

The Circle

January 2026



Dear Friends in Christ,

Merry Christmas! I have a feeling that most everyone reading this will be doing it some time after the 25th of December, but of course, it's still Christmas until January 6th, because Christmas—God coming to dwell with us, as one of us—is too big and important of a celebration to confine to one day. I'm glad and grateful for the chance to celebrate the Christmas season with St. John's, and I'm looking forward to the work and ministry that we'll do together, during Christmastime and beyond.

Thank you to everyone who was a part of the Christmas Eve services. Our Christmas Eve services were wonderful and joyous, and we couldn't do it without a lot of hard work from a lot of different people: musicians, worship leaders, altar guild members, acolytes, livestream technology operators, ushers, counters, and volunteers of all sorts who I'm sure I'm forgetting. It's a blessing to have so many people working together to celebrate as St. John's. Thank you especially to Sonya Sowards, Tom Snyder, and John Quinn for the work that you've all done to make our Christmas worship go smoothly and beautifully!

Even after the Christmas season comes to a close, I'm looking forward to the ministry and work that we'll do together. I'd like to highlight a few of those things.

First, our work alongside the other members of the Muhlenberg Parish continues. St. John's is going to be hosting a potluck fellowship event closer to the end of January for members of St. John's and of the other three Muhlenberg Parish churches. We'll continue to work with the other Parish churches on service events like the Red Cross blood drives, and to gather together for worship as we're able. The Muhlenberg Parish combined worship services are on the fifth Sundays of months with five Sundays in them, but the next two fifth Sundays are Palm Sunday in March, and then Holy Trinity Sunday in May. Because of those two festivals, the next combined worship service won't be until August 31st. I'll be sure to share more information about those events as we get closer to them.

We're also still working to provide opportunities for youth ministry in the congregation and in the community. While we're continuing to look for a new Director of Youth and Family Ministry, I appreciate the work that members of the Faith Formation Committee and volunteers with the ASP team, the VBS planning team, and others have done to keep those ministries going. As with Christmas services, it's a blessing to have so many committed people willing to help with the work of youth and family ministry.

I'm also excited to be able to be the chaplain at Bear Creek Camp for a week of their summer camp programs this summer. I'll be serving as chaplain at Bear Creek the week of June 28th-July 3rd, which is Week 2 of their camp sessions. I hope some of the campers from St. John's might be able to join me that week!

And finally, the season of Epiphany is traditionally a time when people bless their homes. We'll have prayer cards with a house blessing and chalk (to mark the traditional inscription over the doorway) available during the season of Epiphany, and if anyone would like to have Pastor Russ come and bless their home, I'd be honored to. Just give me a call or send me an email, and we can find a time that will work.

There are a lot of exciting and joyous things happening at St. John's, and a lot of opportunities for ministry in our community. I'm excited to be a part of them!

In Christ,
Pastor Russ

Thanks to this awesome and generous St. John's family, WELCA wrapped up another successful Silver Springs project.

Despite terrible weather conditions, the final boxes were sealed and loaded into Diane Sherman's car. Special mention to Bobbi Riley for clearing the ramp making it safe for our many trips from Kley Hall to the car.

Gift bags were assembled for our shut-ins and staff. Thanks to Klotzbach Funeral Home for contributing items to help.



With our chores completed, we enjoyed an interesting and informative program on Carols of Christmas presented by Pastor Russ.

Our January meeting on Tuesday the 27th will be our annual humor program.

Plan to join us at 10:30 a.m. in Eisenhower for fun and fellowship. Bring a joke, funny story, and a friend!

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

**WELCA Retreat
April 11, 2026**

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Among the many thousands of hymns, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" holds a tender place in the hearts of many believers. We live in a world of distractions, disappointments, discouragements, and anxiety about the future. It is so easy to become overwhelmed, lose our focus and take our eyes off of Jesus who promises us hope and peace amidst life's many challenges.

Turning our eyes upon Jesus is a way of life for us, as His followers. By fixing our gaze on Him, trusting in His guidance, seeking His Kingdom first and walking in love, we can navigate life's journey with purpose and resilience.

This year's retreat, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," will take place on Saturday, April 11, 2026. It begins with coffee and fellowship at 9 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m. The cost is \$20. We welcome back Rev. Kris Peterson as our retreat leader. To register please call Sonya Sowards at (610) 933-3947, ext. 2. If you have any questions please contact Linda Landis. This retreat is limited to 24 participants.

