



Dear Faith Shapers,

Spring is here! Now is the time to start thinking about summer. I hope summer camp is on your list. We have exceptional Lutheran Camps here in Iowa. There are so many reasons to send your kids to camp. I've brought you 6 reasons, but there are so many more! Did you know many of our clergy had camping ministry experience (either as campers or counselors or both)? Camping ministry is God filled, fun and faith shaping!

If you are unable to afford sending your kids to camp, please speak to your church or call camp. There are scholarships available so that every child who wants to attend church camp will get the chance.

I wish you all a very blessed Holy Week and Easter! I pray that your Easter is filled with the Good News of Jesus' Resurrection and that you share that news with others!

Deacon Lisa Kammerer



6 Surprising Things Kids Learn at Camp

My 30 years of camping experience and youth ministry work have shaped my long held opinion that camp experiences benefit kids in profound ways. Here's a little of what I learned from church campers.

1. **How to Be Happy.** Campers say they learned how to have fun and not worry so much. In a time where many kids struggle with anxiety and depression, it is so refreshing to hear that camp is their happy place!
2. **How to Be Myself.** Campers say they learned to be happy in their own skin, gained confidence in their abilities, learned to speak up for things they believe in, and worried less about what others think. One camper told me, "At camp, I am the best version of myself."
3. **Meet New People & Make Friends.** One camper told me that camp made her more open & caring. Another told me they experienced a sense of belonging that they did not feel at school.
4. **Take Risks & Conquer Fears.** Camp takes students out of their comfort zones and offers new challenging experiences. It's ok even if you fail because you are surrounded by people who care for you, no matter the outcome. It's a great way to build grit!
5. **Unplug and Have a Passion for Nature.** Students need time away from their phones and the chance to experience nature. Experiences and relationships are more vibrant and real when you are able to connect face to face.
6. **Experience God.** Campers tell me they learned to pray, see the holy spirit at work and to serve others. There is nothing cooler than a student learning how much God loves them and that they have God given gifts to share with the world!

This information is prepared for you by the Northeastern Iowa Synod-Home Life Network for use by families and local congregations.



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He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!

FUN WAYS TO CELEBRATE THE EASTER SEASON

- ⇒ **DECORATE A POSTER FOR YOUR WINDOW. TRY ONE OF THESE PHRASES. "HE IS RISEN!" "MY REDEEMER LIVES" " ALLELUIA"**
- ⇒ **GARDEN PRAYER. VISIT A GARDEN AND PRAY AND READ LUKE 22: 39-46.**
- ⇒ **YOU'VE BEEN EGGED. GET A DOZEN EGGS AND FILL 11 OF THEM WITH TREATS AND LEAVE ONE EMPTY. HIDE THE EGGS IN SOMEONE'S YARD AND LEAVE A NOTE SAYING THE EMPTY EGG IS A REMINDER OF THE EMPTY TOMB!**
- ⇒ **CHALK MESSAGES. WRITE CHALK MESSAGES ON SOMEONE'S DRIVEWAY. "JESUS THINKS YOU ARE EGG-CEPTIONAL" OR "NO BUNNY LOVES YOU LIKE JESUS!"**
- ⇒ **BAKE RESURRECTION ROLLS OR MAKE RESURRECTION COOKIES. RECIPES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE.**
- ⇒ **PUT TRICK CANDLES ON A DESSERT.. WHEN THE CANDLES RELIGHT THEMSELVES, TALK ABOUT HOW EVERYONE THOUGHT JESUS' LIGHT HAD DISAPPEARED, BUT IT HADNT. JESUS IS RISEN AND IS ALIVE!**
- ⇒ **RETELL THE EASTER STORY WITH RESURRECTION EGGS. YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN RESURRECTION EGGS- SEARCH THE INTERNET TO FIND OUT HOW.**

Living Faith @

Dear Faith Shapers,

I pray you all had a joyful Christmas. Christmas may not have been the same as previous years, yet our Savior still comes to us & we find good news of great joy!

The season of Christmas is one I cherish with my family. The thing I love about the season (the season of the Church year, not the day) is that our Christmas events are done and the hustle and bustle is over, yet there is still Christmas. The kids are home on break and we can celebrate together. We love to leave our decorations up, decorate with stars, make more Christmas cookies, save a present to open on Epiphany, watch more Christmas movies, have family dinners and enjoy the season of wonder together. My hope is for you to embrace the season with your loved ones!

