

Volume 12, Issue 1  
January 2021

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

# The Messenger

*From the Pastor*

*Rev. Jon Zehnder*

I don't think there are many people who will be sad to "close the book" on 2020! We had a temporary escape with Christmas, which I think people started celebrating earlier than ever this year. But the Christmas season does end, and we'll take down the lights, put all the decorations away, and return to reality – hoping that the pandemic will start to subside, that there will be a return to some sense of "normalcy", and just hoping that 2021 will be better than 2020.

We hope ... but we do not know. So, as we head into the uncertainty of the future, it is important to know, first of all, that **God is our only hope**; we place our hope in the eternal grace and will of our God. I mean, how encouraging is it to know that in this crazy world of ours – where our lives get tossed around by storms – that we have this incredible promise of an eternal relationship with Someone who loves us, will stand by us, and will sustain us no matter where we are or what we're going through.

In a world where everything changes day by day, we understand by faith that there is one consistent, unchangeable force in our lives and that is God's love for us in Jesus! Honestly, there is nothing more important in this life than for us to put our faith and trust in Him. I would encourage you to read Psalm 121, because what the Psalmist is talking about is the certainty of God in an uncertain world – a God who lovingly takes care of us, watches over us, has a plan for us, and who draws us with confidence into this new year.

Well, there's one more thing that we need as we enter this new year. **We need each other.** We all know that tough stuff happens in our lives and that it will continue to happen. There is simply no escape from the suffering, storms, and trials that go with living in a broken world – a world affected and infected by sin. I mean, who would've guessed a year ago the kind of stuff that we would be dealing with this past year?

And our struggles, even though they might be different in the details, have been duplicated in the lives of every other person in the world, which means that we're not alone in these struggles that we face every day. There is a God who made us, redeemed us, who is with us and understands; but it is crucial to remember that He has also placed us into a community, into a fellowship, into a family that we call the Church.

And that Church is a family where there are no outsiders, so we ought to always have a heart for strangers, for the lost, for those still on the outside. We always need to be a place for those who have been here a long time as well as a place for those who have just wandered in because they started paying attention to the thirst in their souls.

We're all here because God has welcomed us with outstretched arms and we have received grace and forgiveness and new life as a gift in Jesus. And that gift is available to everyone. You know I like the description of the church as a hospital for sinners, a place where people come in to find healing from all the desperate mistakes they've made trying to satisfy their thirst with something other than the living water that our Savior gives.

May we in this new year be reminded that there are a lot of thirsty people out there and nothing but Jesus' living water can satisfy them. Every day they're being tempted to throw their hope away for something in this broken-down world. We've got to let them know that it isn't worth it. We've got to let them know as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no human mind has conceived – these things God has prepared for those who love Him..." – that's what we're living for. Not hope for a weekend, but hope in the promise of the fulfillment of all things in the end.

*Pastor Jon*

*From the Director of Little Saints*

*Stacie Thompson*



Happy New Year! Little Saints is gearing up for another great year as we recently have welcomed several new families to our Saint Michael family. We will continue to be blessed with full enrollment in 2021.

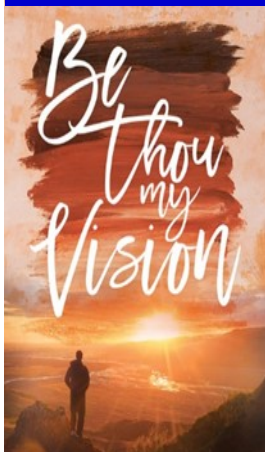


In January we will be learning all about winter at Little Saints, as all the children spend the month building up to our annual Winter Day celebration on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. The entire Early Learning Center will enjoy a day of games and activities focused on winter fun, Florida style – complete with snowball fights and yes, ice skating!

Little Saints is lifting up prayers for 2021 as we have great hope for a better year for all.

*From our Principal*

*Kati Miser*



January is renowned for being the month of New Year’s resolutions. All of us at one time or another have thought that our resolution would be long-lasting and life-changing. And all of us have experienced the disappointment when we failed to make it either long-lasting OR life-changing. Let’s be sure of our most important life’s resolution – to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior – a resolution empowered by the Holy Spirit. **Our mission at SMLS is to educate children and touch families’ lives with the awesome love of Jesus Christ!** We recognize that there are many adults at SMLS who walk along-side our students to help them make good choices and be children who are examples of maturing followers of Jesus. Since the theme for this school year is “Be Thou My Vision,” we ask God to help us – students, staff and parents – see the world through His loving eyes and then act accordingly.