You are invited to bring an object that represents Jesus' love for you.

Un-Decorating for Christmas

What is put up must come down, so following the service on Sunday, January 4th, the "Un-Decorating" will take place. Many hands make light work, so plan to stay a little longer and help ready the sanctuary for Epiphany.



Adult Faith Formation

Sunday morning groups for adults include *Happy Hour*, meeting in the Eisenhower Room—friendly chats while children are in Sunday school; *Faith Life*, meeting in Room 1 by the stage—discussions about faith and recent media articles; *Bible Study*, meeting in the Fireside Room, which will continue the Advent study before beginning the study of Revelation; and *Sunday Morning Book Club*, meeting in Pastor Russ's office, which will be reading & discussing "The Wild Rose" by Jennifer Donnelly throughout the month of January. Join any of the four groups on Sundays at 9 a.m.

Thank you to the Grejduš, Cady, McGregor, and Martin families for lighting the Advent wreath candle each week.

Thank you to everyone who helped with "Hanging of the Greens" on December 21st and to those who plan to help with the "Un-Decorating" on January 4th. The church always looks beautiful and that is accomplished with the help of so many.

Thank you to the Supplee family for providing fresh evergreen wreaths for the three wooden doors to the narthex.



The Two Paper Retriever / Collection Bins are Gone

The company that manages the paper collection bins recently made the decision to not support this part of Chester County any longer. The bins were removed a few days before Thanksgiving. Given the complications we've had with the bins over the last several years, this is not a bad thing. This was no longer a fundraiser for the church, and the collections were very erratic.

St. John's appreciates the member and community support shown over the years to be environmentally friendly and recycle paper products. We hope everyone will continue to do so. Most private trash haulers have a single stream recycling option. For Schuylkill Township residents there are dedicated cardboard box

recycle bins at the township building on the corner of Valley Park and Whitehorse Roads that are a great option for bulk cardboard. Please fully flatten your boxes when taking them there.

Please continue to do everything possible to protect our planet.

Council Nominations

We need to replace **2-3 council members** in February. If you would like to nominate someone (including yourself) for council, please speak to a council member.

No More Campbells Soup Labels

Thank you for bringing Campbells soup labels; however, the company has discontinued the program so no more are needed.

Shoe Collection is Back!

The Green Team is pleased to announce that we have partnered with Soles4Souls to collect any type of gently used shoes. The collection container remains in the glass door entrance and is available to accept the donation of your shoes. Thanks for helping the planet by keeping some shoes from going to the landfill.

Annual Meeting February 22nd after worship



Voting members—be sure to mark your calendars for our upcoming annual meeting! In our congregation's constitution, "Voting Members" are defined as "**confirmed** members who during the current or preceding calendar year, [...] have **communed** in this congregation and [...] have made a **contribution** of record to this congregation." While all are welcome to be a part of the congregational meeting, only members who meet those criteria are able to vote in the congregational meeting. Your **contribution** is recorded when it includes your name and/or envelope number. To ensure that your **communion** is recorded, please fill out the "Record of Communion and/or Prayer Request" card at least once a year. Communion cards can be found in the pew racks at the end of each pew.



Appalachia Service Project this summer

Do you have a heart and passion for service? It's time to start planning for our 2026 ASP mission trip! Each year, volunteers from St. John's spend a week in service, faith, and fellowship helping families in need throughout Central Appalachia. The trip is open to all adults and youth who have completed 8th grade. Whether you're a first-timer or a seasoned volunteer, we'd love to have you join the team! Contact Jodi O'Neill for details or to express your interest. (oneillsinvf@comcast.net or (610) 716-6644.

January Worship Staff

Acolyte

4 TBD
11 TBD
18 TBD
25 TBD

Altar Guild

4 Nancy Cressman & Janet Ertell
11 Donna Anderson & Cathy Garrett
18 Andrea Hart & Betty Hans
25 Betty Hans & Andrea Hart

Assisting Minister

4 Ron Stevens
11 Tom Snyder
18 Mimi Woods
25 Deb Ahola

Bread Bakers

3/4 Adam & Gwen Supplee/TBD
10/11 Adam & Gwen Supplee/Jeanne Schanzenbach
17/18 Adam & Gwen Supplee/TBD
24/25 Adam & Gwen Supplee/TBD