May your season of Christmas & Epiphany be filled with wonder & great joy!

Deacon Lisa Kammerer



Did you know that there is Christmas day and also a season of the church year that is Christmas? Many people believe the 12 days of Christmas are before Christmas (the media & stores push it as a holiday sale leading up to Christmas) but that is not the case. The season of Christmas is 12 days. It starts on Christmas day and ends on January 5th. How appropriate that it starts on Christmas day with the best gift— Jesus! The color of the season is white (paraments at church will change from advent blue to white for the season of Christmas). Here's some fun ways to enjoy the season.

- * **12 days of Christmas Kindness.** Do a act of kindness on each day of Christmas. Some popular projects we have done are: candy cane bomb a parking lot, put quarters in machines at the laundromat, shop for our local food pantry (they are low after the holidays), deliver treats or gifts, handout free flowers, bring hot chocolate or coffee to outside workers, shovel sidewalks. Involve the whole family in picking 12 projects.
- * **12 Clever Gifts for the 12 Days of Christmas.** Box of Bread mix (Jesus is the bread of life). Christmas story book (Christ is Emmanuel). Reese's Pieces (Jesus is the Prince of Peace). Soap (Christ is the Redeemer who washes our sin away). Candy cane (Jesus is the good shepherd). Flashlight or glowstick (Christ is the Light). Water (Jesus is the Living Water). Ring Pop candy or Ring (Christ is the Lord of Lords). Blanket or other warm item (Jesus is the Lamb), Prayer beads or prayer gift (Christ is the Mediator), Gift Certificate (Jesus is our Redeemer). King size something (Jesus is the King of Kings).

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15 WAYS TO CELEBRATE EPIPHANY

EPIPHANY IS JANUARY 6TH (THE TWELFTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS) AND CELEBRATES THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI TO SEE JESUS. THEY PRESENT HIM WITH GIFTS OF GOLD (A GIFT FOR A KING), FRANKINCENSE (A GIFT FOR A PRIEST) AND MYRRH (A GIFT FOR A SAVIOR). THE WORD EPIPHANY MEANS "MANIFEST".

1. READ ABOUT THE 1. VISIT OF THE MAGI IN MATTHEW CHAPTER 2
2. MAKE A KING'S CAKE (SEARCH FOR A RECIPE ONLINE)
THE ONE WHO FINDS THE BEAN OR NUT IS SAID TO BE ESPECIALLY BLESSED
3. SURPRISE SOMEONE WITH AN EPIPHANY GIFT
4. DECORATE YOUR HOUSE OR CHRISTMAS TREE WITH STARS
5. READ THE SHORT STORY THE GIFT OF THE MAGI BY O. HENRY
6. MAKE STAR OR CROWN SHAPED COOKIES
7. PLACE YOUR MAGI IN YOUR MANGER SCENE
8. DO A CHALK EPIPHANY BLESSING OF YOUR HOME (BLESSINGS CAN BE FOUND ONLINE)
20 + C + M + B + 22 (THIS MEANS THE YEAR PLUS THE FIRST LETTERS OF THE 3 MAGI- CASPAR, MEL-
CHIOR AND BALTHAZAR AND ALSO THE PHRASE CHRISTUS MANSIONEM BENDICAT WHICH MEANS MAY
CHRIST BLESS THIS HOUSE)
9. MAKE A STAR CRAFTS (3D PAPER STARS ARE ESPECIALLY FUN)
10. HAVE A 12TH NIGHT FAMILY DINNER (WE LOVE USING FANCY DISHES AND CANDLES)
11. MAKE ORANGE POMANDER BALLS (RECIPES ARE ONLINE)
12. WATCH "THE STAR" (LITTLE ONES) OR "THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM" (OLDER KIDS)
13. CALL OR VIDEO CHAT WITH A FAMILY MEMBER ABOUT GIFTS THEY RECEIVED AND WHAT GIFTS
(NON MATERIAL) THEY HOPE TO DISCOVER THIS YEAR
14. TAKE AN EPIPHANY ADVENTURE AND TAKE A DAY TRIP SOMEWHERE YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN
15. GIFT YOUR FAMILY WITH THREE GIFTS. GOLD (A FAMILY ACTIVITY OR GAME), FRANKINCENSE
(A RELIGIOUS ITEM), AND MYRRH (GIFTS FOR THE BODY) ON EPIPHANY

Living Faith



Dear Faith Shapers,



Fall is in the air! The season of fall is full of the most delight-

ful things! I love the crisp fresh air, the smells of cider, apples, cinnamon and pumpkin. The sound of rustling leaves and of course, the beautiful array of colors that fall brings.

