

Deadline for submissions is the 15th of each month for the following month's newsletter.

Send to:
smlcspublications@gmail.com



Pastor Jon Zehnder



Saint Michael Lutheran
CHURCH • DAY SCHOOL • FOUNDATION

Weekend Regular Worship

Sat: 5:30 pm Informal
Sun: 8:00 am Traditional
10:45 am Blended

Advent

You are invited to the **Advent Event**, November 29 starting at 9:15 a.m. when we will again be building our own Advent Wreaths or constructing one for one of our homebound members. A breakfast will be served. **Advent Midweek Worship services** will only be held online. Join us as we walk through the season of Advent, explaining its significance, lighting candles, sharing devotions, and more each week.

Christmas Worship

December 24, Christmas Eve: 5:30 p.m. (Family celebration); 7:30 p.m. & 11:00 p.m. (Candlelight and Carols)
December 25, Christmas Day: 10:00 a.m.
December 26, Saturday Worship at 5:30 p.m.
December 27, Sunday Worship at 8:00 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.

The Messenger

From the Pastor

Rev. Jon Zehnder

Well, the Advent season is upon us, and part of the joy of preparing for this season is taking care of all those eagerly anticipated upcoming events. Things like: will we build our own Advent wreath at the Advent Event at church? What day will we pick out our Christmas tree? When do we put the lights on our house? What weekend is dedicated to baking Christmas cookies? When do we have to get all of our out-of-town packages mailed to have them arrive on time?

And while there's a part of us that wants the Christmas season to be filled with new joys and experiences and possibilities, the "new normal" we're currently in may prohibit that. Matter of fact, even though we might want this Christmas to be comfortably the same as those of years gone by – filled with the scenes, smells, flavors and sounds that we've seen, smelled, tasted and heard before – that may not be able to happen this Christmas. As much as we would love a Christmas just like the ones we used to know, we may not this year!

One of my favorite Christmas cards reads this way, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would've sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would've sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was for forgiveness, so God sent a Savior!"

At Christmas we're reminded that God sent the best that He had for our most pressing need, and that Gift given and received is not dependent on a vaccine or downturn of the pandemic! You see, God in His grace met our greatest need, and He had you in mind when He commissioned His only Son to take on human flesh. He had you and me in mind.

And when we start thinking those kinds of thoughts, as we let these fundamental Christmas truths wash over us, those truths draw us near to God. We sense His presence. We're filled with a kind of wonder and worship. And then we look at people around us, even in the divisions that plague us, and we say, "And He came for them too". And we begin to treat people with a little more dignity; it changes the way we relate to family and friends. It's like a Christmas spirit begins to take root in our spirits. May the Holy Spirit fill us all with joy, wonder, and worship as we celebrate the birth of our Savior and King Jesus!

Pastor Jon

From the Director of Little Saints

Stacie Thompson

Happy holidays, everyone! This is the time of year to be thankful, and the Animal Refuge Center (ARC) in North Fort Myers is so very thankful for all of the donations again this year. They look forward to seeing us every year as we pull in with a carload packed to the roof of very badly needed food and supplies for the animals. Thank you everyone for being so generous.

Little Saints is getting ready to celebrate the holidays. Unfortunately, we will not be able to have our annual family Christmas party this year due to COVID. We are looking forward to the day we can all join together again with our families for a celebration. The next planned event will be at some point late spring when we hope to hold a big family picnic at Lakes Park to celebrate the school year.

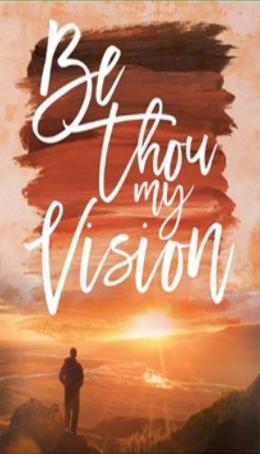
2020 has been a tough year. I want to extend a big "thank you" to all of the staff at Little Saints for working so hard every day to give the best care and education to the children and families, while dealing with the extenuating circumstances COVID has thrown our way. We simply could not do this without all of you; you are a blessing to our school.

May God's Blessing be upon you in the New Year.



From our Principal

Kati Miser



We hear a lot about angels during the Christmas season – angels who sing God's praises and angels who announce the Good News. We too proclaim that same Good News in **our mission at SMLS: to educate children and touch families' lives with the awesome love of Jesus Christ!** We recognize that there are angels among us, putting God's love into action. And it is no different on our campus. What a staff in our school and church! Since the theme for this school year is "Be Thou My Vision," we ask God to help us see the world through His loving eyes and to be His angels to our community.



