



## Thanksgiving Service

### *The Messenger* **St. John Lutheran Church**

155 Fairview Street  
West Branch, Michigan 48661  
Church Phone: 989-345-0120

Rev. Howard Travis, Pastor  
Pastor's Home Phone: 989-312-4637

**Web site:** [www.stjohnwb.org](http://www.stjohnwb.org)



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# November

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#### PASTOR'S OFFICE HOURS

**Monday and Thursday: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**  
**Tuesday and Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

No appointment is necessary – just stop by! Please call the office and make an appointment if these times are not convenient (345-0120).

#### CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Dear members and friends of St. John,

It's becoming increasingly popular in liberal American churches to **deny the existence of hell**. Some churches acknowledge hell's existence, but state that hell is "empty." Take, for instance, the presiding bishop over the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), Elizabeth Eaton. She was recently asked if she believes in hell.

Eaton: "There may be, but I think it is empty."

Interviewer: "Really?" Eaton: "Yes."

Interviewer: "Why is that?"

Eaton: "Well, Jesus was clear in John chapter 3 that when He is raised up he will draw all people to himself. And if we take a look at salvation history, ever since we got booted out of the garden, it has been God's relentless pursuit to bring His people to God. Now, people wonder "can you say no?" I imagine you can say "no" to God. I don't think God is going to give up on us." <sup>(1)</sup>

If you carry this assumption forward, you will have to conclude that **sin doesn't matter one-little-bit to God**. And if sin doesn't matter, naturally the need for repentance, allowing God to work contrition in us (being sorry for our transgressions), and helping us to confess our sin and seek His help to turn from it, goes away. **Why** be concerned about our bad behavior, if God either (1) condones it, or (2) "turns a blind eye" to it?

**The problem with all of this, of course, is the truth recorded in Holy Scriptures.** Bishop Eaton has discarded the Bible's teachings on sin, repentance, and hell, for the more crowd-pleasing position that allows people to continue in their sinful lifestyles. **What does the Bible say? Plenty.**

**First, Jesus doesn't condone sin, nor does He "turn a blind eye" to it.** In John chapter 8, church leaders bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, so that He might pass judgment on her, condemning her to death. Jesus responds, "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.*" (v. 7). In other words, **everyone is a sinner**. The people put down their stones and simply walk away. Liberal theologians love this text! What they forget is the last part. Jesus says: "*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?*" She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, '*Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.*'" (vv. 10-11). Jesus, looking into the woman's heart, saw a **repentant (or penitent) heart**. Being sorry for her sin, and desiring to turn from it, Jesus forgives her. With a penitent heart, this woman's sins are forgiven. This penitent heart comes as a product of faith in Christ. She calls Him "Lord." Jesus final instruction to her is important: "*from now on, sin no more.*" Jesus is talking about the **willful public sin of adultery**. If it persists, it will destroy faith. Sin is dangerous, for without faith, hell is our destination after we die.

**That leads us to the second point: Jesus declares that hell is real.** From Matthew chapter 25, we read Jesus' words:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who*

*are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...<sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (vv. 31-34, 41).*

This text reminds us that faith in Jesus leads us to obedience. Obedience means that we desire to keep God's Law, to please Him! The devil (Satan) and his fallen angels are working to destroy our faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus returns to this earth in glory, **He will judge the living and dead.** Those who died with faith (or who on that day have faith in Him) are the "sheep," His faithful. They will inherit this new heaven on earth. Those who have rejected Jesus (the "goats") will be cast into the "fiery lake," or hell (see Revelation 21:8).

This is only a small portion of the words that God gives us on the place that is referred to as hell (for more, see Isaiah 66:24, Matthew 10:28, Luke 16:19-31, Romans 8:1). While hell is a very real place, God did **not** create it because He wanted some of His creation to burn in hell for eternity. This leads to the next point.

**The third point: Jesus desires that ALL men, women, and children be saved, and spend eternity in heaven with Him.** From 1 Timothy chapter 2: God *"desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all"*(vv. 4-5). Jesus did paid the ransom price necessary to release us from our debt of sin. Why hasn't Jesus returned again in glory, to create a new earth, and new heavens? The message of His Law and His life saving work needs to go out to the far reaches of the earth. God wants ALL people to have the chance to hear His word, repent, turn to Him for forgiveness and life, and to live forever.

