

Deadline for submissions is the 15th of each month for the following month's newsletter. Send to: smlcpublications@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

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spirit-filled faith can grow.

Let this Advent season for us be a time of heightened watchfulness, wide-eyed expectations and wide-awake wonder at what our God in His grace continues to do in our lives, in our church and in our community. For unto us is born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ, the Lord; He is the King of Kings, the Son of God, our Savior.

We've got to keep watching, and, as we watch this Advent season, let's keep our hearts, our spirits and our knees ready to join those shepherds as we fall down to worship Jesus!



The Messenger

From the Pastor

Rev. Jon Zehnder

One polling agency asked a person after election day whether they believed that our political system was characterized more by ignorance or by apathy. To this, the voter responded, "I don't honestly know, and I don't really care!"

Well, unlike that voter, just because we don't know doesn't mean that we don't care. As a matter of fact, not knowing can keep us on our toes, can keep our eyes open and can keep our ear close to the ground, and that's part of this season called Advent; Advent is a time for getting ready.

Now, most of us probably think that we know what we're getting ready for and how to go about doing that. The Advent season is loaded with family traditions and timetables, and there is a part in us that wants, as we prepare for Christmas, for it to be comfortably the same, filled with the scenes and smells, the flavors and sounds that we've seen, smelled, tasted and heard before. In the words of the song, there is a part of our nature that wants a Christmas "just like the ones we used to know!"

However, here we are after the hurricane, and we realize that might be a challenge. During Advent we look forward to celebrating Jesus' First Coming, His incarnation, Jesus taking on our skin so He could eventually, as that Perfect Sacrifice, cover our sins, but the "bookend" of Advent is our Lord's Second Coming, on the Last Day. When it comes to when the Last Day will be, we don't know!

This "not knowing," not knowing how our celebration this Christmas might be different post-hurricane and not knowing when our Savior will return, might actually be used by the Holy Spirit as He comforts us this season to begin to take our Advent focus off of what may or may not happen, what it will be like or when it might happen and, instead, to redirect our focus on God and His grace and blessings to us in His Son, our Savior Jesus!

Here's where I'm going with this: Advent isn't so much about knowing; it's about watching! I think it's in that spirit of watchfulness that we get stretched, we get stretched in our love, in our trust and in our faith. We discover, as we move into this unknown, that there is still a God who loves us, empowers us, forgives us and blesses us, even after the storm, and, so, our love for Him grows.

Brothers and sisters, let this Advent season be one in which we step out in trust, not knowing all the variables or all of the outcomes, but with a faith commitment to follow the Holy Spirit's lead. Our faith in Jesus will sustain us even when we're facing things this year that are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, sad and, often, uneasy, but I believe that this is still a time where real love, genuine trust and



Pastor Jon

*From Our Principal**Kati Miser*

“Go, tell it on the mountain!” The Christmas story of the shepherds celebrates the joy of sharing good news – for the shepherds, the Good News of the birth of Jesus, our Savior. Like the shepherds, we too are driven to proclaim that same Good News to anyone who will listen. Christmastime is a great time for each of us to be Jesus’ disciples to family and friends by letting them know about our Savior. Let’s proclaim **our mission at SMLS: to educate children**

and touch families’ lives with the awesome love of Jesus Christ! Your daily prayers for SMLS are so appreciated as we continue to share that Good News with our children, families and community. As a matter of fact, we would encourage you, during the Christmas season, to send cards or notes to our staff. **We wish a blessed Christmas to you and your family!**

This month, you can support SMLS through the following events:

- December 13 – Christmas band and choir concert at 1:00pm
- December 14 – Kindergarten/grade 1 Christmas presentation at 6:30pm Advent service

Call the school office if you would like more information.

Are you following SMLS on Facebook and Instagram to see photos and to learn more about what’s happening at SMLS? Check it out @saintmichaellutheranschool.

Applications for the 2023-24 school year are now open. Click the “admissions” tab at the top of our website. Give me a call if you want to invite a friend, neighbor or family member to experience Saint Michael Lutheran School.

*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 to their parking lot with a car packed to the roof of much-needed food and supplies for the animals. Thank you to everyone for being so generous.

