

THE IMMANUEL MESSENGER



FEBRUARY 2026

Volume 40, Issue 5



From Your Pastor

In this month of February we will begin the season of Lent. Lent is a season of repentance, marked by a purposeful turning away from our sin and turning toward Christ for His mercy and forgiveness. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day focusing especially on the truth that we, too, shall die and therefore need forgiveness from Jesus.

There are various concrete observances during Lent to remind us of the greater solemnity of this season of repentance, even as we continue to emphasize the Gospel of Jesus our Savior as central to our lives and worship. One of those changes Lent brings is that we do not sing *Alleluia* during Lent. *Alleluia* means “Praise the Lord.” We omit this joyous response in order to focus on our need for repentance and faith. During Lent we also do not sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory to God in the Highest). Again, we do this to focus our worship on repentance. Personally, Lent is a time when people give up eating a particular meal—fasting—in order to devote that time to prayer and meditation on the Word of God, that He may bring about His renewal.

Recently I came across a prayer in one of the resources I use for my daily devotion and prayer time. I often keep that time while walking in our Fellow Hall at church. This prayer literally stopped me in my tracks! I prayed it, and then again and again. It consumed me! The prayer was written by the late Dr. Martin Franzmann, who taught at our Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He was also a hymn writer and wrote the majestic hymn *Thy Strong Word*. The prayer that follows demonstrates his wonderful way with words and excellence in expressing God’s truth which both convicts us of our sin and uplifts us in faith in Jesus our Savior:

“O Lord, we are people of flickering faith; we do not have the courage to take You at Your word, to give You what is Yours, that You may open the windows of heaven and pour down on us Your overflowing blessing. We doubt that Your heart is as great and as good as Your strong Word would make us believe, that the riches of Your glory in Christ Jesus will supply our every need. O Lord, we

are a people of half faith, of cloven faith, half given to You, half saved up for ourselves to entrench us in our ways, to serve our ends, to give us greater greatness than You have given us when You made us children of God. Forgive us, Lord. Teach us, O Lord. Let Your Spirit blow and make our faith burn steady and clear, a flame upon Your altar. Let Your Spirit make our believing whole and wholly sane. Teach us to walk as Your Son walked on earth through ministry to death, through death to life and glory at Your right hand. Through Him we pray. Amen.”

What a powerful prayer! Truly, a prayer to daily include in our observance of Lent, but also in every day. The first part of the prayer has its reference to God’s accusation of His people at the time of His prophet Malachi (3:7-12). They were bringing half-hearted worship and puny offerings. God called them to repent and take Him at His Word that He would pour out His blessing on His people who trusted Him. It is true, as the prayer continues, we doubt God’s good heart to us, and only half-heartedly believe His promise, “God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:10). We are a people of half-faith, cloven (divided) faith, only half-given to the Lord and half saved up for ourselves to serve our ends. Lord, have mercy!

But the prayer returns us to our God of grace: “Forgive us, Lord. Teach us, O Lord. let Your Spirit blow and make our faith burn steady and clear.” Lent turns us back to our Lord and that means we must be turned back in fuller measure to His Word by which the Holy Spirit works in us and empowers the life of Christ in us: that we give our lives as living sacrifices to the Lord (Romans 12:1). Come, join in dedicating yourselves to return to the Lord in this season of Lent, that He may make us people of full faith—full of faith and living for Jesus our Savior and Lord!

Your fellow-servant for Christ,
Pastor Mahnken



February 1.....	Karen Wood
February 5.....	Dave Friedrichsen
	Patrick McFarland
	Wayne Miller
February 6.....	Rex Bielenberg
	Steven Christiansen
	Arielle Pedersen
	Lydell Schoenfeld
	McKenzie Weiss
February 9.....	David Jepsen
	Kevin Streck
February 10.....	Michael Hatfield
February 11.....	Dennis Fredericks
	Lauri Schoenfeld
February 12.....	Bonnie Schroeder
	Camryn Schultz
February 14.....	Emily Kline
	Da'Leyah York
February 15.....	Rebecca Segebart
February 16.....	Kim Petersen
February 17.....	Deb Green
February 18.....	Ruth Reincke (100)
February 19.....	Craig Harm
	Carolyn Schroeder
February 21.....	Debbie Namanny
	Darcy Reimers
February 23.....	Brody Morgan
February 24.....	Karsen Keim
February 25.....	Tanner Petersen
February 27.....	Abigail Friedrichsen
	Alexander Friedrichsen
	Dane Lee
February 28.....	Derrick Dimig
	Travis Friedrichsen
	Jason Hatcher

Dennis & Coleen Bruhn	.....	February 4, 1967
Rick & Brandy Porter	.....	February 14, 1998
Richard & Becky Hanlin	.....	February 16, 1973
Roger & Lois Rothe	.....	February 16, 1991
Tim & Cindy Stoppel	.....	February 17, 1996
Gene & Marlys Haberberger	.....	February 26, 1977

Please notify the office of any omissions or corrections.

Omitted from January birthdays: **Wrenley Naberhaus
1st birthday on January 21. We apologize for this mistake.

February 12.....	Bonnie Schroeder
	Camryn Schultz
February 14.....	Emily Kline
	Da'Leyah York
February 15.....	Rebecca Segebart
February 16.....	Kim Petersen
February 17.....	Deb Green
February 18.....	Patricia (Patsy) Schmitz

From the Church Record Book



Deaths: "I am the Resurrection..."