This month I want to highlight three staff members who help our children be examples of followers of Jesus in all areas of their lives, leaders who faithfully and so ably serve alongside me in the workings of Saint Michael School. **Mr. TJ O’Connell** is not only the Dean of Students, but also a Middle School Literature teacher and athletics coach, with lots of opportunities to guide children and reinforce life lessons. Our Student Resources Department has two staff members who assist children at SMLS not only with classroom learning situations but also with spiritual guidance. **Mrs. Paulette Mueller** has a degree in Elementary Education, a minor in psychology, and a colloquy degree through Concordia University. She teaches Middle School Religion and 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> grade guidance. **Mrs. Madeline Tipton** graduated from Concordia University with a master’s degree in Education specializing in the Inclusive Classroom. This is her fourth year of work with students, teachers, and parents in getting them the resources they need for success at school. Your notes of encouragement during this difficult time are always welcomed by our staff.



January is also the month for our annual **OPEN HOUSE** which this year is a virtual experience on January 22, 2021. Watch for updates about that event. 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. Applications are now available for the 2021-2022 school year.

**A BLESSED NEW YEAR TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!**



## 4 Ways to Not Be a Coronavirus Divorce Statistic

By Sabrina Beasley McDonald

Recently, CNBC predicted a dismal future for marriages after the pandemic is over. The article title speaks for itself, “As couples self-isolate due to coronavirus, lawyers expect a rise in divorces.” The author interviewed several lawyers who liken the quarantine to extra time together during holidays, which is always followed by a spike in divorce. One U.K. lawyer said the internet search “I want a divorce” is 230% higher after Christmas. Which means lawyers everywhere are waiting on the marriages who will be a coronavirus divorce statistic. Sadly, prolonged time together, especially during a crisis, can make you loathe the one you love. And there are several reasons. Most of us can identify with at least one of these (or all—no judgment here) in our current situation:

- **As stress goes up, patience and self-control go down.** During a crisis, we all have less tolerance. Little irritants become big issues.
- **A spouse makes an easy target.** Many of us don’t know how to handle fear and pressure during a crisis. Human nature wants a cause to blame.
- **Prolonged time together puts pressure on existing weaknesses.** Many spouses maintain the relationship by ignoring problems. But prolonged time together forces the forbidden topics to surface.
- **We’re fighting an invisible enemy.** As if these issues weren’t enough, we also have an enemy – Satan – who wants marriages to fail. The Bible says *he prowls around like a lion, seeking people to torment and tear apart (1 Pet. 5:8)*.

With all these issues swirling and feelings running wild, it’s easy to see how any marriage could be a coronavirus divorce statistic on the horizon. But before we turn on our spouses, let’s *check our hearts*.

When money is tight, kids are restless, and mom and dad are stepping on each other’s toes, what can you do? Here are four actions you can start today.

### 1. Avoid making decisions you might regret.

During crises, it should be a rule in any relationship to not make any major decisions. Feelings are too sensitive.

### 2. Talk about the hard issues in your marriage, but don’t stop there.

Come up with a plan. Answer the question, “Now what?” For example, if spending is the cause of your fighting, plan to solve the problem. Can you give your spending spouse an allowance?

### 3. Consider the relationship between strengths and weaknesses.

Most often, a person’s greatest weakness is also his greatest strength. Make a list of your spouse’s traits that drive you crazy. Now consider how those traits are also strengths you love. For example, it drives me crazy that my husband spends too much time surfing his phone. But I’ve discovered I can have deeper conversations with him over text. Sometimes it’s hard for him to find the right words, especially when I’m staring at him, making him feel judged. But over text he can “hide” and share a little more of his heart.

### 4. Evaluate your expectations.

Your spouse is human—frail, imperfect, but still made in God’s image. He or she has God-given gifts and qualities, and there’s a reason God put you together. Through Christ, *“power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9-11)*. Maybe it’s not your spouse, but your expectations causing problems. Have you considered your perspective of your mate may be out of line with who God made them to be? Maybe instead of your spouse, it’s you that needs to change. Are you controlling? Perfectionist? Do you care too much about what others think? Have you made your idea of the “perfect marriage” an idol? How is God using your mate’s imperfections to challenge your own sin?

