

July
2026

St. John Lutheran Church



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.*

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

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

Please call to ensure availability before coming to the office.

"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."

Proverbs 22:6

Kids are distracting during worship. But not in the way you think! Throughout worship, I see the kids do all kinds of things. Sometimes they are eating a snack or playing with a toy, expressing their joy or displeasure, or wandering around and getting wiggly. But they are always absorbing everything we do in worship. Everything.

I have also seen kids place scribbles in the offering plate and the prayer basket. I have seen toddlers reach out a hand for the bread at communion. I have seen their eyes light up at a random word in the sermon. I have seen them sing before they could read words. And every time I catch them out of the corner of my eye, I can't help but be distracted because these kids *get* worship. They have seen worship, and they want to participate as they know how. They may not always fully understand what it is that they're doing, but they know that there is meaning and power in what we do as we gather for worship each week.

Isn't that a little like how we approach worship? We may not always understand how it works, but we know that when we routinely practice worship, we will find meaning and power. We know that when we regularly practice meeting God in our singing and our praying, at the table and in the water of baptism, in our giving and our listening to the Word of God, we will encounter God. Sometimes we get wiggly; sometimes we'd rather be somewhere else. But we are always absorbing what is done in worship.

Kids are distracting in worship because they often cause me to pause and reflect on the way our kids *get* worship. Even when they don't fully understand, they *get* the importance of practicing worship, or embodying worship, of absorbing all that happens in worship. What a lesson that is for us to learn from them! We bring our kids into worship so that we can teach them about worship... but each time I watch them sing without words, place a scribble in the prayer basket, reach out for a piece of bread, or come running to the altar with fully embodied joy... I wonder if we maybe we bring kids to worship so that they can teach us about worship.

Peace,
Pastor Katie

Find Us on Social Media

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

Online Sunday Worship

Worship with us online! Service is livestreamed on our YouTube Channel at 9:00am on Sundays at <https://www.youtube.com/@St.JohnLutheranChurch-2>

Worship Notes

Young Worship Leaders

During the summer, because of a wide variety of schedules and availabilities, we will invite people to volunteer for worship leadership roles traditionally held by our younger worshippers, including acolyte, offering collection, and young readers. Individuals are welcome to sign up ahead of time or volunteer on the day of, prior to the announcements.

Adult Worship Leaders

Individuals are welcome to sign up to help lead worship in a variety of roles using the online sign up board at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>.

The online sign up sheet is also available through the new church app.

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
5-July	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Emma N	VOLUNTEER	David D Cora S
12-July	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D Cora S
19-July	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D Cora S
26-July	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D Cora S
3-Aug	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D Laura G

Summer Worship Series

During the summer, we will shift our liturgical practices from the traditional scripted language to a more conversational tone wherein we are able to slow down and reflect on the various elements of worship. Why do we begin each worship with confession? Why does the greeting come after the confession? Why do we offer such a long prayer before communion? Why do we share the peace in the middle of the service? All these questions and more will be tackled by our summer worship podcast (see “Facets of Faith” for more information) and celebrated in our communal worship.

Service of Hope and Healing – July 9th

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30) **This Service of Hope and Healing invites you to lay down your burdens at the foot of the cross. Filled with scripture, song, and prayer, this service offers a quiet, reflective space to dwell in God’s promise of hope and healing.**

Whether you are dealing with illness, grief, anxiety or another kind of hardship, this service offers peace. Service meets in the sanctuary at 6:30 pm and lasts approximately 30-45 minutes.

VBS Joint Worship Service – July 19th

After an exciting week of 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.

Annual Church Outdoor Worship and Picnic – July 26th



Mark your calendars! Our **annual church picnic will be on July 26th** at Adams Township Park. We will have worship, picnic food, and games! Worship begins at 9am. Stay tuned for details regarding sign ups.

Campfire Worship – July 29th

Summertime means campfires! **Gather around a campfire on the lawn for an evening worship service! Worship will begin at 7:00pm.** S'mores will be available after worship. Pastor Katie may very well be ready with some mountain pie supplies as well! **Bring your own chair/blanket and come for this brief worship service including several camp favorite songs!** Campfire worships will continue through the summer, meeting on a different day of the week each month to broaden people's ability to attend at least one during the summer. Join us on Wednesday, July 29th, and Thursday, August 20th.

