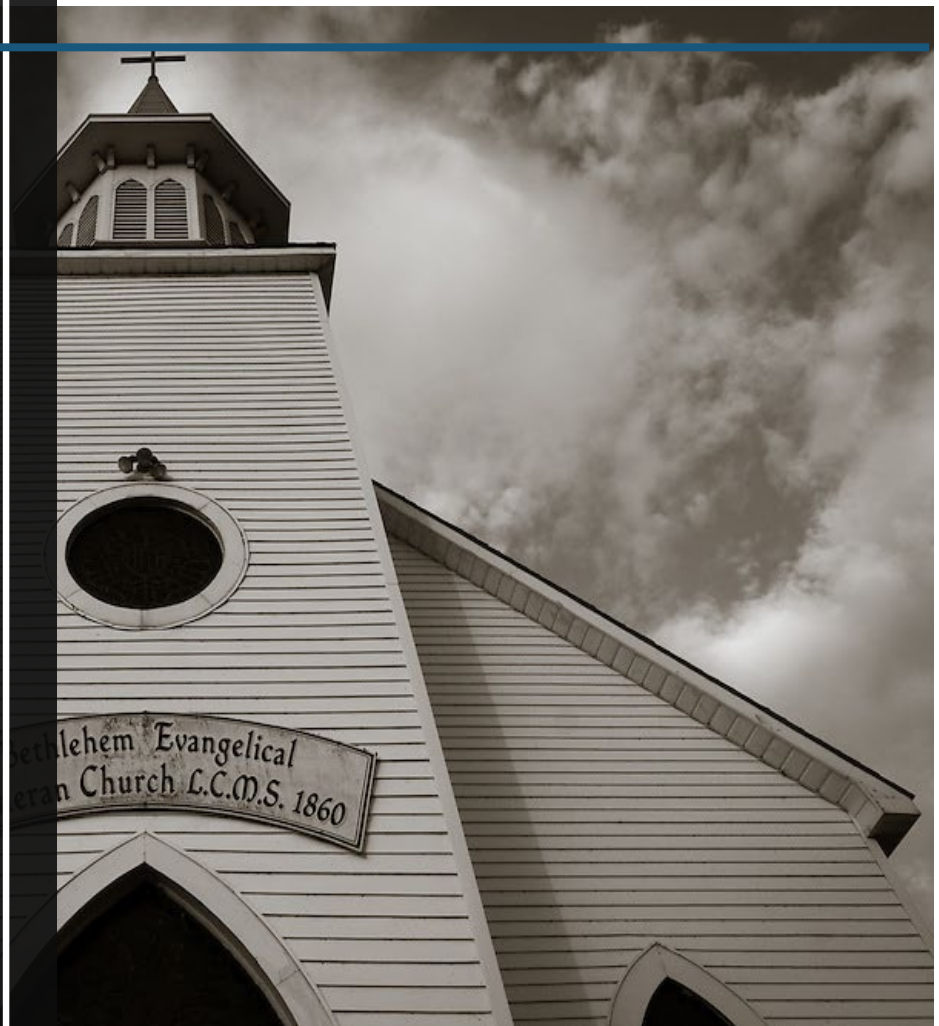


Ghost Town Gazette

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
William Penn, Texas

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“The march, not the dirge,
has ever been the music of
Christianity. If we are good
students in the school of life,
there is much that the years
have to teach us. But the
Christian is more than a
student, more than a
philosopher. He is a believer,
and the object of his faith
makes the difference, the
mighty difference.”

- Martin Luther

BEGINNING THE YEAR WHERE LIFE IS GIVEN

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

January invites us to begin again. The calendar turns, resolutions are made, and hopes are set for what lies ahead. Yet the Church has always known that a truly new beginning is not found in self-improvement or renewed effort, but in what God gives. For that reason, there is no better way to begin the new year than gathered around God's Word and His Sacraments.

The world teaches us to look inward at the start of the year: be better, try harder, fix yourself. Holy Scripture teaches us to look outward, away from ourselves and to Christ. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Every beginning worth trusting starts there. God's Word does what it says. It creates faith where there was unbelief, repentance where there was pride, comfort where there was despair, and life where there was death.