Little Saints is getting ready to celebrate the holidays, and we are happy to say that our family Christmas party is back on for this year! We will be celebrating Christmas with our students and their families on Thursday, December 1 from 4:00-5:30pm at Little Saints. Games, dancing, cookies and, yes, Santa will be joining us this year! The families always look forward to this opportunity to spend time with the children and with each other.

2022 has been a devastating year for our area. 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 their families while dealing with trauma in their own lives. They never cease to amaze me: how strong this group of women are in the face of everything year after year. They just keep giving of themselves to the children and families of Little Saints. We simply could not do this without all of you; you are a blessing to our school.

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



From the Ministry Coordinator

Lori Schwan

Children's Ministry

"Simply Loved" Sunday School

Both Pre-K 3 through Kindergarten and first through fourth grades will study the Christmas story. If you would like to help the children's ministry in multiple possible ways, please contact Lori.



Children's 5:30pm Family Christmas Eve Worship

To prepare for our child-friendly service on Christmas Eve at 5:30pm, we will email out a link to the songs for kids to practice at home. If you want your elementary-age child to have a speaking part, to help with technology or to help hand out bulletins, contact Lori Schwan. If you want to help with this service, please let me know as well. There will be a rehearsal on Saturday, December 17 at 10:00am with a pizza party to follow. There will also be a rehearsal during Sunday school hour (9:15-10:30am) on December 18.

Kids Serving

Due to the generosity of donors, Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, collected more than 50 shoeboxes packed with toys, school supplies, hygiene items and prayers to children suffering from poverty, disasters, war and famine.

In the past, our Sunday School kids have served families in need who are being helped by Lutheran Services of Florida through Jammies for Jesus. However, this year they would like to do a toy drive that will help the community at large. If you are in the congregation and want to help with this Thrivent Action Team, you can do so by shopping and donating a new toy for a child.



2022 Thrivent Action Teams Expiring

Before your \$500 for two action teams expires on December 31, 2022, consider applying to sponsor one of over 25 educational events, fundraisers or service projects happening this month. Teams can apply for activities into the new year too! Please contact Lori Schwan if you are interested in sponsoring an action team.

Advent Event for Families of All Ages

Thank you to everyone who helped make the Advent wreath making event a blessing to our families and homebound members. Feel free to store your Styrofoam wreath to reuse next year!

Women's Bible Study

Join us on Thursdays from 10:00-11:30am on Zoom or on campus in the ELC boardroom for ladies Bible study. We will be discussing topics related to Advent in December.

GriefShare

A new session of GriefShare will meet on Saturdays from 9:00-11:00am from January 21 through April 15, 2023 in Pastor Jon's conference room. Anyone can join any session. Find out more at www.griefshare.org. If you have any questions, please call Gail Schultz at (732) 991-0642.



DivorceCare

A new session of DivorceCare will meet on Tuesdays from 11:00am-1:00pm from January 10 through April 4, 2023. Anyone who is separated or divorced can join any session. This group is online and in-person. Register at www.divorcecare.org. If you have any questions, please call Lori Schwan at (239) 939-1218, ext. 237.

DivorceCare: Surviving the Holidays

After separation or divorce, your Christmas holidays won't look the same as they used to. Traditions change. Some family members won't be there. Social gatherings can be stressful, but DivorceCare: Surviving the Holidays can help. This special, one-time DivorceCare class will meet Tuesday, December 6 from 11:00am-1:00pm. This group will be online and in-person. Register at www.divorcecare.org.

Pastor Jon's Sunday Bible Class

Join us Sunday morning in the cafeteria to study the book of Revelation. If you cannot be there in person, Zoom is also available. [Join Zoom Meeting](#) ID: 305 113 7001 Passcode: church

Saint Michael Youth Ministries

Saint Michael Youth Ministries

Wednesday Youth Nights

We have been so blessed to have great youth nights in November. The kids had fun with Slip 'N Slide kickball, learned a ton through our Veterans Day speakers Rey Arroliga and Brian Hoffmann and expressed their thanks to our amazing youth volunteer Doug Kositzke who moved back to Omaha, Nebraska after our Thanksgiving feast. This month is filled with opportunities to serve and grow in our faith. Thanks to the many adults who volunteer weekly to make these fun nights possible. If you want to sign up to host or sponsor a dinner, contact me.