Communion Assistant/Lector

4 Lynn Titus
11 Bill Starling
18 Nancy Cressman
25 Walt Deichmann

Counters

4 Jack & Janet Ertell
11 Heather Yonosh & Jeanne Schanzenbach
18 Mary Heiser; Mike & Cathy Kahl
25 Stephen & Jen Drewes

Evening Light Assistant

4 Sandra Momyer
11 Buzz Hadfield
18 Rich Latella
25 Toni Hadfield
31 Sandra Momyer

Fellowship Time

11 Property Committee

Lock-up

4 Dale Herbranson
11 Jeanne Schanzenbach
18 Kyle Oszeyczik
25 John Dorward

Stream Team

4 Josh Romano & Paul Miller
11 Dale Herbranson
18 Nils Aho & Josh Romano
25 Aimee Hillegas

Ushers

4 Don Titus & Donna Anderson
11 Sue Starling & Barry Church
18 Diane & Katelyn Blattner
25 Jen Drewes & Nancy Cressman

January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 10:15am Holy Communion 3pm Girl Scouts 4041 3pm Girl Scouts 41766	29 11am Alanon Family Group 7pm Finance Committee	30	31 7pm Alanon	1 7pm Naranon	2	3 10am DAR 5pm Evening Light (w/communion) 7pm Alcoholics Anonymous
4 8:30am Children's Choir 9am Faith Formation 10:15am Holy Communion 11:15am Undecorating 2pm Girl Scouts #41441	5 10:15am Staff 11am Alanon Family Group 5pm Stewardship Committee 6pm Cadette Troop 42024 7pm Property 7pm Stephen Ministry	6 6pm Girl Scouts 6:30pm Faith Formation Committee 7:30pm Worship & Music	7 4pm Social Ministry 7pm Alanon 7pm Fellowship Committee 7:30pm Adult Choir Rehearsal	8 7pm Naranon 7:15pm Adult Handbells	9	10 5pm Evening Light (w/communion) 7pm Alcoholics Anonymous
11 8:30am Children's Choir 9am Faith Formation 9:45am Fellowship Time 10:15am Holy Communion 2pm PCO Rehearsal 3pm Girl Scouts 4041 3pm Girl Scouts 41766	12 11am Alanon Family Group 7pm Church Council	13 6:30pm Parents' Grief Group 8pm Welcoming Team	14 5:15pm Daisy Girl Scouts 6pm Girl Scouts #4432 7pm Alanon 7:30pm Adult Choir Rehearsal	15 7pm Naranon 7:15pm Adult Handbells 8:15pm Naranon Support	16 St. Peter's lunch Confirmation retreat	17 Confirmation retreat 5pm Evening Light (w/communion) 7pm Alcoholics Anonymous
18 Confirmation retreat Circle deadline 8:30am Children's Choir 9am Faith Formation 10:15am Holy Communion	19 11am Alanon Family Group 7pm Green Team 7pm Stephen Ministry	20 4pm Girl Scouts 6pm Girl Scouts	21 7pm Alanon 7:30pm Adult Choir Rehearsal	22 7pm Naranon 7:15pm Adult Handbells	23	24 5pm Evening Light (w/communion) 7pm Alcoholics Anonymous
25 8:30am Children's Choir 9am Faith Formation 10:15am Holy Communion 2pm Girl Scouts #41441 2pm PCO Rehearsal 3pm Girl Scouts 4041 3pm Girl Scouts 41766	26 10am Garden Club 11am Alanon Family Group 6pm Cadette Troop 42024 7pm Finance Committee	27 10:30am WELCA 7pm Fellowship Committee	28 5:15pm Daisy Girl Scouts 6pm Girl Scouts #4432 7pm Alanon 7:30pm Adult Choir Rehearsal	29 7pm Naranon 7:15pm Adult Handbells	30	31 5pm Evening Light (w/communion) 7pm Alcoholics Anonymous