Shannon Henningsen, age 64, died December 22, 2025, and was buried Jan. 3, 2026 in the Hayes Township Cemetery, Arthur, Iowa.

Janet M. Beeck, age 86, died January 4, 2026, and was buried Jan. 8, 2026 in the Morgan Township Cemetery, Schleswig, Iowa.



Soup & Sandwich Luncheon



On these cold winter days doesn't a hot bowl of soup sound good? Please join us for chili, potato or chicken noodle soup on Sunday, February 15. Serving will be from 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

We invite you to dine with us in the Fellowship Hall! Drive-thru will also be available. Invite your friends or family to join you. Your support of this outreach could be life-changing for God's people. Sponsored by the Mission Board.



Thrivent Choice Dollars for 2025 will be expiring soon!



Pastor Mahnken talked about the nativity scene during his Children's Message at the Sunday School program.

If you are a Thrivent member, you may direct Thrivent Choice dollars to our congregation, our preschool, Mission Central and other LCMS organizations.

Simply go to www.thrivent.com/thriventchoice or call the Denison office at 712-263-6785 for assistance before March 31.

THANK YOUS

Thank You to everyone who remembered us with cards and/or gifts as we have celebrated our Savior's birth! We are richly blessed to be a part of our Immanuel family. We praise God for the many kindnesses He showers upon us through you. We pray He will continue to guide us and bless us as we continue together in the service of Jesus our Savior in 2026.

Pastor & Chris Mahnken and Pastor Kaiser

Thank You to our Altar Guild, our Mission Board and to the volunteers who put up the trees and ornaments for this past Advent and Christmas seasons! Your efforts have enriched our worship and assisted in mission and outreach efforts to help spread the Good News of Jesus our Savior and the joy His presence brings.



Thank You to all who helped with setting up and then helping to take down the staging of our Sunday School Christmas service.



Weekend to Remember
by FamilyLife

Find out why over
1.5 million couples have
attended FamilyLife's
Weekend to Remember.

Weekend to Remember provides encouragement, hope, and practical tools to build and grow your relationship—no matter how many years you have been married.

Our congregation will pay the registration costs of any member couple attending a *Weekend to Remember* (those attending are responsible for their room and all other expenses). Local weekends coming up include:

Omaha, NE: March 13-15 at Hilton,
\$159/night-room (price good until February 27).

Des Moines, IA: March 27-29 at Marriott Downtown,
\$149/night-room (price good until March 13).

Lincoln, NE: May 15-17 at The Cornhusker Hotel,
\$129/night-room (price good until April 24).

Weekends are also available in Minneapolis and Branson. For more information visit:

<https://www.familylife.com/weekend-to-remember#where>.

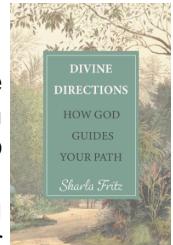


Upcoming Bible Studies during Lent

Ladies' Lenten Bible Study

Ladies, how is your life going? Do you sometimes wish God sent texts? God does provide some guidance for us. We will study how God guided six people in the Bible and learn how He desires to guide us too.

Please join us Wednesday, starting February 18 after the Lenten meal, or approximately 7:00 pm. Let the office, or Chris, know if you want a book. You will benefit the most by having your own book and doing the short reading each week. You may order a book even if you can't attend the study. You are invited even if you choose not to buy the book. Hope to see you there! We will grow together in His Word!



Men's Lenten Study

Fighting the Spiritual War! The devil often uses very subtle weapons to attack God's people—our sinful world and our sinful nature. The Holy Scriptures have much to say concerning the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. Above all, God's Word directs our eyes to the cross and the empty tomb, where the Lord Jesus declares us to be the holy saints of God, and provides us with the assurance, the confidence, the peace, and the power to fight the spiritual war that HE has already won! Men, join us after Lent midweek suppers, beginning February 18, as Pastor Schulz leads us in this lively study!

On Sunday, December 21, 2025, the Sunday School children presented their Christmas service titled "To Us a Child Is Born."

Afterwards, everyone was invited to a delicious brunch served by the Board of Education.





A Christmas Brunch was served for the women of the congregation on December 4th in place of our regular meeting. In spite of extremely cold weather, there were 30 in attendance. It was an enjoyable morning with food, Bible Trivia games, and Christian fellowship.

We continue to work on a suitable display for the Confirmation pictures. Chris is purchasing a book with archival pages. Next, we will need to find the best place to make it available for viewing.

We continue to visit Immanuel members in care facilities and provide "Portals of Prayer" devotional booklets for them.

—Submitted by Donna Harm, Secretary



From Your library . . .
"Have we got a book for you!"



The Healing Quilt
by Lauraine Snelling

When her Aunt Teza faces a second bout with breast cancer, her niece Kit Cooper decides to raise money for a new mammogram unit for their local hospital by creating a beautiful king-size quilt to be auctioned off at a later date.

Kit gathers a group of various women skilled in sewing and quilting. During the months to come, the women will form a close bond and it will become the therapy for several of the women carrying personal sorrows and long held secrets. Aunt Teza is the heart of the group and her deep faith and belief that prayer will carry you through, not only helps the others but their love for her will help with her surgery ahead and treatments.

We have several books in our library by Lauraine Snelling. They are enjoyable, faith-based reads.

—Submitted by Elaine Teut

Join us for our Lent Midweek Services

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which will be February 18. The theme for our midweek Lent services this year is "For Us."

