



What Does It Mean To Be A Loving Congregation?

Throughout the Scriptures, God calls us to love. In our baptisms, we are privileged recipients of God's saving love in Christ. And now, sent out as His redeemed people, we are called to love one another. "Love one another with brotherly affection" (Romans 12:10). "Owe no one anything except to love each other" (Romans 13:8). "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). "Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1). "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Yes, it's everywhere. We are called as God's people to love.

But how do we actually live this out? This is where it gets tricky. It's one thing to pursue love in general; it's another thing entirely to know what that looks like in specific day-to-day circumstances. For instance, when does love compel us to speak up? And what should we say? When should we give to someone? And when is it most loving to say "no"? How do we help one another without being judgmental? The questions are endless. And the answers require wisdom. Here, we must learn from Jesus. Before Him, we are all beginners—even the wisest among us. For us, the specifics of love are not always easy to discern.

And yet, nevertheless, the call remains. Therefore, I'd like to share a few thoughts, focusing on how we can be a loving congregation:

1. Love requires us to speak well

I could have begun in many different places, but I will start here because, in my experience, this is where we Christians fall short most of all. Indeed, James says, "No human being can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). And yet the fact remains: If we want to be a loving congregation, we must guard carefully our speech. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

Our words are meant to build up, not tear down. So, first of all, we should be very careful not to talk about other people behind their backs. Did someone do something you don't agree with? Did someone offend you? Does someone frustrate you? Talk to them personally, rather than grumbling about them to others. Give them the benefit of the doubt.

Perhaps you'll find that it was all a big misunderstanding. And likewise, we should avoid all gossip. A good rule of thumb is this: If you wouldn't want the person to overhear it, don't say it.

Instead, we should be gracious in our speech toward one another. Don't be rude. Don't be passive aggressive. Don't put one another down. Be kind. Be patient. Bear with one another's quirks. We should be sensitive to the feelings of others and aware of the fact that if anyone is the "chief sinner" it is "me" (1 Timothy 1:15). And yes, if we do say something hurtful or ungracious that is contrary to the spirit of Christ, we should be quick to apologize.

2. Love requires us to support one another well

Another facet of love is the obligation to support one another, in both faith and life.

This means, first of all, praying for one another. Are we doing this? Are we paying attention to the needs of those around us and tirelessly bringing them before the Lord? Are we praying for our fellow congregation members? Are we praying for our family and friends? Are we praying for our pastor and our teachers and our school? Are our pastors praying for their people? There is no greater act of love than to approach God on behalf of another. Nothing is impossible with Him. Who knows what great things He might do, if we would only ask (James 4:2)?

Similarly, we should be working to encourage one another in faith. We are all running the same race in Christ (Hebrews 12:1). If anyone stumbles or falls behind, we should be turning to lift them back up, not leaving them behind. This includes reaching out to those we haven't seen in a while, and getting to know those that attend a different service. This includes bringing words of comfort to those who are hurting. And, yes, this includes rebuking sin in a spirit of humility and grace when that is necessary (Luke 17:3). This isn't just the job of the pastor. It's the job of the entire congregation.

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And, even more, this means caring for one another's bodily needs. God has placed you here for them, and there are so many different ways we could live this out. We could offer to make meals for those who are facing troubles. We could offer to take up a collection for those who have experienced a tragedy. We could offer to help around the house for someone who is ill. Already we are doing these sorts of things in a number of ways. But we can always grow. Remember that believers in the early church even sold their land and possessions to care for the needy among them (Acts 2:45).

And I could certainly say more. I could talk about humility. I could talk about standing strong on Jesus' Word and confessing it boldly before the world. I could talk about remaining faithful to our various vocations from God and being steadfast in mission. I could talk about setting an example in life and faith and being patient in suffering. I could talk about welcoming visitors (which I hope to write more about soon). Love encompasses it all. But, for the sake of space, let me simply close with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

My friends, we are loved unconditionally by God. He has given Jesus His Son to save us from our sins and, in Him, we are forgiven. This is all ours through faith, apart from any works. So then, having received His love, let us now love one another, "not in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Pastor Aaron Vergin

Listen to Sermons Online

Did you miss a sermon or want to listen to it again? We post sermons on our website and on SoundCloud. You can listen to all of the sermons by scanning the QR code below.



Men's Monthly Bible Study

You're invited to join the monthly Men's Bible Study at 9-10:30 a.m. Saturday, April 13, in the Social Hall.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Vergin at pastorverg@stjohnsgandhaven.com.



Eyeglass Collection Drive Starts on May 11

Your used eyeglasses are needed!

It's time to start collecting your old eyeglasses and non-prescription sunglasses for the eyeglass drive taking place from May 11 - June 16.

These will be sent to MOST (Mission Opportunities Short Term) Ministries where they will be used for eye clinics. A collection box will be placed in the Social Hall.