My prayer for you is that you enjoy the simple blessings of fall, make some new family traditions, and above all, mark the season with gratitude. Gratitude draws us nearer to God and brings contentment and joy.

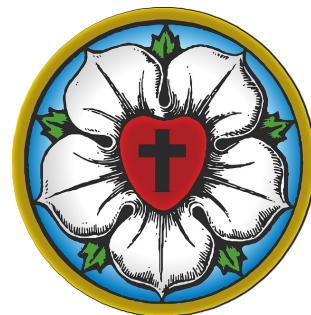
Blessings to you, dear faith shapers,
Deacon Lisa Kammerer



Reformation Day

October 31st is not only Halloween, it is also a time to remember the Reformation and its importance in church history. On this day in 1517, Martin Luther (the reformer, not MLK Jr. the civil rights leader) nailed his ninety-five theses (discussion points) to the door of the Wittenberg castle in protest of the abuses of the church. One of the main messages Martin Luther taught was that salvation cannot be purchased or earned. He said "We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone." When Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to the door the Protestant Reformation was born. Here are some ways to learn more about Martin Luther and the Reformation

- ⇒ Read a book about Martin Luther or any of the other reformers.
- ⇒ Sing or listen to the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" written by Martin Luther
- ⇒ Watch a Reformation Day video on YouTube.
- ⇒ Read the original 95 theses. They are easily found on the internet.



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FALL FAMILY TRADITIONS

TRADITIONS BUILD FAMILY BONDS, CREATE MEMORIES AND ARE JUST PLAIN FUN! HERE'S A LIST OF GREAT FAMILY TRADITIONS. DON'T TRY TO DO THEM ALL, JUST ADOPT A FEW THAT SPEAK DEEPLY TO YOU. THINK ABOUT THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SCENTS OF THE SEASON. THE JOY OF TRADITIONS IS THAT YOU WANT TO DO THEM YEAR AFTER YEAR.

1. VISIT AN ORCHARD AND PICK APPLES
2. GET LOST IN A CORN MAZE
3. JUMP IN A LEAF PILE
4. HAVE A PUMPKIN SPICE FLAVORED EVERYTHING DAY
5. CARVE EPIC PUMPKINS
6. MAKE HOMEMADE SOUP OR BREAD
7. START A FAMILY GRATITUDE JOURNAL
8. TAKE A FALL FAMILY WALK OR CAR RIDE
9. GATHER AROUND A BONFIRE
10. VISIT A STATE PARK
11. DONATE TO YOUR LOCAL FOOD PANTRY
12. TAKE FALL FAMILY PHOTOS
13. LISTEN TO THE RAIN OR PLAY IN PUDDLES
14. TAKE FALL TREATS TO A NEIGHBOR
15. MAKE LEAF RUBBINGS
16. HAVE A FALL PICNIC
17. FAMILY GAME NIGHT
18. EAT HALLOWEEN CEREAL
19. DO A RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS
20. FLANNEL OR COZY SWEATER DAY
21. VOLUNTEER AS A FAMILY
22. DO A PUZZLE AS A FAMILY
23. HAVE AN APPLE EVERYTHING DAY
24. HOST A COSTUME DINNER
25. TRY A NEW APPLE RECIPE
26. MAIL A FALL CARE PACKAGE
27. HELP A NEIGHBOR RAKE LEAVES
28. FALL CAMPING OR STAR GAZING
29. MAKE A SPOOKY PLAYLIST
30. CREATE A PHOTO SCAVENGER HUNT
31. TAKE A HAYRIDE
32. ATTEND A FALL FESTIVAL
33. TAKE A FULL MOON WALK
34. FAMILY BIKE RIDE
35. ROAST PUMPKIN SEEDS
36. MAKE SOMETHING WITH PEARS
37. WALK THROUGH AN OLD CEMETERY
38. SCARY MOVIE MARATHON
39. VISIT A FARMERS MARKET
40. MAKE YOUR OWN HALLOWEEN COSTUMES
41. WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR OLDEST FAMILY MEMBER
42. DECORATE YOUR PORCH FOR FALL
43. FRIENDSGIVING
44. MAKE CARAMEL APPLES
45. THANKFUL THURSDAYS