### Loving the person you “hate”

Theologian R. C. Sproul once told a story about a man who came to his pastor for marriage counseling. The man said, “Pastor, I can’t live with my wife anymore.” “Just love her as a sister in Christ,” the pastor replied.

But the man argued, “She’s a terrible person. I’m not even sure she’s a Christian.” “So, she’s more like a stranger, or a neighbor?” the pastor asked. “Yes, that’s right,” the man said. “We’re not close anymore.” But the pastor persisted, “Well, Jesus told us to love our neighbors.”

Frustrated, the man said, “I don’t think you understand. I hate her, and she hates me!”

“So, she’s your enemy?” the pastor asked. “Yes! The worst of enemies!” the man exclaimed.

“Then you have no other choice,” the pastor replied. *“Jesus told us to love our enemies.”* People are people, even Christians. We’re *all* going to sin and hurt the ones we love. But love doesn’t mean a lack of conflict. Healthy conflict is a sign communication is happening – facing issues, instead of burying them. Holding anger inside, on the other hand, is dangerous. Like a pressure cooker, if we don’t let out the steam, the pot will explode.

### You’re not alone

Looking around, you may feel alone in your struggle. But those smiling faces on social media don’t always tell the truth – marriage is hard work. The Holy Spirit is also with you. Even when the fight seems too hard on our own, Jesus promises He’s with us during every trial in life. He said, *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)*. Trust God. Love unconditionally. Use wisdom.



*From the Ministry Coordinator**Lori Schwan***Children's Ministry Thank You for Serving!**

Thank you to the kids, their families, Shea Flynn, Priscilla Flynn, Vicar LaMay, and Pastor Jon for making Christmas Eve a great worship celebration despite Covid. God alone still gets the glory! If you missed the service, you can watch it on our website.

**Sunday School**

We will continue to explore the Old Testament through less familiar stories that show how God can use anyone to continue His plan to save us. We are also finding some creative ways to involve the kids online and in person together to apply these stories to their faith lives too. Join us on Zoom or in the music room live.

**Kids Serving**

In December, our Sunday School kids hosted a servant event that has grown to involve some church members and school families. Wow, did we see God do more than we could ask for or imagine! We knew with the economic struggles that this could be our largest **Jammies for Jesus** project ever, but we had no idea how it would grow or how God would provide. At the start of this project, we had estimated buying pajamas for about 68 children. That number grew to 72, then 78, 103, and finally landed at 112! Thanks to ALL the people who supported this Thrivent Action team by purchasing PJs for the kids in families who are being served by Lutheran Services of Florida to help families stay intact. During the project, Satan continued to work hard to derail the tremendous efforts of the twelve-person team of social workers and staff who have doubled their caseload since last year. The devil thought that quarantining the office would shut their efforts down, but they kept persevering despite several being sick. Please join me in praying for this staff who has not stopped serving these families in these very difficult times. We had to postpone a luncheon we had planned for them as a treat since not all their staff was well enough to come back before Christmas; we will plan to do the luncheon in January.

**An Advent Thank You**

Thanks to all who helped make and deliver Advent Wreathes for the homebound. We received word back each time as to how God blesses through those acts of love for our church members who can't join us anymore on campus. Many tears were shed as they appreciated being remembered. Parents also appreciated the Advent devotions being mailed to their homes if they missed the event.

**Thrivent Financial Members**

Thrivent Financial Members: If you own a Thrivent Financial Product, with the start of the new year you can give \$250 two times without giving any of your own money. Contact Lori Schwan to see how you can partner with a fundraiser, service project, or an educational Thrivent Action Team. Those who have Choice Dollars can also direct them for 2020 up until March 31, 2021.

**Women's Bible Study**

Join me on Thursdays from 10:00-11:30 AM on Zoom to study the Scripture together. When this is published, we will have just completed a study on Christmas and will be starting a new study still to be determined.

