add to the justice, mercy, compassion, and love that the people of this world so desperately need now.

This is not easy work, but it's what God expects of all of us. We can bring the good news of the gospel to a wounded world, proclaiming that Jesus rescues, redeems, gathers, repairs, replenishes, shepherds and delivers. This is the challenge we face as a faith community and as individuals. So, let's be about the task in a way that honors our rescuing God and brings joy throughout the land. — *Pastor Rayl*



FAMILY BLESSING SUNDAY

During worship on Sunday, January 18th you can come to the altar as a family (one person is a family in God's eyes) and receive a blessing. Come with different people in your family (you and your spouse, you and your extended family) or even those you consider as family. What a wonderful way to begin 2026!

INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

All newly elected and incumbent members of Church Council, Day School Board, WELCA, and Altar Guild should plan to attend church on Sunday, January 11th. Officers will be installed during both church services as they begin their 2026 duties.

BREAKFAST FELLOWSHIP

The next fellowship breakfast will be held **Saturday, January 10th** at 8:30 am at the American Table restaurant on the corner of Wheeling and Navarre. Hope to see you there! For more info call Bob Haar at 419-250-9409.



MEMBER UPDATES

Births

None

Baptisms

None

Marriages

None

Deaths

None

Transfers to / from First St. John

None

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING



Starting January 11th through February 8th we will participate in the nationwide Souper Bowl of Caring. We will collect money and canned goods to help the Lutheran Social Services (LSS) Food Pantry program. LSS provides food for over 15,000 people each year. Every dollar you donate will go directly to purchase food for the pantry.

A soup pot will be in the Narthex (lobby) to collect monetary donations (starting Sunday, January 11th)—pocket change, a dollar or two—anything to help keep this program going. Also, shopping carts will be in the Narthex and lounge to collect canned goods and other non-perishables. Whatever you can do to help support this important ministry is greatly appreciated.

HOMEBOUND COMMUNION

If you or a loved one would like a homebound communion visit, please call the church office at 419-691-7222. Bob Haar is communing the homebound upon request, and he will return your call to set up an appointment. Thanks.

2026 OFFERING ENVELOPES

The 2026 envelopes are ready for pick up in the lounge. Even if you contribute using Vanco, you will still get envelopes to be used for special services or other donations.

JANUARY CHURCH COUNCIL DINNER

Our upcoming Council/Dinner meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20th at 6:30 pm at Tony Packo's on Front Street. All new incoming members as well as outgoing members and their spouses or significant others are invited. The church will donate \$10 toward each person's meal. Please make sure to RSVP to Dave Wilbarger at email.dow@gmail.com or 419-205-7855 or to the church office at 419-691-7222. **Please RSVP by January 19th.**

ATTENTION 2025 and 2026 COUNCIL, DAY SCHOOL BOARD, WELCA, & ALTAR GUILD OFFICERS

If you've finished your term, please turn in your church keys and access cards to the church office. If you are new and need an access card and/or keys, see the secretary in the church office.

Note: Access cards cannot be handed to new officers because the numbers on the back are tied to a specific person in the computer. Thank you.

SPECIAL MUSIC FUND

A special music fund now exists specifically to support the talented musicians invited to play at our church. Money from this fund will be used at the discretion of Dr. Tony, our Church Musician, when securing guest musicians. To contribute, please donate cash or checks made out to First St John Lutheran Church and simply indicate on your envelope and/or check memo line that your contribution is to be directed to the Special Music Fund. Thank you!

ADDRESS CHANGES/CORRECTIONS

To keep information for office records current, please notify the office of any changes to your name, address, or phone: **Fax:** (419-691-7220) **Mail** this form to: 2471 Seaman St./ Toledo, OH 43605 or **Email:** office@firststjohn.com

Name _____

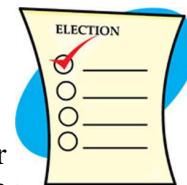
Address _____

City, State Zip _____ Phone _____

ELDERS FOR JANUARY

	<u>8:00 am</u>	<u>10:30 am</u>
4th	Ted Hagedorn Jeff Smith	Bob Haar Sherrie Haar
11th	Bob Haar Sherrie Haar	Kevin Ruedy Mike Winslow
18th	Bill Nelson Matt Miller	John Roth Bob Haar
25th	Ted Hagedorn Jeff Smith	Bob Haar Sherrie Haar

ELECTION RESULTS



Dear Congregational Members,

The church council appreciates your time in attending and voting at the congregational meeting in December. The outcome of the meeting gave approval for the budget, and all candidates were elected unanimously.