Living Faith @ HOME

Dear Faith Shapers,

March is a great month for faith shaping. We are in the midst of Lent. Lent is a great time to try a new spiritual practice or restore one that you have stopped doing. Here are some spiritual practice ideas:

- ◆ Mealtime Prayers
- ◆ Sharing Highs and Lows & Praying over them
- ◆ Reading the Bible
- ◆ Listening to a Bible podcast
- ◆ Lighting Lenten Candles
- ◆ Picking a Bible verse to memorize
- ◆ Praying
- ◆ Acts of Kindness
- ◆ Gratitude Journaling
- ◆ Read a Gospel as family during Lent
- ◆ Be Still- Start your day with God and 10 minutes of listening
- ◆ Prayer Journaling
- ◆ Contemplative Family Walks
- ◆ Meditation App

May you continue to seek ways to be closer to God this Lent.

Deacon Lisa Kammerer



March 17th is St. Patrick's Day. Enjoy a snack of Lucky Charms and talk about God.

Rainbow Marshmallow- A symbol of God's promises

**Balloon Marshmallow- God lifts our burdens.
Psalm 55:32**

**Heart Marshmallow- God is abounding in love.
Exodus 34:6**

**Star Marshmallow- God knows the names of the stars
and my name, too. Psalm 147:4-5**

**Moon Marshmallow- Sorrow only lasts for the night.
Psalm 30:5**

**Clover Marshmallow- Reminder of the Trinity
(Father, Son & Holy Spirit)**

**Horse Shoe Marshmallow- Do you really need luck
when you walk with God?**



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ACTS OF KINDNESS FOR LENT

LENT IS A TIME TO PRAY, GIVE, SERVE AND WALK CLOSER TO GOD. HERE ARE SOME FUN AND EASY ACTS OF KINDNESS YOU CAN DO. PICK ONE ACT OF KINDNESS TO DO EACH DAY AND AT MEALTIME OR BEDTIME TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DID AND HOW IT FELT. .

1. USE ONLY KIND WORDS ALL DAY
2. DONATE BOOKS TO THE LIBRARY OR LEAVE A KIND NOTE IN A BOOK
3. COLOR A PICTURE AND MAIL IT TO A FAMILY MEMBER
4. COMPLIMENT THREE PEOPLE TODAY
5. DONATE PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS TO YOUR LOCAL FOOD BANK
6. LEAVE CHANGE IN A VENDING MACHINE
7. HELP SOMEONE BY RETURNING THEIR GROCERY CART
8. WRITE A THANK YOU NOTE TO A TEACHER OR A COWORKER
9. BUY SOMEONE A CUP OF HOT CHOCOLATE, TEA OR COFFEE
10. THANK A VETERAN
11. GATHER UP TOYS OR CLOTHES TO DONATE
12. READ A STORY TO A NURSING HOME RESIDENT OR SHUT IN
13. INVITE SOMEONE TO GO TO CHURCH WITH YOU
14. GIVE SOMEONE A FLOWER OR PACK OF SEEDS TO PLANT
15. TAKE TREATS TO FIRST RESPONDERS
16. WRITE DOWN POSITIVE QUALITIES OF FAMILY MEMBERS
17. BRING IN TRASH CANS OR SHOVEL SHOW FOR A NEIGHBOR
18. BAKE TREATS FOR STAFF AT SCHOOL OR WORK
19. PLAY OR SIT WITH SOMEONE NEW
20. FEED THE BIRDS

Living Faith @



Dear Faith Shapers,

Our family calendar is quite full and I'm sure yours is as well. Sometimes my family even struggles to sit down for a meal together. However, we still strive to make sure that we are continuing to form impactful shared experiences in the busyness of our daily lives.