Week after week, the Word preached and read among us delivers Christ Himself, crucified and risen for sinners. This is not information to be mastered, but a promise to be received. As Luther reminds us, the Gospel is not advice but good news. At the start of a new year, when the weight of expectations can press heavily, God's Word steadies us by declaring what is already true: your sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

That same Christ comes to us bodily in His Sacraments. In Holy Baptism, we are not merely reminded of a past event; we are given a present identity. "I am baptized" is not a slogan but a daily confession. The old Adam is drowned, and the new creation in Christ is raised, again and again. When the year brings uncertainty, temptation, or sorrow, your Baptism stands firm because it rests on God's promise, not your resolve.

In the Lord's Supper, Christ places into our mouths His true body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Here the crucified Lord meets us personally, strengthening faith and binding us to Himself and to one another. This is no symbolic meal to mark a fresh start, but the very medicine of immortality for sinners on the way.

As this new year begins, I encourage you to order your life around where Christ has promised to be for you: in His Word and Sacraments. Make the Divine Service your anchor, not your afterthought. Bring your joys and your burdens, your plans and your failures, and receive what only God can give.

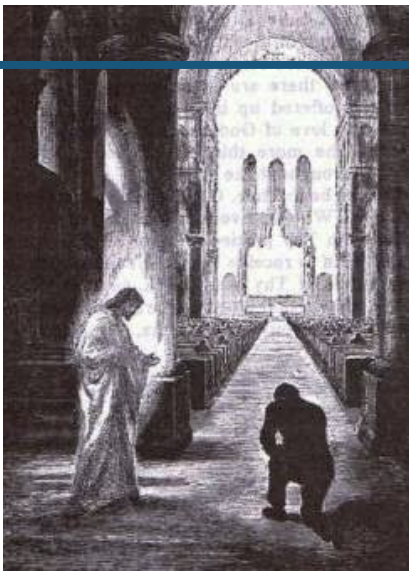
The year is new, but Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In Him, you already have everything you need.

In Christ's Service and Yours,
Pastor Krieg



**"In the
beginning
was the
Word."**

John 1:1



THROUGH THE LITURGY: GENUFLECTING

Why We Genuflect: Reverence Before the Real Presence of Christ

From time to time, you may notice the pastor briefly bow or genuflect during the Divine Service, especially at the Words of Institution, when he goes down on one knee. You may also see members bowing during certain moments of worship. These actions are not empty ritual or personal preference. They are bodily confessions of what we believe Christ is doing for us in the Divine Service.

What is genuflecting?

To genuflect simply means to bend the knee, usually briefly, as an act of reverence. A bow serves a similar purpose. Scripture consistently links the bending of the body with worship: "Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker" (Psalm 95:6). Our bodies confess what our mouths believe.

Why does the pastor genuflect at the Words of Institution?

At the Words of Institution, Christ Himself speaks through His called servant. According to Christ's promise, His true body and blood are truly present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. The genuflection is not directed toward the elements as such, but toward Christ, who humbles Himself to be present for us for the forgiveness of sins. It is a silent confession of the Real Presence and an act of reverent awe before the mystery of the Gospel.

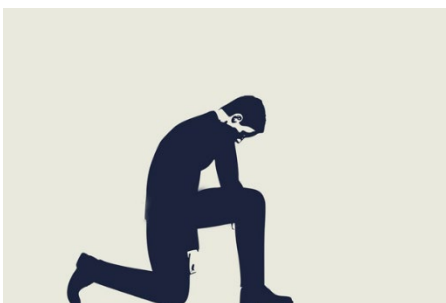
Biblical and Historical Roots

Scripture teaches that every knee shall bow to Jesus (Philippians 2:10). Throughout Christian history, Christians have used physical gestures, kneeling, bowing, making the sign of the cross, to confess faith in Christ and His gifts. The Lutheran Confessions explicitly affirm that ceremonies which teach the Gospel and serve good order may be retained (Augsburg Confession XV). Genuflecting falls squarely within this evangelical freedom.