Thank you to everyone who ran for council. Please welcome our newly elected council members who will join our other current serving members:

Property Management: Terry Roberts*, Roger Church

Elders: Kevin Ruedy*

Finance Committee: Bob Kinsey, Bill Caldwell

Sunday School Board of Education: Courtney Miller

Day School Board of Education: Jennifer Hess, Kathy Church*

PORTALS OF PRAYER



The January–March Portals of Prayer can be found in the lounge, Chapel, Narthex, and the caddy by the door near the choir loft. This is a daily devotional book, free to anyone who would like one.

WINSLOW SCHOLARSHIP



This is for high school seniors who are members of First St. John and who will attend college for the 2026/2027 school year. Applications are in the church office. Please turn in your completed applications to the church office by March 30th to be considered. Money is supplied from proceeds of the Winslow Memorial golf outing held each summer, along with donations from church members.

KROGER COMMUNITY REWARD PROGRAM



Did you know you can support First St. John just by shopping at Kroger! This past quarter we earned \$65.70 in rewards donated to the church!

This program makes fundraising easy by donating to local organizations based on the shopping you do every day. Once you link your Kroger Card to an organization, all you have to do is shop at Kroger and swipe or enter your Shopper's Card. Here's how it works:

1. Create or sign into your online rewards account on Kroger.com
2. Make sure your Kroger Reward Card account is attached to your online account.
3. Under the Kroger Community Rewards Screen, search for First St. John Lutheran, or enter the NPO # WM368.
4. Select the organization and click 'Save'. You are all set! The selected organization will now show on the Kroger Community Reward Page!

WELCA NEWS

Happy New Year, everyone! Thanks to all who made or brought cookies for our cookie sale. A Christmas luncheon/meeting for board members only will be at Oregon Inn on Sunday, January 11th at 2:00 pm. We will be discussing events for the year.

Our first board meeting for all women will be on Monday, February 16th at 6:30 pm in the lounge. We meet the third Monday of each month, and everyone is welcome!

Have a healthy and happy new year!



NURSERY OPEN!

The church nursery is available during the 10:30 am service. The nursery is in the church basement in the kindergarten classroom and will be staffed with one to two volunteers each week. Parents/Guardians can fill out a quick release form for children ages five and under and then feel free to return to the church service.

We will use text messages to communicate with you if a need arises (please keep your phone on vibrate only so as not to disrupt the service). For more information or if you have any questions, please feel free to stop down during the second service, or reach out to Darlene Paul.

We are also still looking for a few more volunteers! Talk to Darlene or call the church office at 419-691-7222.

WEEKLY BULLETIN DEADLINE

News

As a reminder, please try to submit all weekly bulletin announcements no later than **Wednesday** each week for the upcoming Sunday. Thank you.

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER DEADLINE: January 19th

AFTERNOON CONCERT SERIES

Please join us on Tuesday, January 13th at 1:00 pm in the church for a wonderful music concert! Pianist Tumaini Sango, completing his master's degree from BGSU will present a diverse program of both classical music and jazz. See you there!

JANUARY DARTBALL

Dartball continues with games hosted in the gym. All games start at 7:30 pm. Upcoming dates for January are:

January 12th: 1st St. John #1 @ Trinity
1st St. John #2 @ Prince of Peace

January 26th: Messiah @ 1st St. John #1
St. Petri @ 1st St. John #2

Please mark your calendars. Questions? Call Bill Nelson 419-836-4165, or Bob Haar 419-250-9409.

MEMORIALS

PERSONAL NEEDS PANTRY

In memory of **Karen Kruse** by Terry & Jane Schuetz.

BELL CHOIR

In memory of **Barb Meyers** by Bob & Sherrie Haar.

CIRCLE INFORMATION



Ruth Circle: Tuesday, January 6th at 11:30 am at Ralphies.

Miriam Circle: Wednesday, January 7th at 9:30 am in the lounge

Rebecca Circle: Saturday, January 3rd at 11:30 am in the lounge.

