

July
2025

St. John Lutheran Church



St. John Lutheran Church
PO Box 411
420 Beaver Street
Mars, PA 16046

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Church Office: (724) 625-1830
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Pastor Katie's email: pastorkmcneal@gmail.com
Pastor's Cell #: 412-407-3166

Please call to ensure availability before coming to the office.

Mission Statement

St. John is a living witness to the love of God as shown in Jesus Christ.

*We gather faithfully in God's name to **worship** and praise God; and we go forth in peace to **share** the Good News and to **serve** the world around us.*

"Keep loving each other like family. ² Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. ³ Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place."

Hebrews 13:1-3

I recently started reading "The Amen Effect" by Rabbi Sharon Brous. I haven't made it very far in the book, but I'm already struck by an early theme that Brous introduces in the book that seems particularly relevant to our CAKE conversations. She summarized this theme in a maxim offered by her grandmother: "If, God forbid, you would fly in for the funeral, you'd better find a way to make it there for the wedding." Within the maxim is the rich ministry of presence. Life is full of ups and downs, twists and turns, but none of it is meant to be experienced alone. We are created in community. We are created to share our experiences with others – whether they are times of grief or hardship (like funerals) or times of celebration or joy (like weddings). And as church, we participate in the ministry of presence, of seeing others go through the ups and downs, twists and turns of life, and choosing to show up, to be present, to share in the experience of life and hold one another closely through all that life has to offer. As Brous says, "I have learned that human beings are, fundamentally, deeply relational beings with an innate yearning to be known. To be seen, imperfect and striving. To find our way through the forest together." People long for connection and community.

And that ministry of presence is at the heart of what we will explore through our CAKE conversations. As we declare ourselves a CAKE congregation, we commit to the ministry of presence, because we as St. John show up... with cake (or some other type of food). Baptism? Cake! People making a commitment to follow Christ through the ministries of St. John? Cake! Youth celebrating their first communion or affirming their baptism? Cake! Birthdays or Anniversaries? Cake! Graduations? Cake! Someone is experiencing a hardship in their life? Food is offered! Funeral? Food is provided! And we provide more food through the food pantry and the community garden. St. John shows up for the funerals and the weddings... with cake.

We provide food for the body at every opportunity with cake and other foods. Now the question is, what does it look like to show up, to offer the ministry of presence in all that life has to offer with CAKE – Christ-like Acceptance and Kindness for Everyone?

Pastor Katie

Find Us on Social Media

Like us on **Facebook** (@stjohnchurchmars) or Follow us on **Instagram** (@stjohnchurchmars)

Online Sunday Worship

Join Zoom for service: <https://zoom.us/j/5663185411> Meeting ID: 566 318 5411 PW: Luther
Available on our YouTubeChannel: <https://www.youtube.com/@St.JohnLutheranChurch-2>

Worship Notes

Young Worship Leaders

We love having our young worshippers helping with worship leadership! If you are unable to be present for your scheduled service, please find someone to cover and tell the office of the change.

	Acolyte	Offering	Offering	Young Reader
6-July	Jules K	Anna K	Nathan K	
13-July	Lydia M	Ava N	Ella N	
20-July	VBS WORSHIP AT THE PARK			
27-July	Carissa M	Ella N	Abby C	Anna K
3-Aug	Ava N	Jules K	Eva K	

Adult Worship Leaders

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
6-July	Cora S	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Cora S	Missy K VOLUNTEER
13-July	Cora S	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Cora S	Missy K VOLUNTEER
20-July	Cora S	VBS WORSHIP AT THE PARK			Missy K VOLUNTEER
27-July	Cora S	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Cora S	Missy K VOLUNTEER
3-Aug	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER VOLUNTEER

Campfire Worship – July 9



Thursday, July 9th, join us outside around a campfire on the lawn for singing and an evening worship service! Worship will begin at 7:00pm. S'mores will be available after worship. Bring your own chair/blanket and come for this brief worship service including several camp favorite songs

VBS Joint Worship Service – July 20

After a week of celebrating Jesus as our True North in our joint Vacation Bible School program with Mars United Presbyterian and Valencia Presbyterian Churches, we will worship together at Adams Township Park using themes and songs from Vacation Bible School. **Worship will begin at 10:00am with a potluck picnic lunch to follow.** You are encouraged to bring a dish to share and an extra chair in case we need extra seating. If access to this service is a concern, please contact Pastor Katie and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

Worship Notes (continued)

Worship on the Lawn and Church Picnic – July 27

Mark your calendars! Our **annual church picnic will be on July 27th**. We will have worship, picnic food, and games right on the church lawn! If you can help set up or tear down from the event, contact the church office to volunteer. Denise H will be coordinating the food, registration for the picnic will begin soon.