Why may members also bow or kneel?

Members may bow during the name of Jesus, at the Creed, or when receiving the Sacrament, not as a requirement, but as a personal confession of faith. These gestures do not earn God's favor; Christ already gives that freely. Rather, they train our bodies to confess what our hearts believe: that Jesus Christ is truly present among us, serving us with His saving gifts.

In all of this, our posture reflects our theology. We bow not out of fear, but out of faith, because the crucified and risen Lord comes to us in mercy.



“And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

Acts 9:4-6



HEROES OF FAITH: THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

Each month, we will highlight one of the many heroes of the Christian faith who have stood firm in the truth of Holy Scripture. We will look at the apostles who knew our Lord Jesus Christ personally, his friends who were witnesses to His miracles, the faithful ancestors of the Old Testament who patiently awaited His first Advent, as well as the many other Godly men and women who have been bold witnesses throughout the years, to the one true faith. We look to them not as people to be worshiped or prayed to but as ordinary sinners, like us, to whom the Holy Spirit gave faith to be extraordinary. They are holy because the blood of Christ forgave their sins. They are holy because the Holy Spirit gave them a living faith in which the love of Christ shone through.

On January 25th, the Church rejoices in the memory of the Conversion of St. Paul.

On January 25, the Church celebrates the Conversion of St. Paul, a feast that proclaims the power of God's grace to save even the greatest of sinners. Saul of Tarsus was not seeking Christ. He was persecuting the Church, breathing threats and violence against believers. Yet on the road to Damascus, the risen Jesus sought him. Struck blind by the glory of Christ, Saul was brought low, emptied of his pride, and raised again through the Word and Baptism. He emerged as Paul, an apostle sent to preach Christ crucified to the Gentiles. We celebrate this day not because of Paul's decision, strength, or sincerity, but because of God's mercy. Paul's conversion shows that salvation is God's work alone. Christ turns enemies into servants, sinners into saints, and persecutors into proclaimers. This feast comforts the Church: if Christ could claim Paul, there is no sinner beyond His saving grace.



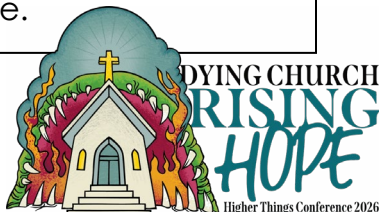
NEXT MEETING



On Sunday, January 4th, the Youth League will meet for its monthly meeting after church. We will be discussing Higher Things, our next outing, and quiz night, among other things.

We will also be taking down the Christmas tree in preparation for the Epiphany Season.

If you are going to attend **Higher Things** this summer in St. Louis, you need to let Pastor Krieg know by **January 18th** so we can get the early-bird registration price.



YOUTH LEAGUE UPDATE

December was a very busy time of the year. As in the past, for many, many years, the youth have been decorating the Christmas tree in the sanctuary, which we did again this year, along with setting up the manger scene.

The youth hosted the Young At Heart dinner where gifts were given during games played.

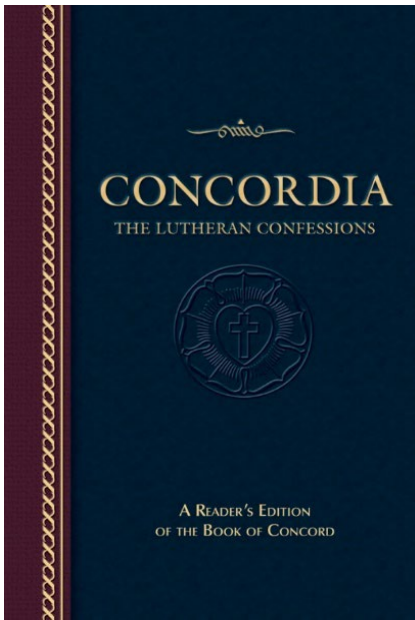
They also helped with the placing of the wreaths at the Wreaths Across America event on December 13th.

On December 19th, the youth lent their voices to carol to our special members of the congregation.



THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS: ARTICLE XVIII

FREE WILL



Article II and Article XVIII (which we will consider here) are linked in such a way that if you misread one, you will almost certainly misread the other. The errors of Pelagius and Arminius, which we studied under AC II, prove this. Pelagius, in his desire to combat the idea salvation gives the liberty to sin, taught that man is morally indifferent and must choose between right and wrong even in matters of salvation. Consequently, he had to abandon the Biblical teaching on Original Sin. The same is true of Arminius. He taught human beings can and must aid in their own conversion (synergism), and so our free will in matters of salvation was only partially damaged by the fall.

However, when one has a correct understanding of Original sin, and confesses that since the fall, we are all by nature set against God, then any thought of freedom of our human will in spiritual things is nonexistent.

ACXVIII teaches, *"Our churches teach that a person's will has some freedom to choose civil righteousness and to do things subject to reason."*

Humans are not robots. We are not programmed to do everything God wants us to do. We are given the ability to reason and to make rational choices. In the garden, God gave Adam and Eve one command, and they had a choice to obey or not. In the fall, the image of God was lost, and we now possess a hatred of God from conception, but we have not lost our ability to reason, to make choices. However, this freedom of our will is limited to outward matters only, to things having to do with this life.

This is what we call "civil righteousness". Civil righteousness is present in all people because God has given us an innate understanding of right and wrong, as Paul describes in Romans 2:12-16. The problem is that people confuse civil righteousness (obeying the law in outward matters) with spiritual righteousness (being holy before God). Many unknowingly become Pelagians by equating civil righteousness with spiritual righteousness.

For example, the atheist who lives an outwardly decent life, gives to the poor, and volunteers their time to help others may seem to be predisposed to good, despite their unbelief. But Scripture time and again says differently (Rm. 8:7-8; Heb. 11:6; Rm. 14:23; Mt. 7:17-19).

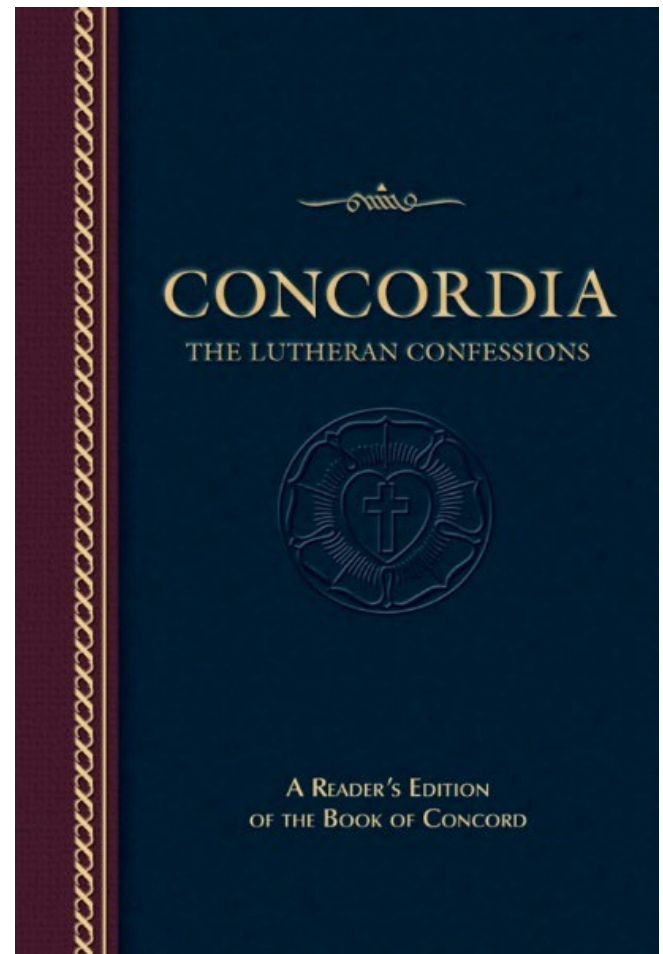
THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS: ARTICLE XVIII - FREE WILL

Civil righteousness makes life easier here on earth by keeping a certain amount of order. But we must never forget we are not saved by our good works. Only Christ's work on the cross and His righteousness declare us right before God. Our free will has no part with this righteousness (Romans 3:21-31).