Speaking of angels among us, the leaders who faithfully and so ably serve along side me in the workings of Saint Michael School and Early Learning Center are "heaven-sent." This month, I would like to introduce two who are a dynamic duo – the Director of eSAINTS, **Stephanie Letourneau**, and her cohort, **Sue Hansen**. With a master's degree in Library and Information Technology, Stephanie has taught at SMLS for 27 years ... as a classroom teacher, yearbook and production instructor, media specialist and librarian. With a degree in early childhood, Sue was a founder, teacher and director of a preschool in Illinois for 20 years before coming to SMLS. She has been involved in substitute teaching, extended care, summer camps and keeping our Pre-K classes "on their toes." It would be great if you could shower them with notes of appreciation, encouragement, and support as together we tackle nurturing and educating children in our community, especially in these days of the pandemic. As a matter of fact, we would encourage you during this Christmas season to send cards/notes to our school families and all our amazing staff.



Check out our [SMLS Facebook](#) page where Saint Michael families share their stories about the impact Saint Michael Lutheran School has had on their family. Give me a call at 239-939-1218 if you want to arrange to see our school first-hand. **A BLESSED CHRISTMAS TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!**

*From the Director of Caring Ministries**Julie Berchtold***Nothing Is Impossible with God**

By Dave Boehi, FamilyLife

The Christmas season reminds us that the God who made it possible for a virgin to conceive can heal any marriage and any family problem.

A wife writes to say her marriage is falling apart. She is so depressed, she says, that “I can barely even work or get out of bed.” Another says she is separated from her husband and would like to reconcile, “but I cannot go through him coming back and sucking all the life out of me again. I think it may just kill me. I feel empty, and I have no strength left.”

A mother and father are heartbroken about the struggles their daughter is having in her marriage. “We long to see them live together in a home where Christ is obeyed, honored, served, and where they can have peace, joy, and the hope of a future together.”

During this Christmas season, I’ve been thinking of these marriages—and so many others represented in the letters and emails FamilyLife receives every day. These are people who need a special dose of the hope that God offers through Christ. One of my favorite parts of the nativity story is when Mary is told she will bear a son who “will be called the Son of the Most High.” She asks, “*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*” and the angel replies: “***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God***” (Luke 1:34-37).

I love that final phrase: “***For nothing will be impossible with God.***” It’s the type of truth we need to remember in our lives, our marriages, our families. We need to remember that the God who made it possible for a virgin to conceive can heal any marriage and any family problem. The God who came to live with us understands the temptations we face and gives us the power to turn away from them. The God who sent angels to speak to men two thousand years ago still speaks to us today through His Word. The God who sent Jesus to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) ... because we couldn’t do it on our own ... now gives us the power to walk with Him every hour of every day. We all have something going on in our lives that should cause us to turn to God ... some problem or situation that we just can’t seem to solve ourselves. Christmas gives us hope that God wants to be intimately involved in our lives ... and that nothing is impossible for Him.

***Saint Michael Foundation***

It was due to a desire to provide ongoing support for the mission and ministry of Saint Michael Lutheran Church and School that Saint Michael Foundation was created. From the earliest beginnings of our ministry presence in Fort Myers, we have benefitted from the sacrifice and generosity of those who came before us, just as those who follow us will benefit from us.

Using Short Term, Long Term, and Endowment strategies, the Foundation has grown to over \$700,000. As you consider your end of year charitable gifts, the Foundation Board of Directors would encourage you to not only check any company matching gift programs (often done for educational institutions like Saint Michael School and non-profit charitable organizations like Saint Michael Church), but to also consider how you might add Saint Michael Foundation to your long-term stewardship plans.

From the Ministry Coordinator

Lori Schwan

Children's 5:30 Family Christmas Eve Worship

We will still have a child friendly service on Christmas Eve at 5:30 PM. However, we DON'T need to get everyone together to practice. We will be singing traditional Christmas Carols, and all the kids who are present for the service will help tell the Luke 2 and Matthew 2 parts of the Christmas story together. We will have a few speaking parts for those who are passionate about reading as well as six special helpers to hold signs during our dramatic reading of the Christmas story. We will email out a link to the songs so that you can practice them at home whether you attend in person or at home. If you want your elementary child to have a speaking part, help with technology, or hand out the glow sticks and special gifts to each person, contact me.



Sunday School

We will continue to explore the Old Testament through stories we don't always talk about in Sunday School but which show how God continues to use all different people to reveal His love for the WHOLE world. We are also finding some creative ways to draw the kids online and in person together to apply these stories to their faith lives too.

Kids Serving

Because of the generosity of donors across the world, **Operation Christmas Child**, a project of Samaritan's Purse, collected more than 11 million shoeboxes packed with toys, school supplies, hygiene items, and prayer for children suffering from poverty, disasters, war, and famine. Thanks to our families who helped last month, we contributed 31 boxes to Operation Christmas Child.



In December, our Sunday School kids will organize our biggest **Jammies for Jesus** project by purchasing PJs for the kids in over 40 families who are being served by Lutheran Services of Florida in an effort to help these families stay intact. With the stress of Covid, LSF is serving more families than ever before. If you are in the congregation and want to help with this Thrivent Action Team by shopping and donating Pajamas for kids, contact me so that I can let you know a specific child for whom to buy. All PJs should arrive no later than December 13th.

Thrivent Financial Members

If you own a Thrivent Financial Product, don't miss the December 31st deadline to give \$250 or \$500 without giving ANY of your money. Contact me to see how you can partner with Thrivent Action Team.