**The final point: God condemns all people who have rejected His only Son, the Messiah (we know Him as Jesus Christ). Yes, God is the God of perfect love, for He loves all people completely, but He's also the God of justice.** God's Law was given to man for his good. God demands that it be kept perfectly. Because of God's great mercy, Jesus' atoning work on the cross was given as payment for all of those times that we refused to obey Him. Jesus Himself says, *"whoever believes in him [Jesus] should not perish [in hell] but have eternal life [in heaven]"* (John 3:16 – bracketed words by Pastor Travis).

How can the presiding bishop of the ELCA claim that "there may be [a hell], but I think it is empty"? By denying that the unrepentant, those who willingly live in sin, are headed for hell as Jesus clearly teaches. We have the truth – God's word - and we refuse to play games with it. May God continue to keep us in the one true faith, as we live each day with repentant hearts, seeking to do His will. Amen.

Pastor Travis

(1) Chicago Sun Times Podcast, March 7, 2018.

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## SOCIAL MINISTRIES

**FOOD TRUCK** – We are collecting donations of personal hygiene items and cleaning products to distribute at the Food Truck give-a-ways. Individuals in need cannot purchase items such as

shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, or household cleaners with their Bridge cards even though they are needed. A collection basket will be in the fellowship hall for donations. We very much appreciate the support we get from all of you! Very blessed to be a part of this church family! Questions can be made to Lisa or Bev.

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## PRAYER MINISTRIES

Prayer Warriors are always needed!

**Prayer Angels...** You should have received, in the mail or in your church mailbox, the names of the children and students that you will be praying for this year. Please keep them in your prayers and drop them a note to let them know you're praying for them. *Any questions or concerns? Contact Adele Travis, at 343-9088.*

**Praying for you...** Have you received a postcard in the mail recently that said, "The Congregation has prayed for you"? As part of the ongoing prayer ministry here at St. John, we pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our members. We also lift up the ministries and outreach of this congregation on a daily basis. If you are interested in praying for these concerns, November Prayer Sheets are available in the Narthex on the cart next to the Portals of Prayer.

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## LADIES AID

**MEETING** – Ladies Aid Meetings are now being held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month instead of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday. This was changed to accommodate those of you that were unable to attend the Thursday meetings. We would love to have any lady of the congregation attend our meetings and help us accomplish the valuable work that the ladies do for our church. The November meeting will begin with lunch at the China Inn at 11:30 A.M. on November 13th with the meeting to follow at the church at 1:00 P.M. Come join us!!!

**BLANKET PROJECT** – The ladies are working on making fleece blankets similar to fleece blankets with tied edges. We have a newer method of securing the edges and could really use some help! We invite any ladies or men that would like to help, to please join us on Mondays at approximately 12:00 Noon. The project requires no standing or bending over. It is totally a sit-down project!

**DIAPER PROJECT** – Thanks to all of you that have donated T-shirts for us to make diapers for Orphan Grain Train. We have completed over 12 dozen diapers and are running out of T-shirts! We especially need used men's extra-large t-shirts so that we can give them a new life. Stained collars and minor small stains are OK.

**FAMILY FARE "Direct Your Dollars"** - As of October 19th, we have collected 36,188 dollars in receipts. Remember, you must use your "Yes Rewards" card or give them your phone number for the purchase to count as a "Direct Your Dollars" receipt. We have had some receipts recently that didn't count due to not using the "Yes Rewards" card!

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# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Listen, listen God is calling, through the Word inviting,  
Offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy.

September was Christian Education month! *Invitations to Bible Study were offered.* Did you see them in the bulletins or newsletter? *Have you joined one?* Opportunities await you, now is the time.

## **Sunday Mornings**

**8:30 a.m. - A Longer Look at the Lessons** – Prepare for worship by taking a closer look at the Bible readings for that Sunday's service.

## **Monday Mornings**

**10:00 a.m.** - We are taking an in-depth look at the book of **James**, written by Jesus' half-brother. Through this book we will understand the importance of obedience to God's will in our life; how faith propels us to action, to do those good works that have been prepared in advance for us to do.

## **Tuesday Evenings**

**7:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study at Jane Tennant's home.** A deeper look at Baptism through the Lutheran Difference Bible Study series.

**7:00 p.m. - Men's Bible Study on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday.** They continue to dig into God's Word, and have started the "Great Heroes of the Bible - New Testament" series.

## **Wednesday Mornings**

**9:00 a.m. – Men's Breakfast and Devotional** - 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday at the church.

**Choose a study...**

**And, come grow in God's Word with us!**

## **Sunday School Happenings**

Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Genesis 18:14

**Through our true stories from God's Word in the Holy Bible**, the children are learning that there is absolutely nothing that is too hard for the Lord. And, God always keeps His promises! Just as He promised Abraham a very large family, a son was born to Abraham and Sarah. They were old! Way beyond child bearing years, Abraham was one hundred and Sarah was ninety. But, God promised and He delivered!