January 2026 Birthdays and Anniversaries

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 Jen Drewes's birthday Madelynn Doepping's birthday Maura Lockett's birthday	29 Justin O'Neill's birthday Mark and Deborah Wallace's anniversary	30 Tom Snyder III's birthday	31 Jodi O'Neill's birthday	1	2 Bruce and Elena Wallace's anniversary Craig Emery's birthday Ela Drewes's birthday	3 Jayden Carey's birthday
4 Ashley Westerman's birthday Debbe Welsh's birthday	5 Allison Andrews's birthday Janet Ertell's birthday	6 Elisa Khan's birthday	7 Jake New's birthday	8 Angela Bearoff's birthday Quinn Oszeyczik's birthday	9	10 David and Susan Schumacher's anniversary
11	12 Leah Carey's birthday	13	14 Brynn Klotzbach's birthday Jack Kramer's birthday Katie Kramer's birthday	15	16 Eli Melton's birthday	17 Cole Cummins's birthday Rachel Bearoff's birthday
18 Annalynne Grace Thompson's birthday Marie Snyder's birthday	19 Margaret Lane's birthday	20 Elise Staudenmaler's birthday Jullus Sherrick's birthday Katie Miller's birthday Rose Gatlos's birthday	21 Kaleb McGregor's birthday Maggie McGregor's birthday Peyton Barker's birthday	22	23	24
25 Byron Seyler's birthday Susan Schumacher's birthday	26 Anna Schablie's birthday Eille Schablie's birthday Hannah Kramer's birthday Kimberly Breidenbach's birthday Mary Scavello's birthday	27 Gary Campbell's birthday William Stobier's birthday	28 Crew W. Quaglia's birthday Lily Stewart's birthday	29	30 Charles Soult's birthday Cindy Gadzick's birthday	31 Stephanie Riley's birthday



Sunday, February 15, 4:00 p.m.
 Stacy Arnold, Classical Guitar,
 St. John's Lutheran Church
*"A variety of guitar music, stylistically
 pleasing in every way."*

www.stacyarnoldguitar.com



**St. John's Lutheran Church
Council Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2025**

Council Member Name	Pres/Exc/ or Absent	Committee Assigned	Term 1/2	Term Ends
John Dorward (President)	Present	Executive	1	2/2028
Marc Staudenmaier (VP)	Present	Stewardship, Executive	1	2/2026
Sue Starling (Secretary)	Present	Executive	2	2/2027
Janet Gerner	Present	Social Ministry	2	2/2026
Dale Herbranson	Present	Electronics, Columbarium, Exec At-Large Member	2	2/2026
Kate Hicks	Present	Faith Formation, Welcoming	1	2/2027
Aimee Hillegas	Present	Green Team	2	2/2027
Mike Kahl	Present	Property	2	2/2028
Kyle Oszeyczik	Present	Property	1	2/2027
Jeanne Schanzenbach	Present	Finance, Exec At-Large Member	1	2/2026
Becky Stevens	Present	Worship and Music	1	2/2028
Rachel Zimmermann	Present	Fellowship	1	2/2028
Pastor Russ	Present	n/a		
Guests:				
Sonya Sowards	Present	n/a		
Tom Snyder	Present	n/a		

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by John.

Council devotional was led by Mike.

Prior Meeting Minutes

10/13/25 Council Minutes:

Motion by Becky, second by Dale to accept the minutes; motion carried with two abstentions.

Staff Reports

Motion by Kyle, second by Kate to accept Staff reports; motion carried.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee meeting minutes from 10/27/25:

Motion by Sue, second by Marc to accept Finance Committee report; motion carried.

Council reviewed the following Committee Reports:

- Electronics Committee of 10/07/25 – accepted as written.
- Faith Formation – no notes provided.
- Property Committee of 11/03/25 – accepted as written.
- Worship and Music Committee of 11/04/25 – accepted as written.
- Social Ministry Committee of 11/05/25 – accepted as written.
- Fellowship Committee of 10/28/25 – accepted as written.
- Columbarium Committee – did not meet.
- Executive Committee – did not meet.
- Stewardship Committee of 10/20/25 and 11/03/25– accepted as written.
- Welcome Team Committee of 10/14/25 – accepted as written.
- Green Team of 10/20/25 – accepted as written.

Motion by Kate, second by Mike to accept committee reports; motion carried.