Hannah Circle: will not meet in January. The next meeting date will be announced soon!

WEEKLY LIVESTREAM SERVICE

Did you know our 10:30 am Sunday service is livestreamed? Visit www.firststjohn.com/LIVE, or by use the Online Worship link in the middle of the home page or the top navigation ('Worship' then 'Online Worship') on any page.

TIME FOR QUILTING!



The Quilting group meets Mondays at 9:30 am in the lounge beginning January 5th and running through March. Bring a sack lunch. This year, we especially need people to tie layers of a quilt together (you just need to know how to tie a knot). If there is bad weather, they follow Oregon Schools for cancellations.

Many of the quilts will be donated to local charities. If you would like to sew quilting blocks at home or if you have any questions, please call Penny DeWitt at (419) 215-1072 or Lore Warnke at (419) 350-0940.

If you would like a ride to and from quilting, please call Bob Haar at (419) 250-9409. He will be happy to pick you up.



PERSONAL NEEDS PANTRY THANK YOU

We want to thank everyone who donated to the Personal Needs Pantry in 2025. Both your monetary and item donations helped us continue this important outward community ministry.

There is an increasing need for community pantries such as ours, and the cost of products has increased greatly, not to mention we have experienced product shortages, and some of our go-to stores for lower prices are closing. Please consider donating our monthly focus item each month or sending a monetary donation to help cover costs of products to the church (2471 Seaman St, Toledo, OH 43605), or dropping a donation in the offering plate with "Personal Needs Pantry" in the memo line. Donated items can be placed in the bright green bin in the lounge, or in the pull-out bin in the Narthex (lobby) under the main bulletin board.

We believe God will continue to bless this ministry, and we thank you again for whatever role you have played in helping us continue to serve those in need.

PERSONAL NEEDS PANTRY PRODUCT NEEDS

Please purchase full size items.

dish soap	shampoo, child	disposable razors
paper towel	laundry soap	body lotion
toilet paper	band aids	tissues
body soap	toothpaste, adult	toothbrush, adult
deodorant	toothpaste, child*	sanitary pads*
shampoo, adult	fabric softener sheets	

* Indicates an urgent need

PERSONAL NEEDS PANTRY MONTHLY FOCUS



Our focus item for January is dish soap. In addition, ongoing donations of other items are always welcome: disposable razors, laundry soap, fabric softener, toothbrushes & toothpaste, toilet paper, shampoo, feminine hygiene products, band aids, etc. (See full list above.)

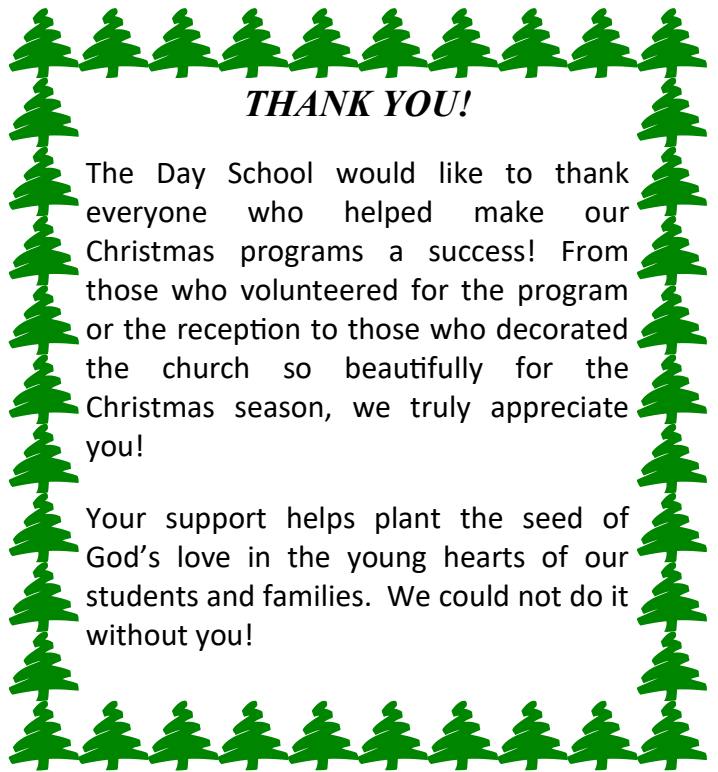
The bins for collecting items are under the main bulletin board in the Narthex (the left pull-out bin) or the bright green bin in the lounge. Monetary donations are welcome, too. Thank you for your help.