Dinner Church – July 29

Tuesday, July 29, 6:00-7:30 pm

At the beginning of the Christian movement, people gathered around a full meal. People would come from different walks of life and gather around the table. They would eat together. They would read scripture together. They would discuss what the scripture meant to them and support one another in the efforts to live as followers of Jesus in their daily lives. And they would celebrate God's grace given in the gift of Holy Communion.

Dinner Church brings us back to this relational worship style where all are welcomed and all are fed in body and soul as we gather in community around the Word and the table – the dinner table and the Lord's table. You are invited. There is a seat for you at the table!

Summer Worship Series

Throughout the summer, we will be focusing our worship services on a couple of different topics. We will begin our summer with a series exploring what it means to us to be a CAKE (Christ-like Acceptance and Kindness for Everyone) congregation. **This will include a sermon series exploring different expressions of being a welcoming and hospitable congregation along with discussion questions congregation members are encouraged to explore during a fellowship hour after church or throughout the week.**

After Vacation Bible School we will tackle the hard questions offered by congregation members.

Worship Volunteers Wanted



With summer schedules creating some unknowns in people's schedules, we have several openings in our worship volunteer schedule. **Training is available** for any position. You are welcome to **sign up for just one week to give it a try or multiple weeks** to practice and get comfortable! Sign up to volunteer for an open slot using the sign-up sheets in the greeting area or at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>

Assistant Minister

Help lead worship by reading scripture and prayers and assisting in the distribution of communion.

Greeter

Greet people as they enter for worship and hand out bulletins.

Usher

Ring the bell before and during worship, attend to lights and doors, and coordinate offering collection.

Bread Baker

Bake or purchase bread to be used for communion during worship.

Counter (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Serve in a team of two to count the offering after worship.

Eucharistic Minister (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Visit and take communion from our Sunday celebration to those unable to be physically in worship.

Altar Guild (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Set up for and clean up after worship; change the paraments to match the color of the day.

Around the Synod

Synod Assembly Recap

By David Dreher

On June 12 - 14 the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA held a conference to elect our new bishop. David Dreher and Denise Hager represented our congregation at this conference. There were 289 delegates from 11 counties in PA voting over several ballots to finally come to a consensus. The result, on the fourth ballot, was the election of Pastor Melissa Stoller as our new bishop. The term is for six years. Pastor Stoller has been a pastor of several congregations and has also served as an assistant to Bishop Kusserow. Along with her election was the election of new members to the synod council. Throughout the conference were opportunities for worship as well as breakout sessions on Friday for delegates to hear talks on a variety of subjects regarding pastoral and congregational concerns. For more information of the proceedings of synod assembly see <https://www.swpasynod.org/assembly2025>.

Farewell Celebration for Bishop Kusserow – Aug 10

Give thanks for the steadfast and faithful leadership of Bishop Kurt Kusserow, who has shepherded our shared work for 18 years, by joining for a celebration at Camp Lutherlyn (500 Lutherlyn Ln, Butler, PA 16001). **Join for any or all of the activities; this will be an open-house style gathering where you may come and go as you please.**

Worship: 2 PM @ amphitheater

A shuttle from the main office will be available beginning at 1:30 PM for those who would like assistance getting to the amphitheater. (Rain Location: Chapel)

Reception: 3:30 @ Dining Hall

Please contribute to the cookie table by bringing a dozen cookies to share.

Campfire: 4:30 PM @ Friendship Circle

Top off the afternoon with a classic campfire at the fire pit located directly in front of the dining hall. (Rain Location: Dogwood Pavillion)

Installation of Bishop-Elect Stoller

The Rev. Melissa L. Stoller was elected on June 13 to serve a six-year term as bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA. She is the first woman to hold the position of Bishop in the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. **“In these liminal times, it is important that we strengthen our ties,” Rev. Stoller said, “so that we may be Church together, communities of justice of hope, sharing the Good News with our neighbors.”**

Rev. Stoller has served as Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for the SWPA Synod since 2017. Prior to this role, she was Pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Penn Hills, Pennsylvania, Trinity Lutheran Church in Cook, Minnesota, and Intern Pastor at the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy in Russia. Before entering ordained ministry, she worked in housing and healthcare advocacy for the Minnesota Senior Federation. Her current synod leadership includes stewardship coaching, transitional ministry training, and vocational formation initiatives.