Women's Bible Study: A Case for Christmas

Even when he was an atheist, Lee Strobel enjoyed the Christmas season – the gift-giving, holiday parties, and being with friends and family. But after his wife became a Christian, Lee started to investigate the real meaning behind all those nativity scenes he had seen outside of churches. In this four-week study, Lee reveals what he discovered as he sought to separate the holiday from the holy day, the facts from the fantasy, and the truth from the tradition. Join me on Thursdays from 10:00-11:30 AM on Zoom to discover the Evidence for the Identity of Jesus.

Be the Match Bone Marrow Screening



As our Parish Nurse Ann Sluiter is needing a bone marrow transplant, we are encouraging anyone who is 50 and under to contact Be the Match directly at www.BeTheMatch.org to see if you can be put on the national registry. A potential donor will answer a few questions online. Those that qualify will be sent a screening kit directly to swab their mouth at home and return in the mail. People of all ethnicities are needing bone marrow transplants, so please share with anyone you know to consider giving the gift of life.

From the Director of Christian Education

Jack Proctor

Saint Michael Youth Ministries

We are back primarily in person with virtual participation options!

Sunday Mornings

Confirmation: 7th and 8th grade students with parents in the cafeteria.

Youth Sunday School: With Ms. Sue in the youth room.



Middle School Youth Night

6th - 8th grade from 6 - 7:30 PM starting in the gym! We will have dinner, fun games, and explore how God is working in our lives!

Revive

Revive is a community of high school students who gather weekly to connect with each other and with our God! 6 - 8 PM in the youth room.



The FL-GA MSYG was held on November 7th, and it was a huge success! We had amazing worship, great fellowship, and awesome teaching! We were encouraged to know that we are always held in the loving grip of Jesus. Thank you to all who prayed for and supported this event. You can watch the MSYG here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0gOyP32WWY>

Youth Service Project Benefiting the Oasis Youth Shelter

One of our favorite traditions is the Progressive Servant event. We serve the youth who have to spend Christmas at Lutheran Services of Florida's Oasis Youth Shelter by buying Christmas gifts for them and also something special for the staff who so faithfully serve. We won't be able to do it the same way this year, but we will still be getting gifts for the youth. More details to follow in the weeks to come. If you would like to donate toward this project, please contact me.

Christmas Eve Luminaries

Mark your calendar. The youth groups will be preparing Luminaries for the Christmas Eve Services on Sunday, December 20th. We will be gathering on Christmas Eve to set them out around campus. Watch your email for more information.

The Fundamentals Podcast - "The Fundamentals" is a former radio show I hosted with my best friend Jeff, who is now in his final year at the seminary in Saint Louis. In "The Fundamentals", we break down different topics to the roots. Currently we are taking a look at the Book of Daniel! You can find the podcast on apple podcasts by searching for "The Fundamentals Jack Proctor" or check us out on YouTube. We pray it may be a blessing to you. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbFuHtXVmW0&t=5s>

Jack Proctor, Director of Youth Ministries

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To be in the know with specifics for each week in youth ministry, contact Jack.Proctor@gsmcls.org to be included in the weekly emails.

*Director of Music Ministry**Vicar Colton LaMay*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,

Advent is here, and this time of year is so exciting as we remember Jesus not only coming as the Word made Flesh, winning for us salvation, but as we look forward to the Day He will come again to reign over His kingdom that will have no end. Much like the prophets of old, we long for that Day of His coming when the whole of creation will be made right with God for all eternity. Advent is the beginning our church year, and it reminds us of the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End: God's plan for salvation for all mankind fulfilled through Jesus and the sure faith in God's promises for the redemption of the whole world in the judgement of the living and the dead. It is an exciting time of year when we think about God's way of continually forming and shaping His children throughout history and how His promises are fulfilled in our midst and in the days to come. As you think about the worship themes and the services this month, notice the intentional focus on not only the coming of Jesus in human flesh, but also the focus on His triumphant return.



Friends who share your gifts of music, be sure to watch for emails or phone calls in the coming days about some special music opportunities for the Advent season! We have been thinking of creative ways to have special music during this time. I have also been in contact with folks blessed with the gifts of organization and directing, so we are working together to release some of the musical direction to others with those gifts in order to have the groups run smoothly and possibly meet more regularly. There are exciting things on the musical horizon, so watch out for more to come very soon! God's richest blessings to you this Advent season, and I so look forward to worshipping with you during the coming weeks both in person and online!

Blessings in Jesus,
Vicar Colton LaMay

Board of Human Care

Our Children's Gift Giving Tree is a Gift Card Tree this year! We are putting the giving tree in the Narthex with Christmas Cards and envelopes for you to use, or you can mail in a donation to the St. Michael Board of Human Care and we will purchase a gift card for you. Feel free to write a Christmas message in the card! (We suggest that if you sign your name, use your first name only.)

You can place the completed card in the offering plate by the doors or return to the church office by December 13th!

Suggested amount is \$25, and the suggested stores are Walmart or Target. Thank you for helping make this Christmas a little brighter for children in our community!