Our meditations will be guided by the Lenten hymn *O Love How Deep* (LSB #544). Some hymns tell a story, others teach, and still others create pictures in our minds of the great works of God. Some hymns do all three, weaving together a tapestry that is beautiful yet simple, wondrous yet easy to understand. *O Love, How Deep* is that kind of hymn. Although the words "for us" do not appear in the first stanza, the most pointed and beautiful language in the hymn is expressed in the phrase "for us." The phrase is reminiscent of the language of the Nicene Creed: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."

Our midweek Lent services will begin at 5:45 p.m. A supper will be served following the service. After supper, our ladies are invited to a Bible Study "Divine Directions—How God Guides Your Path." Our men will join with Pastor Schulz around the theme "Fighting the Spiritual War."

Our worship themes will be as follows:

FEBRUARY 18—ASH WEDNESDAY:
O LOVE, HOW DEEP, HOW BROAD, HOW HIGH

FEBRUARY 25—*THE ROBE OF HUMAN FRAME*

MARCH 4—*DONE FOR US*

MARCH 11—*FOR US HE SEEKS*

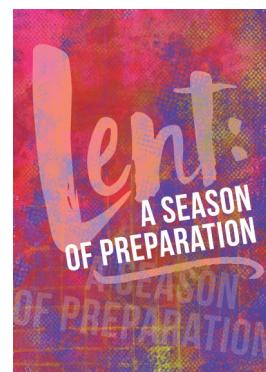
MARCH 18—*HEALING FROM DEMONS*

MARCH 25—*FOR US BETRAYED*

APRIL 2—*MAUNDY THURSDAY:*
FOR MANY MEANS FOR YOU

APRIL 3—*GOOD FRIDAY:*
HIS DYING BREATH

APRIL 5—*EASTER:*
FOR US HE LIVES ON HIGH TO REIGN



**Immanuel Lutheran Church
Voters' Meeting Minutes
January 11, 2026**

I. Opening Devotion and Prayer

Led by Pastor Mahnken.

II. Reading/Approval of Minutes and Agenda

The minutes were presented by Craig Bogatzke. It was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved by the voters to accept the October minutes.

III. Reports of Officers and Boards

A. Elders (Curtis Korner)

A planning meeting was held on January 4. Pastor Mahnken served some great homemade soup.

Thanks to Kent Bornhoft for years of service as an Elder. He also served as the secretary. Eric Schneider will take on the role as secretary while Alan Weiss will take on a new term as an Elder. Pastor's retirement will bring about a need to place a call and Pastor will help the Elders navigate through this process.

B. Trustees (Ryan Ernst)

Andrew Tuckpointing repaired some flashing and applied a sealant to stop some leakage and has seemed to be effective. A dripping faucet has been repaired. Lighting in the narthex is going to be converted over to LED panels. Feel free to bring it to the Trustees if you see a need for physical plant improvements. The contracted cleaning company continues to do a good job and now sets up/tears down for funerals or other events. There will be coordination with the city on repaving our parking area. The preschool flooring and repainting projects are complete.

C. Treasurer/Stewardship/Finance (Larry Abbe)

Currently, Immanuel is ahead \$7,199.22.

The Immanuel Endowment Fund currently has \$55,312.04. This fund has been inactive for a long time, in excess of a decade. It has been suggested that a new board be appointed and consider spending some of the money in the account (not to include the principle). There are parameters of what the money can be spent on: 30% for local mission projects, 30% for world mission projects, and 40% for projects deemed worthwhile but exclude general budget items.

D. Education/Youth (Deb Green)

Ross Wood is the Board of Education Chairman. Rachel Jacobson is the Board of Education Secretary.

A teacher appreciation supper will be held on March 15. Confirmands questioning will be held on April 22 at 7:00 p.m. Confirmation Sunday is April 26. Graduate Brunch will be held on May 3rd. Vacation Bible School will be held July 6-9.

E. Preschool (No Report)

F. Mission/Fellowship (Judy Gierstorf)

The Octoberfest meal proceeds were \$2,284 (after expenses were paid). The garage sale will be held again in the spring. The soup dinner will be held in February but no date has been set.

G. Memorial Committee (Lodean Voss)

Nothing to report.

H. Pastor's Report (Pastor Mahnken)

Pastor Mahnken shared a variety of statistics pertaining to the congregation's membership data. He also spoke about the protocol for calling a new Pastor, which includes submitting a call, congregational survey, possibly suggesting pastors by name, receiving a call list, setting up a call committee who analyzes the call list, to name just a few of the steps in the sequence. You cannot put in a call for a new pastor while you currently have a pastor, so this process will not likely be put in motion until after January 1, 2027.

IV. Old Business

A. New Constitution (Pastor Mahnken)

Reports that this is still a work in progress.

B. Other

V. New Business

A. Designate Use of Meal Receipts

1. Soup Dinner

The Mission Board has requested that they be allowed to serve the soup dinner and direct the proceeds to help fund their endeavors

2. Lenten Suppers (February 18 is Ash Wednesday)

Peggy Wunschel moved and Judy Gierstorf seconded the motion that the Mission Board be allowed to use the proceeds of the Soup Dinner and whichever church body served the Lenten supper be allowed to designate those proceeds. The Voters unanimously approved this motion.