Studies in family psychology tell us that family traditions and rituals are key in developing family bonds, a sense of belonging, and creating a memorable childhood. Family traditions and rituals are associated with marital satisfaction, adolescent's sense of personal identity, children's health, academic achievement and stronger family relationships.

Traditions & rituals do not have to be extravagant or expensive. They can be silly, free, fun, faithful, and meaningful. The important thing is that they are something your family can come to expect and look forward to. This issue of Living Faith at Home is filled with family rituals & Traditions. The holiday season is a great time to start making new traditions & rituals.

May your Thanksgiving, Advent & Christmas be filled with traditions that share the good news of great joy of the coming of our Lord and Savior.

Deacon Lisa Kammerer

Rituals of Family Conversation

Here's some super easy and fun fall conversation starters to get your family talking. Use these at meals, during car rides, before bed or text them to your family.



- ⇒ **Tell us about your favorite fall activity**
- ⇒ **Name three things you are grateful for**
- ⇒ **What is your favorite fall scent?**
- ⇒ **Name an experience that has reminded you life is good**
- ⇒ **What are you most looking forward to about thanksgiving?**
- ⇒ **What is something you hope to be thankful for next year?**
- ⇒ **What invention are you most thankful for?**
- ⇒ **What was the hardest part of you day and why?**
- ⇒ **Tell about a person who has shown you God's love**
- ⇒ **What is something new you would like to learn and why?**
- ⇒ **What made you laugh today?**
- ⇒ **What is the biggest problem you are facing right now?**
- ⇒ **How were you a blessing to someone today?**
- ⇒ **What are three things you can thank God for right now?**
- ⇒ **Name a talent or ability God has given you.**
- ⇒ **What makes you a good friend?**
- ⇒ **What is your favorite song right now?**
- ⇒ **How can we pray for you?**
- ⇒ **Invent a new fall family tradition. What would it be?**
- ⇒ **Where did you see God at work today?**
- ⇒ **What language would you like to be able to speak and why?**
- ⇒ **What is one thing you love about our family?**
- ⇒ **What is the best Thanksgiving side dish?**
- ⇒ **How many times did you say thank you today? How does it feel when someone thanks you?**
- ⇒ **If you could invite 2 famous people to dinner, who would they be and why?**

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GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

An Advent Calendar of Scripture and Fun Christmas Traditions



<p>1 <i>Isaiah 9:6</i> Make an Advent Wreath & Decorate for Christmas</p>	<p>2 <i>Isaiah 7:14</i> Play Christmas Charades, Pictionary, or Minute to Win It Games</p>	<p>3 <i>Luke 1:26-28</i> <i>1st Sunday of Advent</i> Donate Food to your Local Food Pantry</p>	<p>4 <i>Luke 1:29:33</i> Have a Christmas Music Dance Party in your Kitchen</p>
<p>5 <i>Luke 1:34-35</i> Send a Christmas Card to Someone in the Military</p>	<p>6 <i>Luke 1:38</i> Celebrate Saint Nicholas Day</p>	<p>7 <i>Luke 1:46-50</i> Candy Cane Bomb a Parking Lot</p>	<p>8 <i>Luke 1:51-55</i> Bake Christmas Cookies or Candies</p>
<p>9 <i>Matthew 1:18</i> Deliver Treats to a Neighbor Without Getting Caught</p>	<p>10 <i>Matthew 1:20-25</i> <i>2nd Sunday of Advent</i> Make a Homemade Christmas Ornament</p>	<p>11 <i>Matthew 2:4-6</i> Take Funny Family Christmas Pictures</p>	<p>12 <i>Luke 2:1-5</i> String Cranberries for the Birds</p>
<p>13 <i>Luke 2:6-7</i> Build a Snowman or A Whole Snow Family</p>	<p>14 <i>Luke 2:8-9</i> Have a Sleepover Under the Christmas Tree</p>	<p>15 <i>Luke 2:10-11</i> Draw Your Own Picture of the Birth of Jesus</p>	<p>16 <i>Luke 2:12-14</i> Put Quarters in the Machines at the Laundromat</p>
<p>17 <i>Luke 2:15-18</i> <i>3rd Sunday of Advent</i> Call A Relative and Sing Christmas Carols</p>	<p>18 <i>Luke 2:19</i> Bring Coffee or Hot Chocolate to an Outside Worker</p>	<p>19 <i>Luke 2:20</i> Put on PJs & Look at Christmas Lights</p>	<p>20 <i>Luke 2:21</i> Do A Christmas Science Experiment</p>
<p>21 <i>John 1:14</i> Complete a Random Act of Christmas Kindness</p>	<p>22 <i>Matthew 2:1-2</i> Have a Hot Chocolate Bar and Watch a Christmas Movie</p>	<p>23 <i>Matthew 2:10-11</i> Add Stars to the Tree & Talk About the Kings</p>	<p>24 <i>John 3:16</i> <i>4th Sunday of Christmas & Christmas Eve</i> Read A Christmas Story</p>