*For the Love of a Baby*

The Board of Human Care will be holding a collection drive in February for the Healthy Start Coalition of Southwest Florida. Due to COVID, many of the churches which supported Healthy Start are still closed. They are in need of diapers (all sizes), wipes, and clothing for babies and toddlers (new or gently used). Healthy Start suggested Once Upon a Child as a great place to buy high quality, used clothing at a good price. We ask that you prayerfully consider how you can support this endeavor next month. As always, we are so thankful for your generosity. We truly have a generous congregation.



## **Saint Michael Youth Ministries**

A few events such as Rock the Universe and the Edison Festival of Lights parade have been cancelled. However, that doesn't mean we don't have great things to look forward to! Jesus is still active as ever, and we get to join Him on His mission!



### **Father-Son Retreat has been postponed**

The retreat this year has been postponed until the spring. This retreat is for boys in 5th - 7th grade along with their father's. This retreat is all about fathers teaching their sons about manhood and how to be a real man of God. A man of God is courageous, honorable, and faithful to the end.

### **Confirmation**

**7th/8th grade students & parents:** Bring your Small Catechism and Bible with you each week in the cafeteria from 9:30-10:30 AM. Contact me for Zoom information if you are joining online.

### **Sunday School**

For all 6 - 12th grade students not in confirmation class. 9:15-10:30 AM in the youth room.

### **High School Revive**

Revive is a community of high school students coming together to support, encourage, learn, and laugh together centered on the truth of Christ. Join us on Wednesday nights from 6:00-8:00 PM in the youth room! Bring your mask.

### **Middle School Youth Nights**

We play games, enjoy snacks, build community, and learn more about God together! We meet on select Tuesdays from 6:00-7:30 PM in the Joy/Youth Room! Check the bulletin for specific dates.

### **Progressive Dinner Servant Event**

Our progressive dinner servant event was a success! In December, our middle and high school youth learned about the ministry of the Oasis Youth Shelter. Then thanks to donations, they were able to shop for specific Christmas gifts for the Oasis teens! (Picture from 2019)



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

Jack Proctor, Director of Youth Ministries

[Jack.Proctor@gsmcls.org](mailto:Jack.Proctor@gsmcls.org)

239.939.1218 ext. 224

**Director of Music Ministry****Vicar Colton LaMay**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,

Happy New Year to you, and I pray that you and your family are healthy and well as we enter a new year! I also pray for hearts of hope as God is making us new each and every day in the grace of Jesus while He continues to shape and form us by His Holy Spirit. This is an exciting month for the ministry God has given us as we will be blessed to gather together for the rite of ordination later this month. On January 24<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm, I will be ordained and installed as Pastor, Director of Worship and Music. I will continue to oversee our music and worship as well as provide pastoral service for our congregation. With the ordering of the Specific Ministry Pastor program, I have two more years of classes through the Saint Louis seminary with mentorship under Pastor Jon.



I look forward to the next phase of pastoral formation, and I thank God daily for your continued prayers and support. My family is thankful for you as a wonderfully caring congregation who continually reflects the love of Jesus to those we are called to serve alongside in our church. God has drawn us together in this time and place, and what a blessing it is to continue growing in stewardship of God's means of grace and care for the congregation on your behalf. Plus, we are able to continue celebrating our Lord and Savior through the songs of the Church as we join to offer worship and praise! Jesus' love for us is overwhelming, and He continues to form our hearts so we may have hearts for Him and the people He has placed in our lives. You are all very near to my heart and continually in my prayers. I look forward to what God has in store for His ministry at Saint Michael!

Blessings in Jesus,  
Vicar Colton LaMay

**Board of Human Care**

We will be collecting warm clothing for the homeless along with any type of cold weather gear – sweatshirts, blankets, jackets, hats, gloves, etc. New or gently used items can be placed in the collection bin in the narthex anytime through January 31<sup>st</sup>.

We would like to thank you for your tremendous generosity during the Christmas season. Our Children's Gift Giving Tree and our Senior Gift Bags were hugely successful this year! We could not have helped so many children and seniors in our community without your support! Thank you, and God bless you!



The Lee Health Blood Mobile will be on campus Sunday, January 3<sup>rd</sup> from 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Please consider donating!

**PTL MEETING!**

The first PTL Meeting of the new year will be Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. on Zoom. Email Meg Minor, PTL President, for details. [meg.minor.motr@gmail.com](mailto:meg.minor.motr@gmail.com)