Online Access to Worship

There are many times when we cannot be physically present to worship with the faith community, but we still want to be present in spirit. For those times, we offer a livestream of each Sunday worship service. Traditionally, this has been offered through a zoom account. To help streamline this online ministry and to make access easier, we will be switching to livestreaming directly to YouTube.

Good news! This method provides a higher quality image and sound as well as an easier point of access as there is no password needed!

To access the livestream either during worship or the recording at a later time, visit the church's YouTube page at <http://www.youtube.com/@St.JohnLutheranChurch-2>.



Don't forget to subscribe to the YouTube channel to make finding it easier. The livestream is also available on the church app.

Facets of Faith – Worship 101

The words we say, the music we sing, the movements we make, the rituals we practice, the space in which we meet, the objects we use... a lot goes into the act of Sunday worship. During the summer, we are shifting gears at Facets of Faith. Instead of digging into the weekly scripture reading, **we are asking the whats, hows, and whys of worship. Each episode will explore a different element of worship and invite listeners to a deeper connection with liturgy (the what?) and what it means to gather in and for worship each Sunday morning.** Episodes will be released weekly. If you have a worship question, feel free to let us know and then stay tuned to see when we'll explore your question on the podcast!

Communion Bread

Having a loaf of bread is a deeply meaningful part of our communion celebrations at St. John. Sometimes the bread comes from the store, but sometimes people may want to bake bread at home.

If you'd like to bake bread for Sunday worship, below is a recipe that we use when we offer communion classes. Give it a try and sign up to be bread baker for a week! (One recipe yields enough for a couple of weeks of communion)

Pita Bread (Communion Bread)

5 to 6 cups flour	1 Tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons salt	1 package dry yeast
2 cups very warm water (120°-130°)	

In large bowl, thoroughly mix 2 cups flour, sugar, salt, and undissolved dry yeast.

Gradually add warm water to dry ingredients and beat 2 minutes at medium speed of an electric mixer, scraping bowl occasionally. Add 3/4 cup flour. Beat at high speed 2 minutes. Stir in enough additional flour to make a soft dough. Turn out onto lightly floured board; knead until smooth an elastic, about 8 - 10 minutes. Place in greased bowl, turning to grease top. Cover. Let rise in warm place, until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

Punch dough down. Turn out onto floured board. Cover. Let rest 30 minutes.

While the dough is resting, preheat oven to 450°. Put a baking sheet on the lowest rack to preheat. Divide dough into 6 pieces. Shape each into a ball. Roll or pat each ball into a 8 inch circle.

Take the baking sheet out of the oven and quickly put 2 or 3 rounds on it. Put it back in the oven. Bake 5 minutes or until done. Tops will not brown. Repeat with remaining rounds. If desired, tops can be lightly browned under a hot broiler. Watch them closely. It takes less than a minute.

When we bake this bread for First Communion, we mix it by hand, and cut the first rising time down to 1/2 an hour. The second rising is about 10 minutes. It still works well, though not all the loaves form pockets. It takes about an hour, start to finish. If you want to be sure that pockets form, follow the above directions more closely.

Around the Church

Office Hours

Diane is currently in the office one day a week, on Thursday mornings, working other hours remotely or in the office on a flexible schedule. Holidays may impact this schedule, though. If you need access to the building or assistance with anything, please call ahead to assure availability.

Pastor Katie can also provide assistance.

Church App



Stay connected with St. John throughout the week! There's an app for that! In the Google Play store or the iOS App Store, search for "Church App – Tithely". Download the app, then search for St. John Lutheran Church in Mars. The app has links for the calendar, podcasts, worship leadership, bulletins, prayer resources, and more! Download the app today at <https://tithely.app.link/st-john-lutheran> or use the QR code. See a tutorial for how to download the app and an introduction to its offerings at <https://tinyurl.com/mtpdv6pz>.



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.