Then there was the true story of Abraham taking Isaac, his one and only son, to Mt. Moriah to offer as a sacrifice to the Lord. Abraham willingly laid the wood of the burnt offering on his only son,

whom he loved, and God provided a substitute for Isaac, a ram. God willingly laid the wood of the cross on His only Son whom He loved. But unlike Isaac, for whom God provided a substitute, Jesus was sacrificed for our sins. He is the perfect Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. And, for that we give thanks and praise!

We know that whatever our trials or temptations are, we have someone who sympathizes with us and has been tempted in every way we are but did not sin. Someone who overcame sin for us. Someone who did what we could not do. The children all know his name, Jesus our Lord and Savior. **Through faith in Jesus, a gift from God, we know that...**

**With God all things are possible.**

Matthew 19:26

## **Upcoming Dates and Events**

**November 25<sup>th</sup>:** Please mark your calendars now and come join the Sunday School children as we decorate the Sanctuary for Advent and Christmas. Pizza will be served when finished.

**Singing and Ringing Choirs:** We will be forming a singing and ringing choir for December 23<sup>rd</sup> and Christmas Eve Worship Service. Practice will take place directly following Advent Worship Service.

### **COULD YOU HELP SUPPORT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?**

We are providing Student Leaflets instead of Arch Bible Story books to our Sunday School students this year. We are looking for donations to cover the cost of the student packets. The cost will be \$8 per quarter or \$32 for the entire year. Please put your check or money in an envelope, label it "Sunday School Student Packets", and place it in the offering on Sunday or put it in Jolene's mailbox.

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## **EVANGELISM / OUTREACH**

Prayer cards are being sent letting you know that we are praying for your well being. I would like to challenge each of us to invite our family and friends to visit us for a Saturday evening or Sunday morning worship service and invite them to enjoy some fellowship with us after service Sunday morning. Who knows one invitation could potentially lead to another member joining our church family. Wouldn't that be wonderful!!

There are plenty of car window decals still available. Check with Dennis if you are interested and would like one or two.

There has been a Thrivent Grant applied for and approved to help purchase advent devotions for our Sunday school children.

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# IN GOD'S TIME –THE DAILY LIFE AND WORK OF MARTIN LUTHER

by Gerhard Bode

## **“I am overwhelmed”**

The day began in the middle of the night, between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. This was when Martin Luther and his fellow monks awoke at the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. Time there was regulated down to the minute. Matins was the first of seven services of the day. The rest of the time went to prayer, meditation and study. Fasting, self-examination and mortification of the flesh disciplined the mind, body and spirit. After becoming a priest, Luther's work expanded to include celebrating the mass, preaching and hearing confession.

In 1511, Johann von Staupitz, Luther's superior in the Augustinian order, assigned him a new task. He would be the chief preacher and teacher in the monastery in Wittenberg. Immediately, Luther protested. He couldn't possibly preach that much. "It will kill me, I won't last three months," Luther declared. He got used to the work, but it was never easy.

In 1516, Luther wrote to his friend Johann Lang:

I could use two secretaries. I do almost nothing during the day but write letters. I am a conventual preacher, reader at meals, parochial preacher, director of studies, overseer of eleven monasteries, superintendent of the fish pond at Litzkau, referee of the squabble at Torgau, lecturer on Paul, collector of material for a commentary on the Psalms, and then, as I said, I am overwhelmed with letters. I rarely have full time for the canonical hours and for saying mass, not to mention my own temptations with the world, the flesh, and the Devil. You see how lazy I am.

## **Never enough**

Before, during and after his time in the monastery (and despite the ironic self-deprecation in his letter to Lang), Luther was never lazy. He was always working. Yet through his study of God's Word, Luther began to understand that no matter how hard he worked, he could never earn God's love. All he could do was never enough.

Yet as Luther discovered the truth of the Gospel, he began to see that Christ alone is the solution to the problem of sin. By grace, through faith, God saves sinners. Faith in Christ forms and informs daily life. As the Gospel transformed his thinking, Luther started to realize that God's calling comes to each Christian. This calling is directed toward our neighbors and lived out in the ordinary tasks that fill our days. Life in a monk's cell, removed from the world, was not any holier in God's eyes and could, in fact, get in the way of love and service to others.