Rev. Stoller begins the work of bishop on September 1, and will be installed on Sat., October 18, 1 PM at Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church, 517 Sangree Rd, Pgh, PA 15237.

Synod Summer Reading Group: “Staying Awake”

Join members of the Authentic Diversity & Justice Working Group from the Synod for a weekly book discussion this summer on **Thursdays July 10-August 7pm at 7:00 pm on Zoom**. We'll be reading [**Staying Awake**](#) by Tyler Sit. This book is ideal for anyone interested in learning how faith and social justice work together. Please join even if you can't make all 5 weeks.

Register at <https://tinyurl.com/4k7aavb8>

Around the Synod (continued)

SWPA Lutheran Disaster Relief Work Trip – Aug 3-9

Our synod's Lutheran Disaster Relief team is organizing a work trip to help the Carolinas recover from Hurricane Helene damage. They are searching for 20 willing adults (18 years old and over) to join. The estimated cost is \$200 per person. For more information, contact Jerry Lynn at jjlynn143@gmail.com.

Synod Office “Yard Sale” – July 12

Sat., July 12, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm at the synod office (1014 Perry Hwy, Pittsburgh, PA 15237)
The synod office is clearing space and parting with unused office supplies, and all can be rehomed for a donation that will support the Tri-Synod Archives. The sale will take place on

Available items include:

- Furniture (coffee carts, lamps, cafe sets, folding tables, small appliances, even a full cubicle)
- Technology (kindle tablets, monitors with VGA connections, inkjet printers)
- Office Supplies (ledger paper, colorful printer paper, highlighters, staplers, name tag lanyards, inbox holders)

Lutherlyn

Lutherlyn Grown Up Camp

Grown-Up Camp includes all of the fun and excitement of kid camp with some relaxation, fellowship, and extras for adults! **This grown-ups only retreat is the perfect opportunity to enjoy all the fun of kid camp but with some changes and additions specifically for grown-ups.** Anyone age 21 or older is invited to join in the fun! You'll be able to enjoy camp classics like campfires, hikes, crafts, ropes course, and sports. **All of the activities are optional to provide as much or as little time as you'd like to relax or explore Lutherlyn's beautiful grounds and trails.**

The \$155 fee includes all meals, program, snacks, and lodging (cabins are equipped with full bathroom/showers and twin size beds). Guests are responsible for bringing their own linens and toiletries. There is an option to register for a private cabin (\$190) or a shared private cabin (2 people get their own private cabin for \$175 each). Learn more or register at lutherlyn.com/grownups

Stewardship

Stewardship Corner

Water is essential for all life, is a critical element of the global economy and, most importantly, holds a sacred place in our relationship with God. As stewards of all creation, protecting Earth's water is not optional. Water in its various forms is meant to meet the survival needs of all of creation around the globe. Yet typical fresh surface-water sources, such as rivers and lakes, only constitute a small fraction of all available sources. But globally, the water situation is dire. According to the United Nations: Eighty-five percent of the world's population lives in the driest half of the planet. Almost 2.5 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation. 783 million people do not have access to clean water. The United States is not immune to the lack of clean water or access to it. Nearly 1 in 10 watersheds is stressed (University of Colorado) and people throughout the country lack drinkable water in their homes.