Military Biblesticks Door Offering

We will have door offering to support the Military Biblesticks program the weekend of April 20-21.

If you are writing a check, please make it out to St. John's Lutheran Church with "Biblesticks" in the memo line. The organization requests just one check from the church.

A donor to Faith Comes By Hearing is providing a match (up to \$1 million) in May and June. Since St. John's will send donations in during that time, our donations will go even further.

This program offers free audio Bibles to troops. These sticks are easier for troops to carry than a paper Bible. Troops then have the option of sending a Bible back home to family members.

The Biblesticks are just one of the projects happening through the organization Faith Comes By Hearing. If you are interested in learning more about this organization, you can visit their website faithcomesbyhearing.com.

If you have any questions, please contact Roxana Taylor.



Updating Church Records

Do we have your correct email, phone number and home address? Please contact us if you have any changes. The church office can be reached at office@stjohnsgandhaven.com or 616-842-4510.

St. John's Lutheran Church Congregational Finance Snapshot

As of Feb. 29, 2024

1. Receipts and Expenses

	Actual – Month 2/29/24	Actual – YTD 2/29/24
All Receipts	\$90,472	\$809,194
All Expenses	\$124,553	\$871,765
Extraordinary Adj.	–	–
Over/ (Under)	\$(34,081)	(\$62,571)

	Budget – YTD 2/29/24	Actual – Prior YTD 2/28/23
All Receipts	\$740,337	\$691,008
All Expenses	\$900,724	\$798,573
Extraordinary Adj.	–	\$67,498
Over/ (Under)	(\$160,387)	(\$40,067)

Receipts: The envelope giving in February was \$67K for a four Sunday month. February of last year was \$51K for a four Sunday month, too. February YTD offerings are \$549K as compared to \$580K during the same time last year. An increase of \$41K or a 7.9 percent increase. Most of the increase on a YTD basis has occurred during the last three months probably due to Christmas and Stewardship efforts. All other YTD church offerings total \$94K which includes loose plate and “Jesus for the Next Generation” offerings. YTD February of last year for other offerings was \$14K.

Total Day School receipts were \$10.5K for February and are \$80K for February YTD with \$10.5K of that coming from gifts and other. Day School receipts were \$74K for February YTD of the last fiscal year.

Day Care & Early Ed had receipts of \$11K for February & \$87K year to date. Day Care & Early Ed receipts have been approximately \$11K for the last several months.

Expenses: Almost all of the \$34K shortage for February, expenses being more than receipts, is due to February being a three payroll month. The extra payroll was \$24K. The third payroll in the month occurs twice during the fiscal year with both instances for this fiscal year already past. February was also a quarter end which has some additional expense coming in – primarily workers’ comp charges of \$4K. For February YTD, all expenses remain under budget by \$29K with Day Care & Early Ed being \$20K favorable. As reported in previous months, all other ministry budgets are right on their budget or slightly favorable.

Operating Results, Operating Cash & Forecast:

As I reported above, the operating result for February were a shortfall of \$34K and YTD it is a shortfall of \$62.6K. Operating cash for the month ending 2/29/2024 was \$55K which is down \$34K from the end of January because of February’s shortfall. Let’s pray that March and April will be positive fiscal months with Easter and spring coming.

2. Operating Cash

Cash in the bank as of 2/29/2024	\$145,195
Less: Current Liabilities	\$9,417
Dedicated Accounts	\$81,197
Net Operating Cash	\$54,581

- Current Operating Cash reflects current operating results.
- Increase of Operating Cash due to “Jesus for the Next Generation” extra giving and envelope offerings both in December. Envelope offering increased in February, too.
- Higher current liabilities due to payroll taxes owed to the government due to lateness of the last payroll in February.

3. Investment

CEF Cash Account \$1,710

4. Debt

CEF Short Term Line of Credit	\$40,000
Long-Term Loan	---
Total Short Term Debt	\$40,000

5. Special Giving Projects

Capital Improvement Fund	\$16,240 (A)
Bell Tower Fund - Receipts	\$83,642 (B)
Bell Tower Fund - Expenses	\$54,597 (B)
Net Account Balance	\$28,946
Parsonage Repair	\$1,858 (C)

- February’s activity included donations of \$710 to this account.
- Funds continue to trickle into this fund with \$100 coming in during February. No charges against this fund either during the month.
- Funds to be used when the Parsonage A/C invoice comes in. To date, no invoice has been received yet. Additional report in February.

Electronic Giving

Did you know that you can give monetary donations online? You can download the Vanco App on your phone or give online by scanning the QR Code.



Thank You

Thank You!

A HUGE thank you to everyone who donated candy for the Easter Egg Hunt and everyone who participated!