## **Freedom from bondage, not busyness**

After leaving the monastery, Luther focused on a different task: to teach and proclaim God's Word and to help the Church learn to live in the light of the Gospel. Yet his heavy workload and the frenetic pace of his daily life continued.

In most years, Luther preached more than 100 times. In 1528 alone, he gave nearly 200 different sermons. Over the course of his career, Luther In most years, Luther preached more than 100 times.

In 1528 alone, he gave nearly 200 different sermons. Over the course of his career, Luther preached approximately 4,000 sermons. Preaching, teaching at the university and writing books, treatises and letters consumed much of his time, even before his marriage to Katharina von Bora.

Following his marriage in 1525, life got even more hectic for Luther. In the 1530s Prince George of Anhalt planned to visit Wittenberg and was hoping to stay at the Luther home.

A friend wrote him to warn him about the circumstances there:

The home of Luther is occupied by a motley crowd of boys, students, girls, widows, old women, and youngsters. For this reason there is much disturbance in the place, and many regret it for the sake of the good man, the honorable father, Luther. If but the spirit of Dr. Luther lived in all of these, his house would offer you an agreeable, friendly quarter for a few days so that your Grace would be able to enjoy the hospitality of that man. But as the situation now stands and as circumstances exist in the household of Luther, I would not advise that your Grace stop there.

At any given time, the Luthers had a lot of people living with them, mostly relatives. Along with Martin, Katie and their children, there were up to eight nieces and nephews living in the home, and one grandniece. Katie's Aunt Lena, a former nun who had escaped the Nimbschen convent in 1523, was also there. There was a lady teacher and tutors for the children, at one time numbering six. These, and at least one dog, were the permanent members of the household. Then there was a constant stream of students, pastors, former nuns and priests and other guests coming and going. The Black Cloister was a busy place.

### **A task to complete**

Later in life, Luther wanted to withdraw. He was tired of fighting against Reformation opponents. Yet he never did. He knew God had called him and given him a task to complete. Luther believed that because of his call as a doctor — a teacher of the Church — he had an ongoing duty to search the Scriptures and to teach and preach what he found there.

Luther restored the teaching of God's Word to the Church of his time, and he did so in a way that helps us see what is important in our lives today. Faith in Christ and in His Gospel were at the heart of both Luther's message and his daily life in Christ. He found that daily life rich and fulfilling, but never easy. Even as he preached salvation by grace through faith — not by works — he spent his days laboring tirelessly for the sake of the Gospel.

Luther died in 1546 at the age of 62, his strength utterly spent, yet confident that he rested, in life or death, in God's good time.

Rev. Dr. Gerhard Bode is a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

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# RECONCILED IN CHRIST

by Mark Rockenbach

Five years ago, Jim and Sally sat in Pastor Smith's office for pre-marriage counseling. They loved each other and could never envision a time when they would have a disagreement or a fight. Yesterday, they were sitting in Pastor Smith's office again. Jim told the pastor they were ready to give up on the marriage because they were in major conflict.

## **What Causes Conflict?**

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1-3)

According to the Letter of James, we end up in conflict because of our sinful attitudes and desires. In this case, Jim wanted to be a professional golfer. There is nothing sinful about this desire. But he desired it so much he was willing to sin to satisfy his desire. He maxed out three credit cards and spent more time at the golf course than with Sally. Sally, on the other hand, wanted a good marriage and to raise children. Most would applaud her for having such godly desires. But she desired these things so much that she began to covet the relationships of other married people and ultimately pursued a relationship with another man.

## **Sin and Interpersonal Conflict**

Sally made it clear that she was the victim, always left at home by herself while Jim spent money pursuing his dream to be professional golfer. Sally saw nothing wrong with finding love and companionship with someone else. Jim was quick to point out that Sally sinned against the Sixth Commandment and that this was grounds for a divorce. But Jim saw nothing wrong with going into debt and spending time away from Sally to pursue his dream. When we are entangled in a conflict, we often focus upon how the other person has wronged us. We don't believe we have done anything wrong, or we make excuses for our sinful behavior.

King David sinfully desired Bathsheba, acted on that sinful desire and then attempted to cover up his sin. His actions put him in conflict with God and with those around him. God sent the prophet Nathan to help David see his actions for what they really were. David was so blinded by his sin that he at first did not realize that the story Nathan told about the rich man slaughtering the poor man's lamb was about him (2 Sam. 12:1-4). As the truth became crystal clear ("You are the man!"), King David could have refused to repent. But instead, "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Sam. 12:13). David needed Nathan to help him see that what he had done was evil in God's eyes. And when David did repent of his sins (Ps. 51), God was quick to forgive him. The relationship between God and David was restored.