On Wednesday, November 30, the Oasis youth Christmas party will be held from 6:00-8:00pm at St. Michael with our youth attending (donated desserts should arrive no later than 7:00pm).

On Wednesday, December 7, we will go gift shopping for Oasis youth. From 5:30-6:00pm, sixth graders and anyone who wants a shelter tour will eat early dinner. Then from 6:00-6:30pm, sixth graders will tour Oasis Youth Shelter and the other youth will eat dinner. From 6:30-7:30pm, middle school and high school kids will go shopping for Oasis youth. 7:45-8:00pm will be our closing devotions. We will need a lot of drivers for this event. Please contact Amber Truax if you are interested in helping at drbillysofficemanager@gmail.com or (239) 872-7100.

Middle School District Youth Gathering

Thank you so much for your prayers for our nine middle school youth and two adults attending the LCMS FL-GA district middle school youth gathering at Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center in Leesburg, FL on November 4-6. We had a phenomenal experience growing in our "Living Hope"!



Help Decorate the Church for Christmas

Join other SML youth as we decorate the church for Christmas on Saturday, December 3 at 9:00am. Donuts will be provided, and you will be able to earn service hours and points. We expect to finish around lunchtime.

Help Serve Food at the Senior Social Christmas Lunch

Text Sue Hansen if you would like to volunteer at the annual board of human care luncheon. Sue's number is (847) 987-0150. You will be able to earn service hours and points by volunteering.

Oasis Gift Wrapping during Sunday School and Confirmation

During Sunday school and confirmation classes on Sunday, December 11 (from 9:15-10:30am), we will be working together to wrap gifts for the youth from Oasis Youth Shelter.

Poinsettia Sales

Keep an eye out for information about this year's poinsettia sale. We will be doing presales at \$15 per plant. For every four plants you sell, you will earn one point! The plants will arrive Tuesday, November 29. Thank you to Jamie Gilles for organizing this fundraiser.



Luminaries for Christmas Eve

Join other SML youth in making, setting up, lighting and cleaning up 400 luminaries for Christmas Eve. We will assemble the luminaries during Sunday school hour on December 18. If you are here on Christmas Eve, we could use your help (along with adults) at one of three times: 4:00pm (luminary setup), 5:45pm (luminary lighting) and midnight (extinguishing and cleanup).

Compassion International Sponsorship

Thank you to all who chose to live generously by sponsoring a child in a developing country through Compassion International. Our youth group sponsors Renata, a thirteen-year-old girl who lives in Indonesia. You can bring in money to help pay for her \$38 monthly sponsorship as well as for her Christmas gift to her family.

Rock the Universe

On Saturday, January 28, a group of middle and high school students and adults will be going to Rock the Universe at Universal Studios. The group will meet at Saint Michael on Saturday at 10:30am, depart on a bus, stop for lunch on the way and be in the park from 4:00pm-1:00am, enjoying concerts and riding rides. After the park closes, they will head home, returning home early Sunday morning (approximately 4:30am). Cost is TBD which includes a park ticket, bus fare and a snack. The payment is due Wednesday, January 11 to Lori Schwan. Bands that will be performing at Rock the Universe are Zach Williams, Matthew West, Dante Bowe, Anne Wilson, We Are Messengers and Cain.

Seventh and Eighth Grade Confirmation with Parents

After finishing our study of the first article of the Apostles' Creed, we will, during Advent, study the second article in preparation of Jesus' coming. We encourage parents to attend with their teens. Any seventh and eighth grade students are welcome to join us. This class meets upstairs in the education building (look for printed signs).

From the Director of Worship & Music

Ben Ball



*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming as men of old have sung.
It came, a flower bright, amid the cold of winter
When half-gone was the night.*

*This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God, from sin and death He saves us
And lightens every load.*



Light is one of the greatest symbols of salvation throughout the Bible, and the imagery of this beautiful carol text from the sixteenth century reflects this Gospel message. Jesus, the King of all the universe, humbled Himself to leave His throne in Heaven to come into a dark world to be the Light we so desperately needed. “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:9). When Jesus said, “I am the light of the world,” He did not say He was merely “one of the lights” but rather that He was *THE* Light—the *one and only* Light of salvation which we cannot create apart from Him.