Stewardship



Stewardship is a condition, a way of being.
– Dr. Marty Stevens



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>

A Steward's Prayer:

O Lord, we pray that as we be, People of God chosen by thee, That you give us strength and guidance every day, For our role as stewards to portray. That our voice and works may proclaim, The ministry of Christ is our aim. That our actions will speak louder than what we say, Where the security in our life is God's way. That we generously respond to what you first gave, Your Son, a Savior, our lives to save. And when we have decisions to make, To thee, O Lord, our prayers we take. (Keith A. Mundy, 1998)

Calling All Thrivent Members

Are you a Thrivent Member?

Thrivent is a financial company that has been around for years under a few different names. They offer a variety of financial resources for people of all ages, but **members who either have an insurance policy or an annuity account with them have access to special generosity programs including Thrivent Action Teams.** Action Teams provide a kit of resources to be used for a project within a non-profit organization. **A \$250 gift card is included in the kit!** Action Teams can be used for any number of things, including VBS, the Community Garden, Lutheran World Relief Quilts, Clean Up Days, and more! **So if you are a member of Thrivent and haven't used your Action Teams, consider using them to support a project at church!**

Around the Synod

Synod Assembly Update

Check out the actions of the 2026 Synod Assembly at <https://www.swpasynod.org/assembly2026>. There is a button at the top of the page labeled "Actions of the 2026 Synod Assembly" that offers a summary of the assembly.

Weekly Synod Emails

The synod sends out weekly emails of upcoming programs and important news. Everyone is welcome to receive these emails. Sign up to receive them at <https://www.swpasynod.org/wayfarer>

Funding Forward: Summer Book Study – Thursdays, June 25 – July 30

Join a synod-wide book study on Funding Forward led by Pastor Erin Jones. Drawing on years of teaching, research, and field work, author Grace Duddy Pomroy shows there are no one-size-fits-all solutions for church and nonprofit finances. ***Funding Forward*** can help ministers and ministries move through the funding forward process from start to finish. Co-sponsored by the Synod's Care and Leadership of Congregations Committee and the Stewardship Team.

The book study meets Thursdays, June 25 – July 30 at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Contact Pastor Katie for the zoom address.

Wayfarer Magazine

Each quarter, the synod publishes a magazine that celebrates ministries happening throughout the synod as well as offers reflections, prayers, and updates from the synod leadership. You can find a printed copy of this newsletter in our greeting area, though we ask that you please leave that copy there. An online copy may be found at <https://www.swpasynod.org/wayfarer> as well as a request form to receive your own copy.

Lutherlyn

Lutherlyn Summer Camp Registration

Lutherlyn is a place where each child is accepted, challenged, and sent out into the world to spread the love of Christ, and summer camp registration is OPEN!

Many of the camps fill quickly, so plan to register early! Learn more about the many different camps and what you can expect at a week of camp at lutherlyn.com/programs/summercamp/. We already have 4 children and youth registered for camp at Lutherlyn and another child registered at another nearby church camp.



Please also hold our young people in prayer as they prepare for their very first time going on this great adventure.

Grown-Up Camp – August 21-23

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.

Learn more and register today at Lutherlyn.com/grownups (Registration closes August 10)

Serving Others

3rd Quarter Mission Emphasis: Quality EMS

Quality EMS provides emergency medical services, non-emergency medical transport, and community services to residents of Adams Township, Middlesex Township, Forward Township, Callery Borough, Mars Borough and Valencia Borough. 100% of offerings collected for the current Mission Emphasis will be sent to the organization. To make an offering, label your gift with "Mission Emphasis."

St. John Food Pantry



We have many neighbors who are deeply grateful for the ministry of the little food pantry. We regularly see a number of items come and go through the pantry as people are making use of the items to help them get through the month.

Spaghetti sauce, vanilla instant breakfast, and cleaning supplies are particularly appreciated by our guests at this time, though a wide variety of items helps to ensure all our guests can find something helpful. **During the summer, please**



be aware that certain items are not shelf-stable at high temperatures. These items need to stay inside. If you know of a need for the building to be open at a certain time, Pastor Katie is happy to make appointments for individuals to access the indoor pantry.

Community Garden



The community garden offers members of our community free nutritious produce that is grown without pesticides. The garden includes tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, eggplant, peppers, herbs, and for the first time, leeks! **To bring all these plants to a bountiful harvest, help is needed to water and weed the garden as needed. If you would like to help with either or both needs, please contact Pastor Katie** for the schedule. There are also a few finishing projects to make the garden clean and inviting to our neighbors, including spreading dirt and mulch. Contact Pastor Katie if you'd like to help.