Thank You from Social Ministries

Thank you to everyone who participated in the baby bottle fundraiser to support Positive Options. St. John's raised \$1,116.96.

That brings a total since 2022 of \$3,600. That amount allowed Positive Options to provide complete services (pregnancy testing, conversation on options and an early ultrasound, as well as education) for three members of the community.

Pool Party on April 28

Join fellow St. John's families for an afternoon of fun at Spring Lake Fitness & Aquatic Center.

Families are welcome to hit the water park 1-3 p.m. April 28. The cost is \$10 per swimmer and \$30 maximum for a family. Payments will be made the day of the event. All skills and ages are welcome!

Please scan the QR code below to register. The deadline to register is April 21. A parent/guardian must be present with children.



New Member Reception on May 5

The Board of Evangelism/Fellowship will host a reception to honor and welcome all new members who have joined the St. John's family from January 2023 until the present.

The reception will take place on at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, May 5. If you are a new member, we are so glad that you have chosen St. John's as your place of worship! If you are an existing member, we would love this opportunity to visit with our Christian family.

New members will receive additional information in the mail. We hope you can all attend!

Cheryl Thomas
Board of Evangelism/Fellowship



Unity Music Festival 2024

Mark your calendar for Unity Music Festival!

The annual event will be held Aug. 7-10 at Heritage Landing in Muskegon. Tickets go on sale in April. Tickets will cost \$40 per person for a one-day pass, \$75 per person for a three-day pass, and \$325 for a family three-day pass. May 5 is the deadline to purchase tickets.

Unity includes music, a children's area, and booths featuring various ministries. This year's main stage artists include Zach Williams, Matthew West, Mac Powell, Tenth Avenue North, Matt Maher, Brandon Heath, and Tasha Layton.

Geraniums for Pentecost

If you would like to purchase geraniums, please use the envelopes that are available on the bulletin board by the church office. Geraniums are \$6 per plant.

Thank you to Bosch's Best Bushes for their continued partnership!

If you have any questions, please contact the church office by calling 616-842-4510 or by emailing office@stjohnsgrandhaven.com.



Diaper Drive May 12 - June 16

The Board of Social Ministries is collecting diapers to support Positive Options. The drive starts on Mother's Day, May 12, and ends on Father's Day, June 16. A collection table will be set up in the Social Hall.

Life Team Updates

The Fifth Commandment as We Age

The fifth Commandment, "Honor thy father and mother," has more to it than meets the eye. The consideration we give to our parents is a predictor of how in our lifetime we will love our neighbors and treat all those with authority over us. Before God set up governments, he gave us families with fathers and mothers in the first positions of human authority. Honoring our parents is one of the best ways to show the love of Christ to all people, especially those in the greatest need. Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

God is all about loving relationships. "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4: 19) With aging, the nature of our human relationships changes, but not the love. Our parents cared for us when we were unable to fully care for ourselves. The time has come, or will come, when we will have the privilege of caring for them and helping them navigate the issues of life's twilight.

Charles Dickens, author of *A Christmas Carol*, uses Scrooge's nephew, Fred, to remind Scrooge and us that "we are all fellow passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." As we or those we love approach the end of that earthly journey, it is good to seek answers on how to prepare. That is the purpose of our Lutherans for Life workshop, *Issues as We Age* on Saturday, April 27. We hope you will join us. Some of these situations are difficult to face alone, but you will be surrounded by people striving to show the love of Christ. Remember, too, that "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116: 15)

Randy Cooper



Issues As We Age: Beholding the Gospel in Life's Twilight

The joy of the Christian Gospel enables us to welcome God's blessings even as life is ending.

Join us for Issues As We Age: Beholding the Gospel in Life's Twilight at 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 27, at St. John's Lutheran Church in Grand Haven. Rev. Michael Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life, is the guest speaker. Tickets are \$15 and includes lunch.

Hear and learn how advance directives, family conversations, and funeral preparations can courageously and compassionately affirm the sanctity of life even in situations of pain, impairment, and advancing age. We'll also consider the benefits and drawbacks of hospice care and organ donation as opportunities for confessing the faith. We will also explore suggestions for upholding life in our congregations and communities.

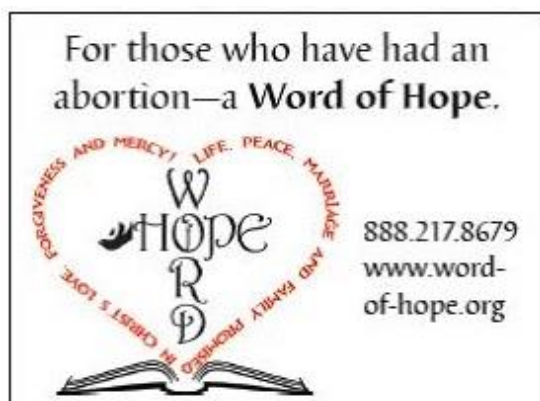
Scan the QR code below to register.