This can cause tension because we like to be in control of our lives and to have a strategic plan, but we know, of course, that our plan is not always God’s plan. In this great gift of the one and only true Light, we trust in God’s plan of redemption. This can once again cause tension because we must acknowledge that all the anticipation and joyful celebration of Christmas all points to the cross on that hill at Golgotha on Good Friday; it all points to Easter and, for those of us on this side of history, it all points to the Second Coming of Christ when all things will be made new and perfect. Only Jesus can bring such life—such Light—out of such death and utter darkness. A perfectly beautiful Rose is blooming. May we all see this joy of salvation in the light of our one and only Savior, Jesus Christ.

As you read this, I have had the privilege of serving as your director of worship and music for less than one full month. Throughout these short, few weeks you have welcomed me and my family with warm smiles, hugs and many words of encouragement. I look forward to getting to know all of you! Please feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions, concerns or song requests that you have. My email here at church is ben.ball@gsmlcs.org.

Blessings,
Ben Ball



From the Board of Human Care

Angel Tree

The board of human care will once again set up the Angel Tree in our narthex for children in our community. The tags will have the child’s age and gender on them. We are asking that you choose a child and purchase a gift card from Target or Walmart and return it to one of our volunteers. The amount is the same for all of the gift cards. We thank you for helping these dear children at Christmastime.

Gift Cards for Families in Need

During the month of December, the board of human care will be collecting donations that will be used to purchase Publix gift cards for community families in need at Christmastime. If you would like to donate, please note on your check or put cash in an envelope designated to BOHC—Christmas. Thank you for continually caring and sharing! So many are touched by your generosity.



Upcoming Special Worship Services

Midweek Advent	Wednesday, December 7 @ 6:30pm Wednesday, December 14 @ 6:30pm (Kdg. and first grade lead)
Blue Christmas	Wednesday, December 21 @ 6:30pm
Christmas Eve	Saturday, December 24 @ 5:30pm (family service) Saturday, December 24 @ 7:30pm & 11:00pm (candlelight services)
Christmas Day	Sunday, December 25 @ 10:00am
New Year's Eve	Saturday, December 31 @ 5:30pm
New Year's Day	Sunday, January 1 @ 8:00am & 10:45am



Conduit of Hurricane Ian Relief

God used us as a conduit of His blessing to provide relief to those affected by Hurricane Ian. 81 households (most from our own congregation) and companies as well as 8 other schools and church congregations around the US have generously donated. At the time of publication, here is the detailed breakdown:

86 families have been blessed by this effort.

- 32 SMLC families
- 5 SMLCS families
- 17 SMLS families
- 28 SMLCS staff families
- 4 community families

These families have received a combined:

- \$44,272.49 in checks
- \$6,100 in gift cards sent from other congregations
- \$6,700 in gift cards provided by the board of human care

Volunteer Work Day



Saint Michael's board of properties has scheduled a volunteer work day for Saturday, January 14 from 8:00am to noon with hopes of making a large push to clean things up around campus. Most work will involve hauling tree branches and other debris to designated areas for pickup by the city. If you are able to bring gloves to use, those will be the most important tools to have. Bow saws, pruning shears and loppers will also be useful in reducing larger tree branches into smaller sections for easier moving and stacking. If you know someone who might be willing or able to help, please spread the word!

LWML Cookie Extravaganza

LWML is having their cookie extravaganza on December 10 and 11! We are looking for bakers who can contribute. Please bring your favorite Christmas cookies to the cafeteria on Saturday morning (December 10), and LWML will pack them in boxes to sell at Saturday night service and on Sunday morning.



Amigos Christmas Gala

Marco Lutheran Church will be hosting a Christmas gala to benefit Amigos Ministry on Friday, December 9 from 7:00-10:00pm. If you are interested in volunteering in the areas of fundraising, ticket sales, sponsorship, hosting, serving, setup, cleanup or any number of other tasks, please call Marco Lutheran Church at (239) 394-0332 and ask to speak with Vicki or Betsy. You may also email them at secretary@marcolutheran.org.