B. Request Home Mission Funds to Cover ⅔ of Registration for Okoboji Campers

Last Year's Registration costs were:

Cub Week 1-\$315 Cub Week 2-\$385 Jr. High Week-\$400 Family Retreats also available, prices based on number attending. Visit <http://www.campokoboji.org/> for more info.

Deb Green made a motion to approve these subsidies.

Rachel Mentink seconded this motion and the Voters unanimously approved it.

C. Nominations for President & VP of Synod

1. President:

Pastor Joel Biermann, Professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
Pastor Jamison Hardy, President of Concordia University System

2. 1st Vice President:

Pastor Peter Lange (incumbent).

3. Regional Vice-President:

Pastor Scott Sailer, former South Dakota District President
Pastor Steve Turner, former Iowa District West District President

Leroy Hight made a motion to accept Pastor's recommendation on the synod offices. Deb Green seconded this motion and the Voters supported this recommendation.

D. Unity Ridge Lutheran School Donation

Unity Ridge is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO). They are not affiliated with a specific congregation, which means raising funds can be a challenge. Their enrollment K-12 is 98 students and growing. Sandy Bubke moved and Ryan morgan seconded to date \$4,000 to Unity Ridge's general fund. Deb Green gave a testimonial about the vibrant worship she has witnessed during Wednesday Chapel services. The Voters unanimously approved this donation.

The money will be taken from the interest off a CD and interest from the Immanuel Endowment Fund*. Since disbursements from the Endowment Fund require approval of the Endowment Board, money from the Home Mission Fund will temporarily be used along with the CD interest to get to the \$4,000 amount. This will help Unity Ridge get their money in a timely manner.

(*Once the Endowment Board releases the funds, they will be deposited into the Home Mission Fund to replenish the funds originally given to Unity Ridge.)

VI. Adjourn With Prayer (Pastor Mahnken)

~Submitted by Craig Bogatzke, Secretary

"Everyone should be eager to advance the teaching and study of the Word for his own salvation and the glory of God."

~Martin Luther

Pastor Mahnken's Report

Voters' Meeting—January 11, 2026

We began 2025 with 632 baptized members and 526 communicant members on the books.

In 2025 six of our members have died—Lainey Naberhaus, Bernie Petersen, Bonard Christiansen, Duane Jacoby, Ruby Friedrichsen, and Gerald Pedersen.

Six members were added by Holy Baptism. Two members have been added through Adult Confirmation. Three communicant members have transferred in from other LCMS congregations.

We have transferred out one communicant member to another LCMS congregation.

Four communicant members were released by personal request.

Two communicant members were released because of having moved away and we lack contact information, despite efforts to obtain such information.

Four communicant members and one baptized member have been released because of no reply to available contact information.

One member was released to join a non-LCMS congregation.

Four members—two communicant and two baptized—have been released by personal request to join non-LCMS Lutheran Congregations.

We began 2025 with 632 Baptized members and ended 2025 with 620 (-12) Baptized members. We began 2025 with 526 Communicant members and ended 2025 with 512 (-14) Communicant members.

Our total Advent worship attendance was the highest it has been since 2014. We had good weather.

Our total Christmas attendance was the highest it has been since 2011. Major contributing factors to that include weather but, even more, “who is home for Christmas.”

Our average worship attendance for 2025 was 140.5/week, which was down from 148.7/week in 2024. Our average Saturday evening worship for 2025 was 32.9; the year before it was 33.8.

Thank you to our Sunday School Superintendents and teachers for preparing our children well for an excellent Sunday School Christmas service. Thank you to the Board of Education who prepared and served an excellent brunch following. We moved the service to Sunday morning this year mostly because, other than parents, grandparents, and other family members so few of our other members had attended. Still, we had wished more of those who attended would have joined us for brunch.

We also thank our Altar Guild, LWML, and others who helped decorate our church again for the Christmas season.

Thank you to Dennis and Judy Gierstorf, Loren and Janice Jepsen for loading out and delivering all the collected items from our Angel Tree.

Thank you to Cheryl and Denny Neppl for taking and delivering all the items collected for our TAP donations.

2025 was another year filled with God's blessings. One of the blessings given to Immanuel is a new Office Secretary—Jodi Lorenzen. Jodi has fit in so well that I keep forgetting she has not yet even been with us for a year. Every once in a while something new still comes up which gives her the “deer-in-the-headlights-look” 😊 and I say, “Oh, we haven't talked about that, have we?” or “You don't know about that, do you?” But she patiently and competently moves through it.

I want to briefly review the process a congregation goes through in the calling of a pastor, since Immanuel will be going through that process because of my retirement at the end of 2026. What I'm outlining is the usual process. At some point our District President will meet with Immanuel in what is called a Pre-Call Meeting. After that the congregation is invited to complete a survey to show what qualities you as members see are most important for your new pastor to have. The congregation is also invited to submit names of pastors they think would be a good fit for Immanuel. The District President takes those names and adds others to a Call List. Immanuel will have a Call Committee to evaluate the information given for those pastors on the Call List. The Call Committee makes a recommendation to the congregation. A call to a pastor is extended through the Voters' Assembly. A call to a new pastor will not be extended while I am still here. That is normal protocol. Sometime before I leave our Circuit Visitor, Pr. Chad Trunkhill of Our Savior, Denison and Bethlehem, Dow City will meet with our Elders to determine which of the area pastors will serve as Immanuel's Vacancy Pastor, the pastor who will see that this congregation's worship and pastoral needs are met until such time as a new full-time pastor is in place. A time of vacancy and calling a new pastor is a time in a congregation's life when the members need to review their ministry opportunities and needs. It is a time for you to help make sure existing ministry needs are covered. Immanuel has not been through this in 30 years, so it will be a learning experience for many, requiring good communication, cooperation, patience, and trust in the faithful mercies of our great God. He will “supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).



