



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

# The Salem Life

Newsletter of Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Sandwich, Illinois

January 8, 2026

VOL. 53, NO. 1



Dear Friends in Christ,

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.*

Our core Lutheran belief is that our God saves us by his grace alone, received through faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing that we can do, nothing we can add to God's amazing grace, because we are all sinners. We freely admit that we are *not* righteous by our own goodness or force of will, and we don't need to try to prove our righteousness by trying to be exceptionally good or holy. Instead we cling to Jesus Christ, who saves us by his death and resurrection. Christ alone makes us righteous, as a gift of his grace. All that we can do is accept God's gift of amazing grace, and live lives that show our gratitude.

Living in God's amazing grace changes everything for us. Jesus declares that we are forgiven, set free from the hopeless task of trying to prove our own goodness or righteousness. We live every day as forgiven sinners, wrestling with our shortcomings, but confident that God loves and forgives us in spite of our sin. We strive always to leave our sin behind us, even as we know that we will never attain perfection in this life. Our hope is that we can grow in God's grace, becoming more and more what God created us to be. Grace means that it is all about what God is doing in us, and not about what we accomplish ourselves.

In the Bible, Jesus knows very well that he is dealing with sinners. Yet his response is not to reject or condemn. Time after time he offers forgiveness and healing, then challenges people to go and sin no more. Sometimes people are ready to hear that word of grace and repent, turning over a new leaf. Sometimes they aren't ready yet, but that gospel word of grace keeps working on them, calling them into his way of new life. His own disciples repeatedly fail to understand and believe who he is, yet Jesus still loves them and invites them to follow.

Jesus declares that he is sent for the lost sheep. He is our good shepherd, sent to care for lost sheep, sinners. We *are* those lost sheep, our church is a flock of lost sheep, living in a world of lost sheep. All of us are caught in sin, and all of us will go astray, like lost sheep. Yet Jesus keeps calling us back, saving us, however often we stray. He never says, "Forget it, they have strayed too far, too often." No, our Lord is always more ready to forgive and restore us than we are to believe it.

We don't have to take extraordinary steps to purify our families or our church. There are plenty of churches out there that strive for that, closing themselves off from the world. They say, "Be like us, or you are not welcome." We live instead in God's amazing grace, in the midst of a sinful world. We don't pretend that we have risen above all our sin, but only that we are forgiven, striving to live in a better way. We always wrestle with the sin in our selves, our families, our church, and our world, but we still cling to Jesus and to one another as the Body of Christ. We challenge ourselves and each other to listen for the Lord's call in our lives.

*Continued on page 3*

# Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church

*Serving Christ!*

1022 North Main Street - PO Box 105 - Sandwich, IL 60548

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Email: [office@wearesalemlutheran.org](mailto:office@wearesalemlutheran.org)

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

## Staff

Pastor	Administrative Assistant	Kelly Clason	<a href="mailto:office@wearesalemlutheran.org">office@wearesalemlutheran.org</a>
Pastor John Rothfus	Financial Secretary, Etc.	Gina Carlson	<a href="mailto:financial@wearesalemlutheran.org">financial@wearesalemlutheran.org</a>
Phone: (779) 901-0803	Bookkeeper	Karen Wesson	<a href="mailto:bookkeeper@wearesalemlutheran.org">bookkeeper@wearesalemlutheran.org</a>
<a href="mailto:pastorjohnrothfus@gmail.com">pastorjohnrothfus@gmail.com</a>	Traditional Worship Coordinator	Nancy Rex	<a href="mailto:nancy@wearesalemlutheran.org">nancy@wearesalemlutheran.org</a>
	Director of Contemporary Worship	Libby Welsch	<a href="mailto:libby@wearesalemlutheran.org">libby@wearesalemlutheran.org</a>
	Organist/Pianist	Gloria Gilbertson	
	Organist/Pianist	Connie Hanson	
	Maintenance	Nancy Hayes	

**Staff Office Hours: Tuesdays - Thursdays, 9 AM-2 PM; Fridays 9 AM-12 noon**

## *Happening this week...*

Sunday, January 11

- 9:00 am Worship/Kids Church
- 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship
- 10:15 am Adult Bible Study/Sunday School
- 10:15 am Fellowship Committee

Monday, January 12

- 9:00-Noon Quilting

Tuesday, January 13

- 9:00-Noon Quilting

Wednesday, January 14

- 10:00 am Methuselah Coffee Group
- 5:00 pm Contemporary Worship Committee
- 6:30 pm Confirmation at Salem

Thursday, January 15

- 8:30 -10:30 am Our Sharing Pantry Distribution
- 5:00 pm Praise Team
- 6:00 pm Handchimes
- 7:00 pm Salem Choir
- 7:00 pm AA