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 5:30 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.

Did You Know?

The church website has an ongoing calendar! There is only so much room in the newsletter for upcoming events, but the website has all of them, including several months out! See the calendar at stjohnchurchmars.org/calendar.

Faith Formation

Summer Book Discussions

We are pausing our weekly Bible Study meetings and instead reading several short books together over the summer. Each book is around 100 pages and less than 2 hours on Audible. Copies of the books will be available in the church office throughout the summer. They are also available on eReader and Audible. The books and meetings dates are below. Discussion typically lasts an hour and a half. Zoom links will be available on the website and through the Bible study email lists. You are welcome to attend either the Sunday or the Wednesday meetings.

July: *Stitches* by Anne Lamott

Wednesday, July 22, 6:30 pm

Sunday, July 26, 6:30 pm

August: *Meta Moments* by Dave Daubert

Wednesday, August 19, 6:30 pm

Sunday, August 23, 6:30 pm

Messy Church Update



We are pausing our regular Messy Church gathering for the summer. If you would like to help shape Messy Church in the fall, please contact Pastor Katie. Questions that we are looking to consider the time and day of Messy Church, how we invite others to participate in Messy Church, and ways we can continue to live into the values of Messy Church: Christ-centered, all ages together, creativity, celebration, and hospitality.

Vacation Bible School

Sunday, July 12 – Thursday, July 16

We are looking for individuals to help prepare, advertise, and lead elements of this favorite summer program. Vacation Bible School is a joint ministry of St. John Lutheran Church, Mars United Presbyterian Church, and Valencia Presbyterian Church. Registration is open to children ages 3-12. Register your child(ren) today at stjohnchurchmars.org/childrenyouth

Praying with All Five Senses

Summer is often a time when people spend more time outside. As you spend time outside, take a moment to reflect on God's good creation around you using your five senses. Spend a moment looking. Look to see what animals or plants you see around you. Look to see signs of life and growth surrounding you. Even the weeds that have grown in the garden can be a reminder of the strength and perseverance of life. Spend a moment listening. What do you hear? Do you hear wind in the leaves? Animals scurrying about? Birds singing? People laughing? Take a moment to literally stop and smell the roses. Are there flowers near you that you can smell? Or herbs? Presuming you know what plant it is, reach out and touch it. How does it feel? Is it soft and fuzzy? Hard and scratchy? Then smell your fingers, did the plant release a smell with the oils of the plant? And last but not least, if you know edible plants. Taste something! Maybe you have berries growing near you, or wood sorrel, or you're near church and can taste things in the garden.

(Again! Only touch/smell/taste plants when you are confident of your identification skills and know which plants are safe. Pastor Katie is happy to offer tours of the garden at church to invite a safe space to use our five senses in prayer with nature.)

And while you are spending time in nature, experiencing nature with all of your senses, ask for God's help to guide you in living in good care and stewardship of creation, give thanks to God for the gifts of nature and life, and sit in awe and wonder at God's creation.

July 2026						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4 <i>4th of July</i> Parade hospitality on the lawn
5 Worship, 9:00a	6	7 Vestry Board Meetings 7:00 p	8	9 Service of Hope and Healing 6:30p	10	11
12 Worship, 9:00a VBS 6:00 pm	13 VBS 6:00 pm	14 VBS 6:00 pm	15 VBS 6:00 pm	16 VBS 6:00 pm	17	18
19 Joint VBS Worship, 10:00a	20	21 Council Meeting 7:00p	22 Book Discussion: Stitches 6:30p	23	24 Mars Bethel Golf Outing 7:00 pm	25
26 Outdoor Worship and Church Picnic 9:00 am Book Discussion: Stitches 6:30p	27	28	29 Campfire Worship 7:00p	30 Worship Planners Meeting 7:00 p	1	2



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 – 51 yrs.
7/14 – Todd & Katherine Niklewicz – 19 yrs.
7/21 – Larry & Amy Werner – 47 yrs.

July Newsletter

Address service requested

ST JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH
420 BEAVER STREET
P.O. BOX 411
MARS, PA 16046