ACXVIII continues, *"It has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness. For 'the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God' (1 Corinthians 2:14). This righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word [Galatians 3:2-6].* While civil righteousness may be attributed to free will, spiritual righteousness comes only through the Holy Spirit. Any cooperation of man with God in connection with salvation destroys the Biblical teaching of Grace alone (Romans 11:6).

Our salvation is brought about completely through the working of God, and not through any free will on our part, which aids God in His saving us. To go further than this is to fall into one of two common errors. 1) An overemphasis on freedom of the will leads to the Arminian teaching of synergism, which attributes part of man's salvation to the cooperation of man with God. Both salvation and damnation rest on the individual sinner, according to their choice. 2) An overemphasis on the bondage of the will leads to the Calvinist teaching of double predestination, which attributes man's damnation to the eternal decree of God. Both salvation and damnation rest on God, according to His choice.

God's Word teaches that He has saved us, not because of anything in us, but through His grace alone. We cannot contribute to our salvation in any way. Scripture nowhere teaches that God has predestined anyone to eternal damnation; rather, He desires the salvation of all people (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).



MEET YOUR NEW LEADERSHIP

At our last voters' meeting of the year, elections were held to replace our outgoing congregational officers and leaders, who served their terms faithfully and fulfilled their tasks with love and dedication. Please take note of the current and new officers and keep them in your prayers as "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

Congregational Leadership for 2026

(*) Denotes newly elected leaders.

Officers

President – Fred Boecker
Vice President – Matt Kettler
Secretary – Vickie Ashorn
Head Usher – Paul Richter*

Board of Elders

Clinton Kettler
Brad Molitor
Chris Smitherman*

Board of Trustees

Doyle Dahmann*
Michael Schroeder
Robert Kettler*

Board of Finance

Treasurer – Kellie Goessler*
Financial Secretary - Jackie Kankel*
Collector – Stanley Haferkamp*
Collector – Wendy Ashorn

Board of Missions

Marilyn Klussmann
Connie Foster*
Dorcus Schroeder*

Board of Education

Sheryl Schroeder
Amy Schroeder*
Sunday School Superintendent – Sharon Schwartz*
Sunday School Secretary – Emily Searle*

Board of Stewardship

Mary Wells*
Laramie Kettler
Peggy McDonald

3RD ANNUAL QUIZ NIGHT

The Bethlehem Lutheran Church Youth League, in conjunction with the Grace Lutheran Church Youth League in Brenham, would like to invite you to the 3rd Annual Quiz Night on Friday, February 20th, at the Sons of Hermann Hall in Brenham. The night will begin at 6 pm and finish at 9 pm.

For those who have not participated, let me explain. The evening will consist of 10 rounds of trivia. Questions are answered by teams using the provided forms. The forms are collected and tabulated after each round, and team standings are announced during the evening. Each round will have a different focus to test your overall trivia knowledge. Prizes will be awarded to the winners after each round throughout the night. A Quiz Night Champion will be crowned at the end of the evening. Will your team be proven the smartest in Washington County? Will the trophy go to Grace, or will Bethlehem keep it? Sign up to find out!

Apart from being great fun, the evening raises money for both youth groups to attend their youth conference this summer. Quiz teams consist of 6 people at a cost of \$20 per person (which can be paid the night of). A light supper and snacks will be provided during the evening. There are excellent prizes up for grabs throughout the night and for the winning teams. We would love it if you could enter a team in the quiz, or if you cannot, please consider sponsoring a round. Please RSVP by February 9th. For questions or to RSVP, contact Pastor Krieg.

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”
Psalm 139:13-14

SANCTITY OF LIFE SUNDAY



“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” is Lutherans For Life’s theme for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, which is set for January 18, 2026. As a congregation, we will be observing Sanctity of Human Life Sunday on that date.