Friday, January 16

- 7:30 pm AA

Saturday, January 17

- 10:00 am Audit Meeting

Sunday, January 18

- 9:00 am Worship/Kids Church
- 10:00 am Coffee Fellowship
- 10:15 am Budget Review
- 10:15 am Sunday School

## *In Our Church Family.....*

### PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER:

- ⇒ Jon Hansen (*friend of Kurt Mattson*)
- ⇒ Mari Eklund (*mother-in-Law of Pastor John*)
- ⇒ Paul Kulbartz\*
- ⇒ Paula Mueller
- ⇒ Nicholas Kulbartz (*son of Paul Kulbartz*)
- ⇒ Stan Benson\*



\*Indicates Salem member

### JANUARY "DIAMOND PLUS" BIRTHDAYS



- 1/8 Nancy Shehorn
- 1/9 Eileen Negley
- 1/22 Ace Hanson
- 1/25 Karen Femali
- 1/25 Carla Klaeren

### **Scripture Readings for:**

Sunday, January 11: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

Sunday, January 18: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

We don't have to insist on doctrinal purity, or that everyone must read the Bible exactly as we do. Those things are not what make us acceptable to God. There is nothing that we can do that would make us acceptable to God. Our God claims and saves us as a gift of his grace alone.

We can't have it both ways. Either we live in God's amazing grace, trusting in his forgiving love for us and for all who believe, or else we try to live by our own righteousness alone. Only God's grace will save us. Our own attempt at righteousness is like filthy rags, worthless before God.

Our only hope is in Jesus, our solid rock of faith. His amazing grace gives us life and hope for tomorrow. May God turn our hearts always to Jesus, and help us to live together in his amazing grace.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor John

*"This life therefore is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal, but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed."*

Martin Luther



### January 6, 2026 Salem Congregation Council Meeting Highlights

The Congregation Council met at Salem on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, starting at 6:29 p.m.. Council members Jacqueline Beverage, Ron Cunz, Alan Deaton, Walter Farley, Bonnie Guyer, Connie Hanson, Durk Hellinga, Sharon Wallis, Bryan Wernli, and Pastor John Rothfusz were present.

The council voted to accept the minutes of the December 2 Congregation Council meeting, as prepared by Alan Deaton.

The financial reports for December were examined. These are the following balances as of the meeting.

General Fund:	\$ 11,412	Designated Fund:	\$ 38,178
Capital Fund:	\$ 41,663	Loan Balance:	\$ 373,874

Council members heard monthly reports from Pastor John Rothfusz and from council members representing Salem's committees. They reviewed the calendar to highlight events coming up and to look for conflicts.

The Sunday School Christmas program was remarkable this year, and members shared their appreciation.

The church office is moving to new emails with the new year. The old Comcast emails will be replaced with church emails that we manage. Members and vendors will need to change the emails in their contacts.

The Treasurer and Finance committee prepared a draft budget, reflecting the intent cards given in our Stewardship drive and the anticipated expenses. The council reviewed that budget and voted to present it to the congregation at the annual meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Salem Outdoor Sign Team will present the proposed design at the Annual Meeting, and request special gifts to help pay for the cost.

Council officers are all eligible for another year in their roles, and were reelected. They are:

Bonnie Guyer, president;  
Sharon Wallis, vice president;  
Alan Deaton, secretary; and  
Dean Lundeen, treasurer.

The group heard council comments from each member. The meeting was closed at 7:13 p.m. with the Lord's Prayer.

Congratulations to Jean Clayton on her retirement from Earthmover Credit Union on January 9, 2026. Jean devoted over 46 years to Earthmover as Teller, Loan Officer, Assistant Lending Manager, and ending as the Call Center Manager. Jean is looking forward to spending more time with grand-children, reading more, longer walks, and naps on a rainy day.



## New Year, New Emails!

Salem has some exciting news! It is time for some new emails for the office staff. We want to move away from the old emails tied to Comcast, to emails reflecting Salem Lutheran. We will be able to use these emails with any provider, and choose the best deal for money and service.

We will phase out the old emails soon. Please take some time today to add our new addresses to your address book and delete the old Comcast addresses.

### Salem Emails as of 1/1/2026

Pastor John Rothfusz

pastorjohnrothfusz@gmail.com

or

pastor@wearesalemlutheran.org

office@wearesalemlutheran.org

financial@wearesalemlutheran.org

bookkeeper@wearesalemlutheran.org

nancy@wearesalemlutheran.org

libby@wearesalemlutheran.org

Kelly Clason, Administrative Assistant

Gina Carlson, Financial Secretary

Karen Wesson, Bookkeeper

Nancy Rex, Traditional Worship Coordinator

Libby Welsch, Director of Contemporary Worship

Cut and save to update your address books.