Old Business

- Lock-Up signup – covered.
- Audit Committee Update – Report provided to Council members. In general, no findings – but some suggestions for improvement in audit process. John to verify the ongoing existence of the safe deposit box at Phoenixville Federal.
- Muhlenberg Parish update - next major activity is the 5th Sunday joint service on November 30th. Other MP pastors will participate in the service. Next meeting is November 19th.
- Endowment Fund Committee – first meeting this Wednesday, 11/12.
- Council nominations for February – continue to consider potential candidates.
- Stewardship Pledge Campaign: Council Outreach Update – Marc sent an email, awaiting responses.
- RIC Update – Initial meeting to discuss next steps was held; working to form a team.
- Peer Ministry Update – Kyle indicated that there is interest in pursuing this; will sign up for upcoming training.
- DCYFM Position Update – have reworked the position description; Faith Formation to review at their next meeting this week.
- Church Insurance – new quote received from Brotherhood Mutual; committee met with broker and reviewed the coverage. Premium is lower, coverage is comparable and deductibles are lower. Will make the change effective immediately; refund for unused premium will be received from Church Mutual.
 - Task Force submitted a motion to proceed with replacing our current insurance coverage from Church Mutual with that proposed by Jeff Beers of the Bower Agency for coverage with Brotherhood Mutual. **Dale seconded the motion, motion carried.**

New Business

- Question was raised about the integrity of our ‘voting members’ count, many people don’t turn in cards throughout the year – agreed would be addressed by Executive Committee before the Annual Meeting in February 2026.
- Invitation to Congregation – ‘Try Two’ – idea to ask people to try out two new things (i.e. attend a committee meeting, participate in a new activity) and commit to one that moves them. Idea would be to roll it out in January, maybe tie into New Year’s resolutions – could have a ministry fair, with people representing committees/groups. Intent is to get more people involved. Sue to take point on this.
- St. John’s Constitution Update – Changes to the model constitution were made this past summer, best practice is to change to match that. General clean-up also needs to happen. Mike volunteered to head up the effort – changes should be forwarded to Mike.

John adjourned the meeting by decree at 8:04.

Next regular meeting is December 8, 2025.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Starling

Church Council Secretary

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355 St. John's Circle
Phoenixville, PA 19460
(610) 933-3947

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CHURCH STAFF

Lead Pastor

The Rev. K. Russell Crouthamel

Pastoral Associate:

The Rev. Thomas Kochenderfer, Jr.

Director of Music:

F. Thomas Snyder III

Organist & Pianist:

John A. Quinn III

Parish Administrator:

Sonya K. Sowards

Sexton:

Mark Yanchek, Jr.

Nursery Coordinator:

Arlene Hudak

CHURCH COUNCIL

President:

John Dorward

Vice President:

Marc Staudenmaier

Secretary:

Sue Starling

Treasurer:

Shirley Platzer

Assistant Treasurer:

Don Titus

Financial Recording Secretary:

Mary Heiser

Executive Committee:

Dale Herbranson

Jeanne Schanzenbach

Other Members of Council:

Mike Kahl

Janet Gerner

Kyle Oszeyczik

Aimee Hillegas

Kate Hicks

Rachel Zimmermann

Becky Stevens

Stephen Ministry Leader:

Linda Landis — (610) 933-9544

COMMITTEES

Columbarium:

Bill Starling, Chair
Dale Herbranson, Council Rep.

Electronics:

Bill Schoellkopf, Chair
Dale Herbranson, Council Rep.

Executive:

Marc Staudenmaier, Chair

Faith Formation:

Erica Reading, Chair
Kate Hicks, Council Reps.

Fellowship:

Sandra Zimmermann, Chair
Rachel Zimmermann, Council Rep.

Finance:

Kevin Gallagher, Chair
Jeanne Schanzenbach
Council Rep.

Green Team

Aimee Hillegas, Council Rep.

Mutual Ministry:

Kyle Oszeyczik, Council Rep.

Property:

Bobbi Riley, Chair
Mike Kahl, Council Rep.
Kyle Oszeyczik, Council Rep.

Social Ministry:

Janet Gerner, Chair & Council Rep.

Stewardship:

Marc Staudenmaier, Council Rep.

Welcoming Team:

Kate Hicks, Chair & Council Rep.

Worship and Music:

Jean Herbranson, Chair
Becky Stevens, Council Rep.

Office Assistants:

Joan Carl
Pat Renninger

The Circle Editor:

Sonya K. Sowards

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office hours 9-3 M,T,Th & 9-12 W,F (with exceptions)
please call for appointments with staff members
A Caring, Sharing, Growing Congregation of the ELCA

Worship Schedule

Saturdays

5 p.m. Evening Light with Holy Communion

Sundays

10:15 a.m. Holy Communion
(fall, winter and spring)

9:00 a.m. Holy Communion
(Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day)
Handicapped Accessible

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January 2026