LUTHERANS
FOR LIFE

Life Team Library, Resources

The Life Team Library includes films and books related to Life issues. The materials are all available to check out in the Social Hall. The information sheets and pamphlets are free to take.



St. John's Lutheran School



Lutheran Schools Week

We spent the week of March 4-8 celebrating and highlighting Lutheran education during Lutheran Schools Week.

Staff and students enjoyed participating in themed dress up days such as sports day, beach day, favorite book character day, color wars, and dress your best. Our first- and second-grade class were also declared the victors in our Penny Wars.

Students also shared their Social Studies Fair projects with friends and family on Special Persons' Day.

To watch a video of all of the fun and learning, scan the QR code below.



Chapel

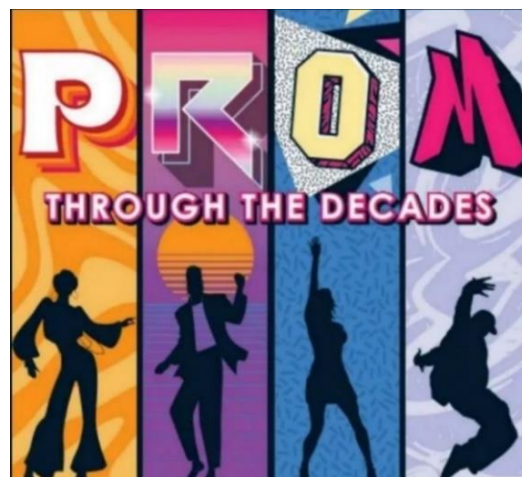
Everyone is invited to worship with our staff and students during Chapel at 10 a.m. Wednesdays.



Enroll Today!

There's still time to enroll for the 2023-24 school year! Call us today to learn more about the faith-based education, low student-to-teacher ratio, academic excellence, and opportunities that await your children and family!

If you have any questions or would like to schedule a tour, please call us at 616-842-0260. You can also contact Director of Admissions Nicole Socia via email at nsocia@stjohnsgandhaven.com.



School Auction on April 12

We're preparing for an evening of fun and raising funds to support St. John's Lutheran School through this year's fundraiser.

The Prom Through the Decades-themed fundraiser will be held on April 12, at American Dunes Golf Club. Tickets are currently sold out.

We are still looking for sponsorships! Please contact Amanda Reary at 828-525-0936 with any questions or to become a sponsor of this wonderful event.

If you would like to make a donation please scan the QR code to be directed to our Amazon wish list!



Prayer Group



Prayer Calendar for April 2024

Easter has passed, but we will continue this month by reflecting on Jesus' obedience which has freed us from our sin. In Colossians 1 Paul challenges us to live a life worthy of the Lord and to please him in every way: to bear fruit in every good work, to grow in the knowledge of God...for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

April 7: Galatians 4:4 "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters." Lord, I celebrate your birth and your resurrection. Alleluia!

April 14: Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. Hebrews 9:15 Thank you, Jesus for you died as a ransom to set me free from my sins.

April 21: Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." Lord, I believe help my unbelief.

April 28: Paul reminds us to not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom we were sealed for the day of redemption...be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:30,32 Lord, help me to forgive and be your peacemaker.

April School Prayers

April 7: Father God, we ask that all the many details involved in Friday's school auction are accomplished. We also pray for Laura Gilson, the 3rd-4th grade teacher, as she recovers from her ankle surgery. Bless her supplying all that she needs as she heals.

April 14: This week let us pray for the music, art, and physical education teachers at SJLCS. We ask for diligent preparation, joyfulness, and meaningful student interactions. We thank you for the teachers' efforts in expanding the students' talents and interests.

April 21: This week let us pray for SJLCS Board of Education members. Father God, we ask that you give them wisdom and insight for their decisions of this and the upcoming school year. We pray that your will be done.

April 28: Let's pray for the little ones this week including the Early Childhood program children, the preschoolers, the kindergarteners, and the Sunday school students. May the program leaders (Alyssa Leah, and Laura) be blessed with great wisdom and patience as they direct and care for the children.



Prayer Group Meets Weekly

The St. John's Prayer Group continues to meet 9-10 a.m. Thursdays in the Social Hall.

All are welcome, even if you aren't there every week. We offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving as well as supplications for individuals, families, our church, school, community, and nation.



**St. John's Lutheran
Church & School**

527 Taylor Avenue
Grand Haven, MI 49417



Worship Times:

5 p.m. Saturdays

8:15 & 10:30 a.m. Sundays



To stay up to date
on the latest
information, visit
our website:

www.stjohnsgrandhaven.com

Contact Us!

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Hannah Coomer

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