### Thank You!

I would like to thank each of you for all of your cards, gifts, and good wishes at Christmas. I feel very blessed to share my life with you as we serve Christ together. I will soon mark two years serving the Lord at Salem Lutheran, and I recognize that God has truly been good to us by bringing our family here. Thank you for your partnership in ministry with me. Pastor John

### CHRIST IN OUR HOME

The January, February, & March 2026 devotional books are now available in the narthex. Please help yourself.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24 4-6 PM

Test your skill of Lutheran trivia, Salem trivia, and local good fun! OR, come enjoy fellowship, food, and fun with friends.



### CALENDAR REMINDERS:

AUDIT COMMITTEE: January 17 at 10:00 am

QUILTING: January 12 & 13 from 9 am to noon

BUDGET REVIEW: January 18 after coffee fellowship

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING: January 25 after worship, followed by Pot Luck Brunch



Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

...for your generous support of holiday giving opportunities, especially the Christmas offering of \$6,185, your donations to Sandwich Lion's Club Franklin Mall Project, Hope Haven of DeKalb Co, and your continued faithful financial support of the ministries of Salem Lutheran Church,...

...for your year-long food donations and financial gifts to Our Sharing Pantry and Salem's Blessing Box,...

...for providing poinsettia plants to decorate our sanctuary for the Christmas season,...

...to cookie bakers and carolers who delivered Cheer Boxes,...

...to the faithful helpers who decorated the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas,...

...to Sunday School students and Libby Welsch for decorating our Festival of Trees at Classic Cinemas,...

...to Sunday School students and Christian Education committee for the Christmas Program,....

...to the ushers, acolytes, and media technicians,...

...to all the talented musicians and worship personnel who went the extra mile to provide inspirational worship services,...

...to Pastor John Rothfusz for his faithful leadership in all we do.

God's Work. Our Hands.



The Christmas Around the World program can be watched from [www.wearsalemlutheran.org/Worship Video/Sunday School Christmas Program 12-14-25](http://www.wearsalemlutheran.org/Worship%20Video/Sunday%20School%20Christmas%20Program%2012-14-25).





Volunteers made a trip to Geneva to pack food for our hungry neighbors in December. They packed 1,620 pounds of Fruit Gushers to make A LOT of kids happy! Those who have signed up already will pack again on January 20, 2026 and the next date is February 17. Please sign up in the narthex.



### Lunch Bunch

Lunch Bunch met at Star 34 in December to enjoy food and fellowship. We chose to stay in town for January and meet at Sidetrack'd Bar & Grill on Wednesday, January 14, 2026 at 11:30. Come join us!

### Ruth Unit Gathers

The Ruth Unit held their Christmas Party at Star 34 in December. Ruth brought Christmas games for all to enjoy a little fun. The next Ruth Unit meeting will be Wednesday, January 28 at 1:00 pm. New members are welcome!



Salem Lutheran Church

P.O. Box 105

Sandwich, IL 60548



## Growing Hope Globally Gala

Saturday, February 21, 2026

St. John's Lutheran Church, 235 S Green Street, Somonauk, IL

Social Hour with Charcuterie Service 5:00-6:00 pm

Formal Plated Dinner Service with live piano music at 6:15pm prepared by [The Traveling Chef - \\$150.00 per plate](#)  
Tickets will be available until January 31, 2026 or until capacity is reached. Reserve your tickets by contacting Jerry Lundeen: [jlundeen100@gmail.com](mailto:jlundeen100@gmail.com); 815.558.4307 or Toni Lundeen: [tjlundeen@gmail.com](mailto:tjlundeen@gmail.com); 815.501.9435

Growing Hope Globally is a Christian response to hunger which links the grassroots energy and commitment of rural communities in the U.S. with the capability and desire of smallholder farmers in developing countries to grow lasting solutions to hunger. With this model we are able to move a person from a life of malnutrition/starvation to one of food security for as little as \$55. In the 25 years of the organization's existence, we have been able to raise 2.5 million people to that security. We envision a day when all people around the world have enough to eat and the physical, financial and community resources to live hopeful, healthy, productive lives.

## Menu:

**Charcuterie Service-Donated by The Traveling Chef** Cured meat, cheese, cracker, breadsticks, veggie, fruit, olives, pickles, nuts, dried fruit, sweets, jam, hummus, honey and more

### **Formal Plated Dinner Service:**

**Soup** -- Roasted red pepper, goat cheese, pepitas, sunflower bloom, confit garlic crostini

**Salad** -- Arugula, burrata, pickled strawberry, cucumber, red onion, peach gel, dried cherry, pistachio, maldon salt, honey pearl, basil oil, strawberry peach balsamic

**Entrée** -- Prime center cut filet (medium), truffle mash, roasted squash, leek finishing oil, 35 yr balsamic

**Dessert** -- Individual cheesecake, New York style, butter pecan, salted caramel,