Our Life Sunday 2026 theme is based on Psalm 139:13-14: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”

We will unpack this theme and what it means for the For Life movement, both nationally and here at Bethlehem, and in our community. My prayer is that this will provide valuable information and encouragement to you, our community, and the life-affirming work we are engaged in.

LEARN WITH OUR CONFIRMANDS

Memorization is a key component of Confirmation and of being a lifelong learner of Scripture. I ask that you keep our confirmands in your prayers and encourage them in their studies. To that end, I have placed all the memory work they will be learning this month below, and I challenge you to dust off your Small Catechism and relearn the treasures we hold so dear alongside them. The Small Catechism is not just for the young or those going through Confirmation; it is for us all. When you see them, recite the memory with them, encourage them in their studies, and let them know you support them and are praying for them.

January	Catechism Memorization (Wednesdays)	Scripture Memorization (recited on Sundays)
7-Jan	5 th Petition w/ meaning	Psalm 106:1
14-Jan	6 th Petition w/ meaning	Ephesians 4:32
21-Jan	No Class	Jeremiah 1:5
28-Jan	7 th Petition w/ meaning	2 Thessalonians 3:3

January 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Alyssa Hayden 6:00 – 7:00 PM Elders' Meeting 6:30 – 8:00 PM Ladies Bible Study	2 Pauline Kettler	3 Jim Straker
4 Geraldine Pohlmeier 9:00 – 10:00 AM Sunday School & Adult Bible Class 9:00 – 10:00 AM Youth League Mtg 10:15 – 11:15 AM Worship w/ Communion	5	6 Waldo Holle, Henry Kettler 7 – 8:00 PM Epiphany Worship w/ Communion	7 Braylee Schomburg 4:30 – 6:00 PM Confirmation Class 7th/8th Grade	8 Terie Gresham 6:30 – 8:00 PM Ladies Bible Study	9 Keith Huber	10 Colleen Latham, Marc Maya
11 Brian Crabb 9:00 – 10:00 AM Sunday School & Adult Bible Class 10:15 – 11:15 AM Worship w/ Communion 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Shekel Store	12 Chuck Boggan, Valgene Kohring	13 Naomi Brocksmith	14 8:30 – 9:30 AM Sonshine 4:30 – 6:00 PM Confirmation Class 7th/8th Grade 7:00 – 8:00 PM Church Council	15 Samuel Smitherman 6:30 – 8:00 PM Ladies Bible Study	16	17
18 9:00 – 10:00 AM Sunday School & Adult Bible Class 10:15 – 11:15 AM Worship w/ Communion	19 Judy Baichtal, Mike Schroeder	20	21 Doyle Dahmann	22 6:30 – 8:00 PM Ladies Bible Study	23 Ray Andrejczak	24 8:30 – 9:30 AM Sisters in Christ
25 9:00 – 10:00 AM Sunday School & Adult Bible Class 10:15 – 11:15 AM Worship w/ Communion	26	27	28 Lucas Searle 4:30 – 6:00 PM Confirmation Class 7th/8th Grade 7:30 – 9:00 PM Voters' Meeting	29 Kevin Harrington 6:30 – 8:00 PM Ladies Bible Study	30 Heather Ashorn	31 Blake Powers, Dawson Powers, Maylee Powers