Have you ever had one of those moments you could just feel the delight of the Lord? If you closed your eyes, you could almost sense His arms wrapped around you as He softly spoke the words, "I love you, child." We had one of those this week at preschool. I couldn't wait to share it with you!

The children were enjoying Table Time. Table Time happens upon arrival when the children get to choose a fine motor toy and sit at the table. It takes place as soon as everyone enters the classroom. It is a wonderful time to sit and visit with the children. I get to hear about their lives and connect. Yesterday, I had four students at my table who all attended daycare together. They began to share a story about how someone was accidentally hurt at daycare that morning. Of course, I was getting details here and there but there was a definite highlight in the midst of the story. One of the children (in passing and not realizing the weight of what they were telling me) says, "Ya, we all stopped to pray when he got hurt."

Wait. You flew by that tidbit of information very quickly. Could you repeat what you just said? They all four confirmed it. A friend of theirs who had gotten hurt needed comfort and these four children stopped what they were doing, had compassion, and followed the Holy Spirit in prayer for their friend. I mean, honestly! How could you not cry happy tears at that beautiful revelation? I wasn't sure whether to full on weep or stand up and do a happy dance!

I know I share a lot that the Word says we should have faith like a child. It is hard not to crave a faith like theirs when you hear a testimonial like this one. These children know the fundamental importance of prayer AND they trusted their Savior enough to take the need to Him. What a beautiful and convicting moment. They know Jesus. They know He loves them. They know He cares about their friend. They know He has the power to heal. They know He likes it when they talk to Him. They know where two or more are gathered in His name, He is there with them. Okay, well maybe I didn't teach them the two or more part, but clearly the Holy Spirit did!

Isn't it enough to make your mouth drop open in awe and whisper your own prayer to the Lord? "Father, I want that too. Please pour out that kind of faith into my heart. Please let me see Your hand at work every single day. Help me to trust You, seek You, and be bold enough to pray for my friends in need (even on-the-spot)."

Thank you for your continued prayers and gracious support of the preschool ministry. These children are having an impact for the Kingdom of God.

Blessings,
Mrs. Gustafson



The picture above is from our Christmas program that was held on December 4, 2026.

AFRICAN RADIO MINISTRIES—NEWS

We celebrate God's work through you, our African Radio Ministries partners and the saints serving in God's vineyard in Africa.

Ethiopia Kingdom Growth in 2025:

♦ New Converts: 899	♦ Listening Groups: 53
♦ Baptized: 503	♦ Confirmed: 642
♦ Calls: 291	♦ Visitations: 22
♦ Bibles: 339	

Islamic Inmates Following Jesus

Rev. Mengistu visited the Hosanna Prison, which has a significant number of inmates from Islamic backgrounds. Three inmates were baptized, many repented, proclaiming their faith in Jesus, and 36 graduates were confirmed and received a Bible. Additionally, a local congregation generously donated choir robes as a blessing.

Growing and Thriving Preaching Point

Rev. Melkamu visited the Sele Preaching Station, a vibrant congregation that has thrived thanks to God's grace, the dedication of our local church leaders, and the generous support from ARM donors. This ministry has not only grown but has truly flourished because of your prayers and partnership. These important milestones were celebrated in December:

- ♦ The Confirmation of 18 new members.
- ♦ The Baptism of 52 new believers.
- ♦ The administration of the Lord's Supper, a significant occasion for remote congregations without ordained pastors.
- ♦ The completion of a new church building made possible by the hard work of the local congregation.
- ♦ An evangelist and the Sele congregation have committed to partnering in supporting his formal pastoral training.

West Africa Kingdom Growth in 2025:

♦ New Members: 484	♦ Listening Groups: 31
♦ Baptisms: 323	♦ Preaching Points: 16
♦ Calls: 978	♦ Visitations: 1084

Liberia-Foya District: Rev. Emmanuel Tengbeh

Rev. Tengbeh and the Foya team have been busy visiting radio listeners, leading them in Bible studies, praying with them, and answering questions about God's Word and Christ. One Islamic family regularly listens to the messages and is praying for a deeper understanding. Please pray that they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Another listener, Lusu Fanando, has been inspired by the sermons. She was so blessed by the teachings and preaching that she found a nearby Lutheran church and is committed to learning and becoming an active follower of Jesus.

Your partners in the harvest.

Missionary Linda Kurtz
John and Kathy Duitsman

!AMIGOS EN CRISTO and GRACIA!

News from *Las Iglesias Evangélicas Luteranas*
Amigos en Cristo in Denison and *Gracia* in Storm Lake
Pastor Pedro Lopez

Greetings in the Precious Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ! May you receive the gift of faith, the blessing of hope, and the peace of His love at Christmas and always.

Advent & Christmas Reflections

The Advent season came and went quickly, and now we celebrate Christmas! With all the snow and extreme cold, many events and worship services were canceled. Despite the weather, we celebrated our first Posada on December 13—St. Paul's style—bringing a little bit of our culture to our families. We say "St. Paul's style" because it was held inside the church. A big *thank you* to Joe Eisenbacher for handing out flyers for this event. Weather permitting, we plan to have two more posadas, hoping to reach new families in the area.