Jim and Sally needed a Nathan in their life. Therefore, Pastor Smith reminded them that they are

baptized children of God reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus Christ. He helped them see the ways in which their own sins had contributed to the demise of their marriage. And as children of God they confessed their sins, and their pastor forgave them in the name of Christ. Just like David, Jim and Sally needed to be reconciled first with God (2 Cor. 5:18-19) before their relationship with each other could be set right.

## **Biblical Reconciliation**

Before Jim and Sally met with their pastor they went to a counselor who taught them coping techniques. They sought out the advice of friends who encouraged them to solve the problem by getting a divorce. They looked at websites and books that suggested ways to fix their marriage. None of these encouraged them to be reconciled to one another through Jesus Christ. But it was reconciliation that finally brought them peace.

In my 15 years of working with conflicted parties — whether in marriages, families or congregations — most focus on fixing or resolving the immediate conflict and ignore the opportunity for reconciliation and the spiritual healing that comes with it.

Biblical reconciliation always begins with God and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When you find yourself in a conflict with someone, start with your Baptism. Remember that God has reconciled us with Himself through His Son and we are forgiven children of God (1 John 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18-19). If He has forgiven us, how can we deny forgiveness to one another?

Next, examine how you have sinfully contributed to the conflict, and if you are struggling to identify your sin, seek out a Nathan to help you. Finally, set up a time to speak to the person you are in conflict with. Confess to them how you have sinned against them and ask them to forgive you in the name of Christ.

Realize that the concept of biblical reconciliation is foreign to most people. They may not forgive you right away, and they may not be willing to confess their own sins. But trust in God's Word and know that you are forgiven (Ps. 32:1-2, 1 Peter 2:24). Be patient as the Holy Spirit works repentance by means of God's Word through your neighbor. And when both parties have confessed their sins and forgiven each other in Christ, give thanks that God has reconciled us through His Son and opened the way for us to be reconciled with our neighbor.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Rockenbach is associate professor of Practical Theology, adviser for personal growth and leadership development and director of the institutional review board at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. His areas of expertise include pastoral care, Christian counseling, forgiveness and reconciliation, congregational conflict and congregational field research.

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# CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

**THANKSGIVING EVE WORSHIP** – our annual worship will be November 21<sup>st</sup>, at 6:30 pm. Holy Communion will be served. Please join us!

**2018 FLOWER CHART** – A new flower chart for 2018 is posted. There are many opportunities to sponsor flowers for the altar. Please take a few moments to sign up for a special date. Remember, flowers are \$15.00 and the Ladies Aid would like them paid for when you sign up.

**DECALS** – Been noticing St. John window decals in the cars in the parking lot or around town? Want one for your vehicle/vehicles? There is no charge . . . just ask Patty Rohman or stop by the church office to get one.

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT** – St. John Lutheran has entered into an agreement with AuSable Valley Community Mental Health that allows them to use our facility for certain activities during the week. Part of this agreement is that our congregational members will keep confidential the names of people that are using our facility. Please observe this agreement by never mentioning the names of people that you may have seen. Also, remind others of this agreement if you hear of a visitor's name being mentioned. Thank you for your cooperation. Executive Council.

**Reminder:** There is a box in the Narthex for giving to the **Ogemaw County Clergy Association**. This money is collected hygiene items, for the purchase of food, personal home heating fuels, and funeral expenses for people in Ogemaw Country that are unable to afford these necessities. Make checks payable to Ogemaw County Clergy Assoc. Thank you!

**EMERGENCY PRAYER REQUESTS** – St. John has developed a system that allows us to rapidly contact all members when a life threatening situation develops, requiring immediate prayers. We are requesting cell phone numbers (for text messaging) or e-mail addresses for all members. For those who don't use e-mails or text messaging, phone calls will be made. Please request a salmon-colored form the office and return it when completed. Thank you.

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## NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

11/01 – Ronnie Moorhouse  
11/01 – Martha Ockerman  
11/02 – Dino Vecellio  
11/04 – Matthew Randall  
11/05 – Joseph Valley  
11/07 – Nathaniel Randall  
11/10 – Brian Klein  
11/17 – Henry Hernandez  
11/20 – Carol Curtis  
11/21 – Elfrieda Kihn  
11/22 – Joyce Chellew  
11/24 – Gerhard Klemm  
11/25 – John Voss  
11/25 – Connie Wakefield  
11/26 – Ken Fowler



## NOVEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

11/20 – Art & Jane Tennant  
11/25 – Rev. Howard & Adele Travis