January 2026

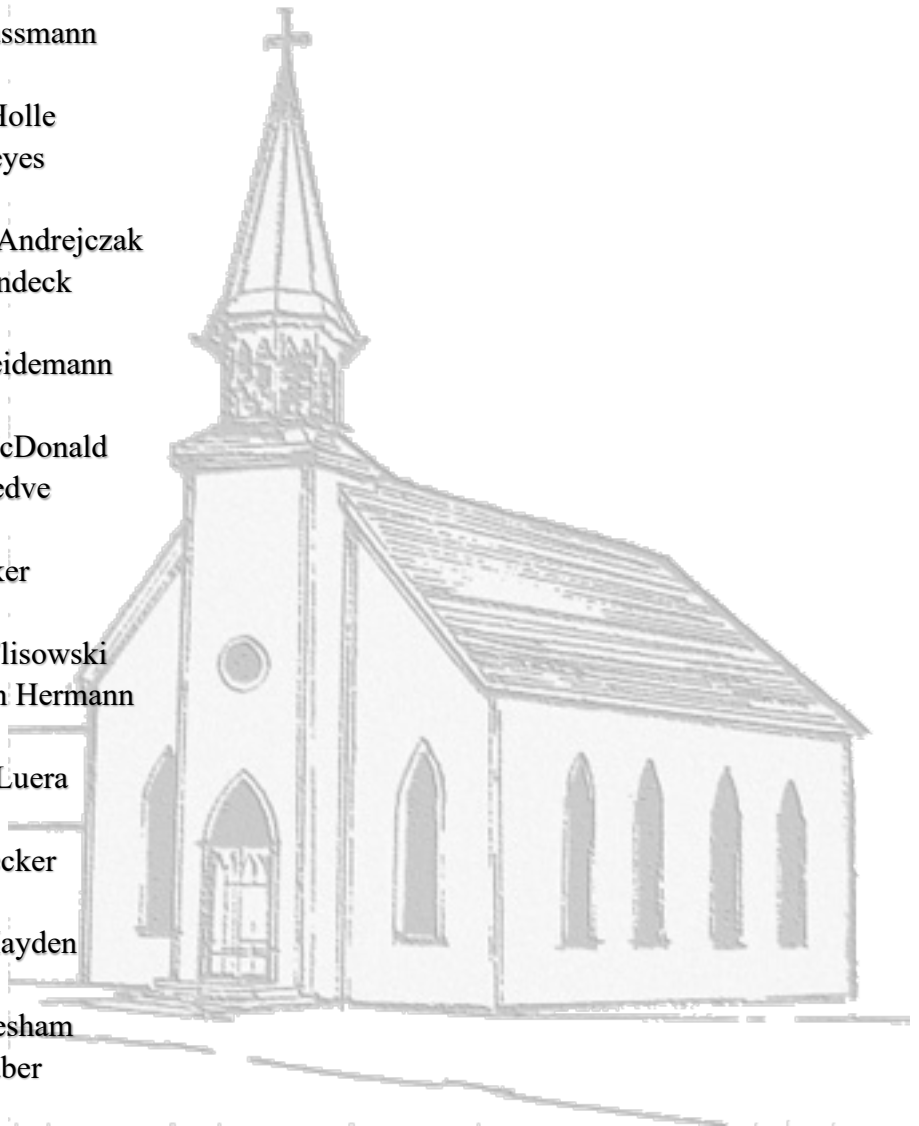
Birthdays

1 Alyssa Hayden
 2 Pauline Kettler
 3 Jim Straker
 4 Geraldine Pohlmeier
 6 Waldo Holle
 7 Braylee Schomburg
 8 Terie Gresham
 9 Keith Huber
 10 Colleen Latham
 Marc Maya
 11 Brian Crabb
 12 Chuck Boggan
 Valgene Kohring
 13 Naomi Brocksmith
 15 Samuel Smitherman
 19 Judy Baichtal
 Mike Schroeder
 21 Doyle Dahmann
 23 Ray Andrejczak
 28 Lucas Searle
 29 Kevin Harrington
 30 Heather Ashorn
 31 Blake Powers
 Dawson Powers
 Maylee Powers

Baptismal Birthdays

1 Arturo Maya
 Pat Meyer
 Janice Pazderny
 5 Adrienne Guthrie
 6 Logan Schwartz
 8 Brian Ashorn
 9 Corey Klusmann
 10 Andrea Holle
 Javier Reyes
 11 Melanie Andrejczak
 Carin Landeck
 14 Gene Weidemann
 19 Peggy McDonald
 Tripp Medve
 20 Jim Straker
 24 Brenda Flisowski
 Benjamin Hermann
 26 Jennifer Luera
 29 Fred Boecker
 30 Alyssa Hayden
 31 Terie Gresham
 Keith Huber

Wedding Anniversaries



BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH-
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