Regular Schedule

Our schedule remains the same for Praise & Prayer, Bible Study and Sunday Worship Services.

ESL Classes & Community Outreach

Deloit ESL Class: Our newest ESL class had a great turnout—thanks to volunteers from Faith-Deloit and Immanuel-Schleswig churches. We celebrated Thanksgiving together on closing day. Rachel, our volunteer from Immanuel-Schleswig, will offer a winter class in January, and we hope for another session in the spring.

St. Paul-Carroll: Hosted our first Posada Service. Families and friends gathered despite freezing weather. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate, share the message of Jesus, and invite families to church services. We continue to have Saturday Praise, Prayer, and Bible Study in the evenings.

St. Paul-Hartley: Finished ESL classes on November 24. Sadly, we will pause ESL in the spring, but plan to resume in the fall.

St. John-Storm Lake: We continue helping with the Swaddling Clothes Program every second Saturday of the month and worship services on Sundays at Grace. Plans are underway to start an ESL class this spring since we will not be in Hartley.

Prayer Requests

Please continue to pray for:

- Our Hispanic ministries, especially in Denison and Storm Lake
- Betin's health and his family
- The immigrant community we serve
- All new people we met this year through ESL classes and other programs
- Pastor Lopez and his wife—that the Lord blesses and strengthens them to continue His work

Bendiciones,
Pastor Lopez

The Message of Confirmation

What you do at home can affect your child's confirmation experience.

By Pastor Tim Pauls

Ah, confirmation—a defining mark of Lutheran congregations. It's supposed to be a good thing, the pastor preparing youth for communicant membership. Too often, though, it's seen only as a necessary rite of passage to endure rather than a blessing to enjoy.

For some reason teenagers just don't seem to enjoy memorizing the catechism or giving up their Wednesday nights to attend class. They often arrive as unwilling participants. And frankly, when that's the atmosphere, we pastors aren't all that excited, either.

So, what to do? I've contemplated other options, like a reality show format, where we vote one student out of class each week. But I believe there's a better way. Here are a few suggestions that pastors and parents might find helpful.

1. Start at Home.

Each chief part of the Small Catechism begins with the subtitle "As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household." The Small Catechism isn't supposed to be the mystery book that your child suddenly discovers in confirmation class. It's designed to be used in the home by the family. When it gets used at home, it communicates to your child that it's a book for use in life, not just at church.

2. Start Early.

God created toddlers with the astonishing ability to memorize. They can hear a jingle on the radio one time and sing it back to you for the next eight hours in the car (What a fun trip that is!).

Young kids are very good at learning words by heart, even if they don't understand what the words mean; so help children memorize the catechism while they're still very young. They won't understand all the words; that will come later. For now, teach the text.

One of the great errors of education today is to think that kids need to understand the words before they learn them. So parents tend to leave the catechism on the shelf. Meanwhile, kids are growing up playing video games, listening to ads and music, often loaded with sexual innuendo (and often just plain explicit sexual material!). They're memorizing this stuff even though they don't understand the meanings. But they will.

Later, when they become puberty-stricken teenagers, their parents expect them to do memory work. That's the last thing they want to do. Eighth

graders don't want to memorize—they want to argue, which actually is a necessary and helpful skill in education when properly directed. That's why you give them the data at an earlier age, so they can defend it and debate it later on. Confirmation class time is much better spent discussing doctrine than reviewing memory work.

Young children want to be grown up. That's why they follow you around the house, put on your shoes, and try everything that you're trying. They want to use grownup words and sing grownup songs. If you work with them at memorizing, they'll want to do it, too. And if you tell them that this is what eighth graders do, they'll work hard to be like "the big kids."

Don't be afraid of big church-words. Kids love them. Recently, I was talking to two 6-year-old students from our school in front of a bunch of adults. When I mentioned that we all were sinful, one of them said, "But God justifies us!" The second one soberly added, "This is good, because we are concupiscent."

I imagine the adults scurried for dictionaries when they got home [in case you don't know, concupiscent means having the constant inner desire to sin]. But the point is that when children hear new words, they want to use them.

Another big mistake is to believe that kids want to be young and cute. They don't. Sure, they'll learn little children's songs, but they're also capable of learning serious hymns. They love to sing them by memory in worship with the "big people."

It's disturbing that so many parents approve of makeup for very young girls, but then want to limit their vocabulary to childish words. Meanwhile, the world isn't waiting—it's indoctrinating your kids about grown up issues at early ages.

Dinosaur books (practically every boy's favorite) preach evolution, and after-school TV shows for kids imply that all religions are the same. It's a bad idea to give the world a decade's head start on these matters.

3. Take Little Steps.

You may feel ill equipped and unprepared to teach the faith at home. However, you have the tools you need and more opportunities than you realize. You probably read stories to your children, so read them Bible stories and talk about what God does for people in each one.

If you have a toddler in a stroller or a bike seat, recite the Apostles' Creed during the ride. Call your children over from the swing set and whisper, "Hey, do you know what? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Kids love it when adults take time to impart information, because it makes them feel more grown up.

(continued on next page —>)

Celebrate their baptismal birthdays every year, so that they understand that it is important to you. Record selections of the catechism on your phone and play it in the car or at home. Do it together with your child. Better yet, print off a portion of the Small Catechism on a piece of paper and hang it in the kitchen. Each day, memorize three or four more words as a family. Don't force it. Make it a simple, important family ritual over the years.