Dear Faith Shapers,

February is the time I sign up my own kids for summer camp. There is often a discount if you sign them up early. We have exceptional Lutheran Camps here in Iowa. There are so many reasons to send your kids to camp. I've brought you 6 reasons, but there are so many more! Did you know many of our rostered leaders had camping ministry experience (either as campers or counselors or both)? Camping ministry is God filled, fun and faith shaping! If you are unable to afford sending your kids to camp, please speak to your church or call camp. There are scholarships available so that every child can attend camp.

February is also the start of Lent. I have included a Lenten Gratitude Calendar in this issue of Living Faith at Home. Feel free to share it, copy it, and use it with your family. Journaling is a wonderful spiritual practice and there are health benefits linked to gratitude practices so gratitude journaling is a perfect Lent activity.

In Christ's Service,
Deacon Lisa Kammerer



6 Surprising Things Kids Learn at Bible Camp

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- 3. Meet New People & Make Friends.** One camper told me that camp made her more open & caring. Another told me he experienced a sense of belonging that they did not feel at school.
- 4. Take Risks & Conquer Fears.** Camp takes students out of their comfort zones and offers new challenging experiences. Campers learn they can try new things surrounded by a supportive & encouraging community of faith.
- 5. Unplug and Have a Passion for Nature.** Students need time away from their phones and the chance to experience nature. Experiences and relationships are more vibrant and real when you are able to connect face to face.
- 6. Experience God.** Campers tell me they learned to pray, see the Holy Spirit at work and to serve others. There is nothing more amazing than a student learning how much God loves them and that they have God given gifts that are needed in our world!

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Lent Gratitude Journaling

Add a spiritual practice this Lent. Here are 40 gratitude journaling prompts. Grab a notebook and journal with us this Lent.

- ✝ Things you love outside
- ✝ Smells you love
- ✝ Bible stories you are grateful for
- ✝ Things you love about God
- ✝ Spiritual gifts you have
- ✝ Accomplishments
- ✝ Opportunities your grateful for
- ✝ Bible verses you are thankful for
- ✝ Challenges you're grateful for
- ✝ Movies that changed you
- ✝ Favorite things about church
- ✝ Things that make you laugh
- ✝ Gifts you are grateful for
- ✝ Places you are grateful for
- ✝ Favorite trips you've taken
- ✝ Family you are grateful for
- ✝ People your grateful for
- ✝ Happy memories
- ✝ Songs you love
- ✝ Favorite foods
- ✝ Books you love
- ✝ Beautiful things
- ✝ Favorite artists
- ✝ Favorite ministries
- ✝ Favorite recipes
- ✝ Simple pleasures
- ✝ Favorite faith practices
- ✝ Favorite ways to serve
- ✝ Favorite teacher
- ✝ Colors you love
- ✝ Friends you're grateful for
- ✝ Life lessons your grateful for
- ✝ Traditions your grateful for
- ✝ People that inspire you
- ✝ Comforting things or places
- ✝ Sounds you love to hear
- ✝ Quotes that inspire you
- ✝ Hobbies you love
- ✝ Favorite things to touch
- ✝ Favorite things God created
- ✝ Gifts you love to receive
- ✝ Holidays you love
- ✝ Prayers you love
- ✝ Church traditions you love
- ✝ Random happy thoughts
- ✝ What you love about Jesus
- ✝ Favorite things about Easter