To help steward our usage of water, think about these tips:

- Fix any leaks that may be in your home
- Turn off the tap while shaving or brushing teeth
- Make sure the dishwasher or clothes washer is full before running a load
- Know when and how much to water your lawn and garden
- Wash your car using a bucket or a commercial car wash that recycles water

Find more at <https://www.epa.gov/watersense/start-saving>

Serving Others

St. John Food Pantry

Our little food pantry sees more usage than we sometimes recognize. Within the week prior to writing the newsletter, we had two individuals visit the pantry who we do not see on a regular basis. One person had bought extra groceries and stopped at the pantry on her way home to donate goods. Another person stopped by the pantry to collect items and was grateful for the opportunity to “shop” at the indoor pantry as well. **When people are asked what goods they are most often looking for, they typically respond with items that are not covered by SNAP benefits (i.e. cleaning products, paper products, personal hygiene products) or easy to prepare meals.**

3rd Quarter Mission Emphasis: Mars Area Public Library

The mission of Mars Area Public Library is to inform, educate, entertain, and culturally enrich by providing books, library materials, facilities, and professional services for all individuals in our area. With generous support, the Mars Area Public Library continues to provide a collection of new and relevant materials, technology, computer access, and free events for all ages and interests, striving to meet the ever changing needs of the community. Your contribution assures that the Mars Area Public Library will continue to be the place where everyone can learn, discover and explore through library operations, community programs, and expansion of their collection. Stay tuned for information regarding a book collection and volunteer opportunities to support this quarter’s mission emphasis. **If you would like to financially support the mission emphasis, mark your envelope “Mission Emphasis.”**



Community Garden



Gardening season is here! The plants are in the ground, and now it’s time to tend to them and do our part to help them grow into strong plants that will produce a bountiful harvest! **Volunteers to water (as needed) and weed are always wanted! Tools and training are available.** We are so grateful for our little garden space that grows healthy, organic, and delicious food. Fresh produce and herbs can be a luxury for many, volunteering to help maintain the garden helps to bring these luxuries within reach for our neighbors. Contact Pastor Katie if you’d like to help tend to the garden.

July 4th Parade Hospitality

Each year residents from all over the area gather to watch the Mars 4th of July Parade. A great spot to see the parade march by is right on the lawn of St. John! **Come and help pass out cold water and freezie pops to those in need of some cool hospitality** while waiting for and watching the parade. The parade starts at 5:00 pm. So please arrive around 4:30 pm so that we can offer cool drinks and tasty treats to folks as they wait for the parade to begin.



Around the Church

Office Hours Update

During a time of personal transition, Diane will be in the office one day a week, working other hours remotely or in the office on a flexible schedule. **Currently, she will be in the office on Thursday mornings.** If you need access to the building or assistance with anything, please call ahead to assure availability. Pastor Katie will also be in the office throughout the week and can provide assistance.

Website Member Portal

Have you signed up for the new members portal on the website? When you visit the website at stjohnchurchmars.org, there is an option to "log in" in the upper right corner. When you log in, you will have access to a member portal. Here you can offer ways to connect with other members, access the latest directory, access the online sign-up board at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>, or view the current vestry. To help keep members safe, the office will approve membership requests.

Do you have other things you'd like to find on the members portal? Tell Pastor Katie!

Youth Car Wash Fundraiser Update

Many thanks to all who supported the youth car wash on June 21st! There was a steady stream of cars being washed throughout the four hours. Thanks to everyone who helped to wash the cars, brought their cars to be washed, or provided supplies.

An extra special thank you to Mars Agway for hosting us!

The youth raised over \$600!

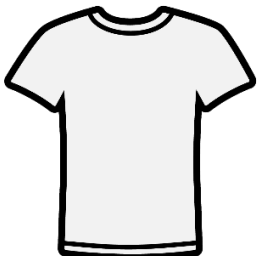


Murder Mystery Dinner – September 13

A new thing is coming to St. John! At 5:00pm on September 13th, a troupe of actors will fill the basement with mystery and laughter as we eat dinner together and sort out the great Whodunit of the night. Tickets will be sold ahead of time by the Deacons. Mark your calendars now and get ready for a unique event!

St. John T-Shirts!

We had some great ideas submitted for our St. John T-Shirts! Ideas are posted in the Greeting Area for people to see. **Given the collection of great ideas, if anyone is feeling creative and wants to collaborate with the initial collection of designs and create more ideas, submissions will be collected through July 13th.** After that date, people will be able to vote for their favorite design. Pre-orders will be available after all voting has taken place.