4. Review Frequently.

As the old saying goes, "Repetition is the mother of all learning." Challenge your children to repeat the memory work you've learned as a family or tell you their favorite Bible stories. Praise them lavishly when they do.

5. Model Church Attendance.

Your kids are watching you; your actions teach them what is important to you. When parents drop off their kids for Sunday School on their way to breakfast, it sends the message that they skip Bible Class because they believe that there's a time when we can stop learning about the Lord and His grace.

When parents attend worship only sporadically, it teaches their children that church is something to be done occasionally—that Jesus' presence and forgiveness are no more important than sports or some activity around the house.

6. Model Study At Home.

Set aside some time for your own prayer and Bible reading. Your kids need the example. You need the Word.

7. Model Repentance.

It's hypocritical to teach your kids about confession and then never apologize to them for your mistakes. And your kids know it. So confess your sins when you mess up, and ask for their forgiveness. Furthermore, voice your thankfulness that Jesus forgives you, too.

One of the failures that you may need to confess is that you haven't taught the faith at home through the years, and now you're facing a rebellious confirmand. Don't bluster and threaten. Confess. And then rejoice that the Lord forgives you for all of your sins. When all is said and done, *that* is the message of confirmation.

Pastor Tim Pauls is the pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boise, Idaho.



Updates from Camp Okoboji

It is with humble appreciation that we share the great response to our Giving Tuesday efforts, we raised more than \$32,000. We reached our match and then some! God is good!

We are continuing to make updates to our Proverbs cabin, funded by a generous anonymous donor. We are updating and rearranging the bathroom and updating the walls and kitchen. We even vaulted the ceiling to help a small cabin feel much bigger. We're excited for these updates to be complete soon. I'm grateful for Ben Brakenhoff, our talented Maintenance Director, for his skill and hard work!

Personnel Updates:

We are actively recruiting our 2026 Summer Staff! Please encourage youth (at least 16 years of age) and college students to consider serving with us. Those interested in serving at Camp Okoboji should complete a NLOMA profile. That is the first step in being considered for a summer position. Visit NLOMA.org for the profile link.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR CAMP campokoboji.org

- * June 14-18 Cub Week #1 (grades 3-5) \$315
- * July 5-11 Jr. High Week (grades 6-8) \$385
- * July 12-18 Cub Week #2 (grades 3-5) \$380
- * July 19-25 Youth Week (grades 8-12) \$400

Immanuel will pay 2/3 of a camper's registration fee!



2026 Iowa Prayer Rally for Life

You're invited to attend the 2026 Iowa Prayer Rally for Life on Thursday, February 5, at 12:00 pm at the Iowa State Capitol. In addition to the Prayer Rally at noon, attendees are invited to attend additional scheduled events from 10:30 am—2 pm.

Invited Prayer Rally speakers include Gov. Kim Reynolds, Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird, Rep. Jon Dunwell, and Rev. Alex Post (LCMS District Life Coordinators for Iowa District East). Join fellow Iowans who care about God's truth for life as we gather in prayer, encouragement, and hope to continue to give a voice to those without. Learn more at <https://lutheranfamilyservice.org/events/>

It's a New Year! New Opportunities for Mission Work!

HELP WANTED: Workers in God's Kingdom

Ladies of Immanuel, would you like to help with a SHORT term, fun mission project?

See the "Classified" with jobs listings below.

Next summer the women of the Denison and Council Bluffs zones will host a district wide mission event at Camp Okoboki. Your help is needed! Your help is welcome! From Wednesday, June 10, through Saturday, June 13, the Lutheran Women in Mission of IWD will meet for Bible study, inspiring speakers, lots of Christian fun, and to choose the missions (local and national) to fund for the next two years. It is like a 3 day retreat with over 300 sisters in Christ!

Classified Ads

Looking for "Creative" types: to plan & make 50 centerpieces on the theme "Share the Light of Christ" based on 1st Peter 2:9. To be done in advance of the event
See the logo below:



Jobs Listing

NEEDED:

Ladies able to hold doors open for lines during meal breaks. Benefit – great way to meet new sisters from across Iowa, and reconnect with old friends! Six shifts available, do one or more – you pick.

USHERS WANTED

to collect offerings and ballots. Help with one collection or all. Several collections to be done each day not some scheduled, some as event business progresses.

Are you just a regular worker? Don't want to be in charge, or make any decisions? Come to the event for the fun & while you're there someone else will direct these jobs:

drive golf carts
arrange tables/chairs
set up for voting
delegates
help unload
put out direction signs

Do you like to tell people "WHERE TO GO"? We need YOU to direct drivers to their cabins/parking as they arrive on Wed, Thurs, & Fri. Tell us which day you can be there, we'll assign a shift.

If any of these tasks look interesting to you and you think you might enjoy working with a group of other Lutheran ladies and helping with this mission work, call Brenda Miller 712-675-4713 or Peggy Wunschel 712-369-1255.

You can serve in God's kingdom to spread His saving Gospel message!



Consulting for Christ Enabling Bible Translation in Africa

BIBLE TRANSLATION CONFERENCE

For the first time, the bi-annual international Bible translation conference was held outside the US. BT 2025 was held in Thailand October 28-31, and since it was not in the US, many more of our international partners were able to obtain visas and attend. Lutheran Bible Translators facilitated the attendance of church leaders from Cameroun, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Papua New Guinea. They joined us in attending the sessions and discussing what was significant for them. All of the attendees expressed how much they had learned and were thankful to be able to participate.