DAY SCHOOL NEWS

Now that 2026 has started we are working on some wonderful things here at the Day School. The Christmas season is over, the kids did a wonderful job on their programs and had a great time at their parties. In February, we will begin enrollment for next year. Priority will be given to church members and current students. We look forward to having new faces next year and to getting to know new families. More information will be sent out later in the month.

The weather may be cold, but we are keeping things fun at the school. We look forward to all our events and hope you can join us. See you soon!

— Andrea Buckley



THANK YOU!

The Day School would like to thank everyone who helped make our Christmas programs a success! From those who volunteered for the program or the reception to those who decorated the church so beautifully for the Christmas season, we truly appreciate you!

Your support helps plant the seed of God's love in the young hearts of our students and families. We could not do it without you!

REMINDER FROM THE ALTAR GUILD



If you'd like to place flowers on the altar in honor or memory of someone, find the red flower book in back of the church under the main bulletin board and sign up for the Sunday you want. Flower vases are \$15 each; you can use an envelope out of the book for payment. Either place it in the small box on the wall next to the bulletin board, drop it in the offering place, or mail it to the church office.



FIRST ST. JOHN PRAYER CHAIN
(as of 12/30/25)



Critical/New Prayer List: For those who need prayers in urgent matters such as surgery, emergency medical care (ICU), etc. Will be moved to the Chronic list after the first month unless someone is contacted about special circumstances:

- Deb Ackerman
- Lynn Brosius
- Duke Dawkins
- Family of Martha Everett
- Family of Karen Kruse
- Family of Barb Meyers
- Bill Nelson
- Danielle Riegler
- Rita Riegler
(Genoa Care Center)
- John Rowley
- John Schwegler
- Carlene Trost
- Rayetta Zeisler
(Kingston, Perrysburg)

On-going Concerns Prayer List: For those who need prayers for ongoing serious situations such as cancer treatments, medical struggles, recovery and/or personal situations. Will be moved off the list after 3 months unless someone is contacted about special/continuing circumstances:

- Betty Anderson
(Browning Care Center, Waterville)
- Peggy Burke
- Patrick Cleough
- Marjorie Counterman
- Olivia & Delaney Dawkins
- Lynn Folk
- Diane Gerkenmeyer
- Bob Hecklinger
- Holly Henneman
- Gary Henningsen
- John
- Darlene Lorenzen
- Diana McGovern
- Mary Ellen Miller
(Kingston, Perrysburg)
- Peyton
- Pam Pirolli
- Gloria Ross
- Connie Singlar
- Tiffany
- Steve Welling
- LeAnn Winslow

Please check the above list and let any of the prayer chain contacts--listed below--know if individuals can be moved off the list.

Prayer Chain Contacts

Carol Abbey 419-351-9795 or
cabbeyrn@aol.com

Lynn Folk	419-309-7977
Donna Koehn	419-705-9560
Darlene Lorenzen	419-351-6293
Gloria Ross	419-836-7166

NEW MEMBER CLASS

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a member of First St. John, or if you would like to review your Lutheran faith, please contact Pastor Rayl by email at pastor1@firststjohn.com or by text message to 567-395-0143. Class will meet on Sundays after the second service.



**SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY
EPHESIANS**

We will resume our study on Sunday, January 4th at 9:15 am in the lounge. Pastor Rayl is leading a Bible study on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Coffee and donuts are provided. Please join us after early service or before late service for this most interesting study.

ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Our weekly adult Bible study is held on Thursdays at 11:00 am in the church lounge led by Pastor Rayl. We will begin again on January 8th. Everyone is invited to attend!

CATECHISM CLASSES

It's time to begin a new Catechism class. All parents of children in 5th through 7th grades at the beginning of this school year are encouraged to join us after the second worship service at 11:45 am on January 4th. Classes will meet every other Sunday. Any questions can be shared with Pastor Rayl by contacting him by email at pastor1@firststjohn.com or by text message at 567-395-0143. This is a great opportunity for parents to fulfill the promises made at the baptism of their child.