Faith Formation

Adult Book Study – Real Faith for Real Life

During the summer months, we will engage in a book study to help us nourish our spiritual selves. We will meet monthly to discuss different parts of the book **“Real Faith for Real Life” by Michael W. Foss**. In this book, Foss invites readers to engage with the Marks of Discipleship (enumerated in his book as: daily prayer, weekly worship, daily Bible reading, serving beyond the congregation, nurturing relationships, and giving a tithe and beyond). **“The Marks of Discipleship are spiritual aids that are biblical and have grown out of the tradition of the Christian Church,”** (pg 4). They are the practices of our faith that re-ground us in our call, our hope, and our joy,” (pg 9). We meet on Wednesdays (7:00-8:30pm) and Sundays (6:30-8:00pm). It will be the same conversation on Sunday as on Wednesday each month. In June we discussed chapters 1 and 2. In July (July 23 and 27), we will discuss chapters 3 and 4. In August (August 20 and 24), we will discuss chapters 5 and 6. All conversations will be available in-person as well as on zoom. See stjohnchurchmars.org/upcomingevents for the zoom links for each night.

Messy Church – July 18th – **NEW TIME**



We know that it can be hard to get to Messy Church by 5:30pm sometimes, so we're shifting the start time to 6:00pm! This Messy Session explores the gospel story of Jesus calming the storm after his disciples wake him up from a deep sleep. **Are we able to trust Jesus when we become afraid?** Being in the boat with Jesus does not



prevent us from experiencing storms in our lives. In addition to the storms of nature that come and go with the seasons, we may experience storms of illness, disappointment, disillusionment, broken relationships, and many others. **Can we discover some prayer practices to help us trust Jesus when we become afraid?**

Messy Church is an intentionally intergenerational place for people to meet and experience fun and messy ways to engage in faith and worship, including crafts and activities, celebration, and a shared meal no matter their connection to church. No registration is required for this free faith formation opportunity. We gather for dinner at 6:00pm and move to activities and celebration, ending at 8:00pm. **This month, we will be exploring the story of Jesus calming the storm... meaning there will be water games! So come prepared to get wet!**

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School is just around the corner - Sun, July 13 - Thur, July 17th, 6:00-8:30p **This year at VBS, we will learn about how Jesus is our true north!** Kids will foster a deeper connection with our faithful friend, Jesus, while discovering the great Alaskan frontier. As kids trek through the tundra of Alaska and experience what it means to trust in Jesus, prepare for amazing faith connections to unfold! We will celebrate the end of the week with a special worship on July 20th. And best of all, it's free for everyone! Registration is free and OPEN. The link is on the website at stjohnchurchmars.org/childrenyouth.

Adult Bible Study – Fall Series

During the summer, we will be taking a break from our weekly Bible study. In the fall, we will explore the Nicene Creed! This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea at which the Creed was formalized. This series will explore the historical context of the authorship of the creed, including the teachings it guarded against, and some of the scriptural basis of the statements made throughout the creed. Stay tuned for specific start dates!

July 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 Elders' Meeting 7:00 pm	2	3	4 Parade Hospitality 4:30 pm	5
6 Worship 9:00 am Trustees' Meeting 10:15am	7	8	9 Campfire Worship, 7:00p VBS Decorating	10	11	12
13 Worship 9:00 am Deacons' Meeting 10:15am VBS Kickoff Dinner 5:00 pm VBS 6:00 pm	14 VBS 6:00 pm	15 VBS 6:00 pm	16 VBS 6:00 pm	17 VBS 6:00 pm	18 Messy Church 6:00 – 8:00 pm	19
20 VBS Worship 10:00 am (at Adams Twp Park)	21	22 Council Meeting 7:00 pm	23 Book Study 7:00-8:30 pm	24 Worship Planners 7:00 pm	25	26
27 Outdoor Worship 9:00 am and Church Picnic (on Church Lawn) Anniversary/Birthday Coffee hour 10:15 am Book Study 6:30-8:00 pm	28 Communion at Penn Mar 1:45pm	29 Dinner Church 6:00 pm	30	31		



7/12 Victoria Lydon
7/13 Christopher Julio
7/13 Marcia Shepard
7/14 Katherine D'Amico
7/19 Jean Claus
7/20 Luca Julio
7/21 Jonathan Ciora
7/20 June Siembieda
7/22 Jeff Ward
7/26 Chester Carbo



7/12 – David & Cynthia Knauff – 50 yrs.
7/14 – Todd & Katherine Niklewicz – 18 yrs.
7/21 – Larry & Amy Werner – 46 yrs.
7/25 – Michael & Cherry Sauers – 61 yrs.

JULY NEWSLETTER

ST JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH
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MARS, PA 16046

Address service requested