One of the major topics at Bible translation conference was AI and its role in translating the Bible. A difficulty in applying AI is that written material must first exist in the language in order to properly train AI on it. For most of the languages we work with, there is nothing written down in it. Often, there is not even an existing alphabet. This limits the use of AI to languages that have some Bible translation done, or that have taken the time to write down a significant amount of cultural stories and materials.

One of the main conclusions is that AI should only be used to prepare a very rough draft. A human translator needed to evaluate what is produced and make the final decision on how to translate the passage. There are two main AI versions that have been developed for Bible translation. Testing shows that one seems to be better at translating non-poetry sections of the Bible, while the other is better at poetry. One recommendation was that translators should refer to both when drafting their translation, but not copy directly from either.

The group from Lutheran Bible Translators took part of our first day before the conference started to visit an elephant camp. This was a place that cared for retired work elephants. So the elephants were very tame and had spent their whole lives around people. We were able to get up close and personal with them, giving them food, washing them, and petting them.

TRANSLATION CHECKING

The Mende team (from Sierra Leone) is making very good progress. I met with them online to check their translation material in September and November. We are currently working on the book of Isaiah and have reached chapter 36.

I have enjoyed getting to know the Kono team (Sierra Leone). We met online in September, October and November to work on some of the minor prophets.

In October, I also worked two weeks with the Tsamakko team from Ethiopia. We were able to check over the last half of their translation of the book of Genesis.

TRANSLATION TIDBITS

In Isaiah 30:10, an interesting figure of speech is used that ended up being said differently in the Hebrew, English, and Mende languages. The NRSV translates part of the verse as, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things..." This keeps the literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase "smooth things". The NIV states it more naturally in English as "pleasant things". When it was translated into Mende, this was most naturally said as "sweet things". So the same idea is expressed using smooth, pleasant, and sweet all giving the same meaning in their particulate contexts.

In the Kono language, it is natural to use the liver in many figures of speech that have to do with emotions. It is often used in places where we would use "heart" in English. One example of that is Amos 2:16 "those who are stout of heart" ESV. In Kono, this is translated as "those who have strong livers", which is how they speak of being brave.

In Genesis 27:44, the Hebrew language uses a figure of speech to describe Esau's anger. Literally, it says, "until the anger of your brother returns." In English, this sounds like Esau would get angry again, which is the wrong meaning. So English translations state it differently in order to give the correct meaning: "fury turns away" (NRSV); "fury subsides" (NIV); "anger cools down" (GW). But in the Tsamakko language, they have the same figure of speech as Hebrew, so they can say, "until the wrath of your brother returns," and it has the proper meaning.

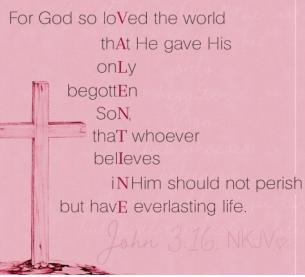
PRAYER REQUESTS

- Pray for Mende team (Sierra Leone) as they continue to work on their translation of the Old Testament and revision of the New Testament.
- Pray for the Kono team (Sierra Leone) as they continue to work on their translation of the Old Testament.
- Pray for the health of Kono translator Rev. Daniel Yarjah.
- Pray for online checking sessions scheduled with the Kono team January 12-16 and the Mende team January 26-30. Pray for good health, reliable electricity, good internet connections, wisdom, and guidance from the Holy Spirit for all involved.

Contact: Jim.Kaiser@LBT.org 586-842-9876
Susan.Kaiser@LBT.org 586-913-3814

Give online: LBT.org/Kaiser

Mail: Lutheran Bible Translators
PO Box 789
Concordia, MO 64020-0789
(designate Kaiser ministry)



FEBRUARY 2026

Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Schleswig, Iowa



Love is patient,
Love is kind.
1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

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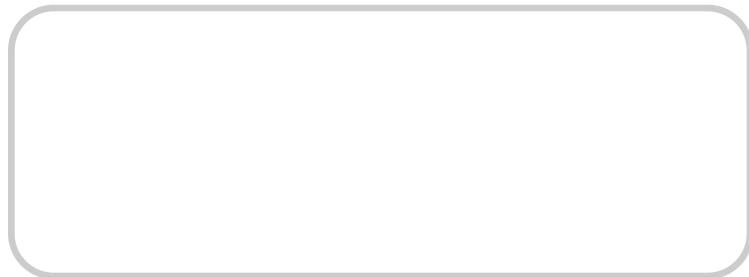
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15 <i>Transfiguration Sunday</i> 9 a.m. Worship w/HC 10:15 SS & BC 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Immanuel Soup Luncheon 	16 <i>President's Day</i> No Preschool 	17 No Preschool LWML Prayer Service @ Our Savior, Denison <i>Messenger</i> Deadline for March issue 	18 <i>Ash Wednesday</i> 6:30 Bible Study p.m. Preschool Confirmation  5:45 Worship w/HC 6:30 Lenten supper 7:00 Ladies Bible Study 7:00 Mens Bible Study	19 Preschool	20	21 4 p.m. Worship w/HC																																										
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THE IMMANUEL MESSENGER



**OUR MISSION
STATEMENT:**
**“Together in Christ,
we grow through the
Word and
Sacraments, serving
our Lord and
sharing His saving
grace with all
people.”**