Living Faith @



October is one of those months that confuses me. The weather is warm one day and chilly the next. I don't know whether to dress in a sweatshirt and jeans or a t-shirt and shorts. This year people have the added stress of trying to deal with the Covid variant and all that it brings. We thought we were through the worst of the pandemic but now find ourselves back into the thick of it. What does this mean for family and faith formation? Fun things to do with people you are close to - some inside and some outside. You could carve pumpkins with cute faces or Christian shapes, collect money for a cause, collect food for the food pantry, make fall decorations, think of some ways to celebrate the reformation, and even bake some apple 🍏 or pumpkin 🎃 goodies ... for your family or to share with others. Enjoy your time together ... Sue Cira, TEEM Student

REFORMATION

One of the popular hymns we sing on
Reformation Sunday:

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God ELW #504

A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield
victorious; he breaks the cruel oppressor's rod and
wins salvation glorious.

The old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe!
With craft and dreadful might he arms himself to
fight. On earth he has no equal.



Harvest Time

- Corn
- Soybeans
- Slow-moving farm vehicles
- Semi trucks full of grain

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FUN FAMILY ACTIVITIES

BEADED PIPE CLEANER INDIAN CORN DECORATIONS

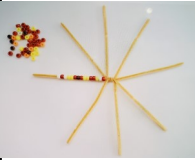
Supplies: 4 pipe cleaners (12 inch)
Plastic Pony Beads (120)

This craft is a fun and easy activity to do in the fall for a decoration. Line up the pipe cleaners and twist them in the middle.

Evenly space each pipe cleaner and spread them into the shape of a star. Start threading the beads onto each pipe cleaner, until all 8 are covered. Be sure to leave a little over an inch of



pipe cleaner showing on each end. About 15 beads per pipe cleaner & mix up the colors of beads. Once you've covered your star in beads — carefully bend each end upward and gather the points together. Take the tops of



all the pipe cleaners and twist them a couple times to secure the beads and form the corn "husks". Be sure to leave some ends free and fan them out a bit. Repeat to make as many mini corns as you need for your decoration. They can even be used to hold a name card on your table.



The month of October has many "National" recognition events; of which some are centered around physical activities, and others emphasize food. For example: Walk to School, Go on a Field Trip, Roller Skating, Cardiac Awareness, Positive Attitude, Bake & Decorate, Apple, Caramel, Chili, Cookie, Dessert, Pasta, and Pizza. There is long list so I've only included a few. It seems like there are many people who say they don't have the time, energy, or resources needed to be active. Here are a few ways to overcome these barriers:

- * Lack of time. Two – three 10 minute short bursts of walking is beneficial. Or, sitting at your desk there are fitness exercises that you can do.
- * Motivation. Make activity a social event. Ask friends or family to join an activity. Encourage each other! Everyone will benefit, both physically and emotionally.
- * Low energy. Many people feel tired after work or doing household chores. Consider whether morning activities could be better.
- * Fear of injury. Visit your health care provider to make sure activity is safe. Chair workouts, stretching & strength training with at-home videos.
- * Cost. Recreation trails are available in many areas. Libraries offer exercise on DVD.



Grab your shoes and have some FUN!!

Living Faith @



Dear Faith Shapers,

With the start of fall there are many new things happening. At school, work, and even at home new beginnings are occurring all around us every minute of the day. I see photos of new schools, new jobs, new relationships, new hair styles, and this is the month of new television shows.

September is the month of new beginnings in so many ways. People are affected in different ways when changes happen. Many times if there is a person available to listen, it can be a big help! If you find yourself in need of a listening ear, notify your pastor or a close friend - don't wait and don't think you can handle it on your own. Don't be afraid to try new things. You may fail but ... step out - be willing to change ... it might work but you won't know unless you try!!



As we begin a new year of new beginnings, let us commit to hope in God's power to make all things new - as God restores and renews, creating new every day. God offers renewed mercy to us, God's children ... "For I know the plans I have for you to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future ." ~ Jeremiah 29: 11. Rather than see another year as a daunting task to be met or an unknown to be feared, let us trust in God's sovereignty over new. New blessings, new failures, and new victories with God's goodness guarding them all.

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New beginnings ... we all have them – sometimes more often than we want or need. Change can be stressful and cause people to be irritated and impatient but the reaction to change can depend on the type or reason for the change.

We all realize the Covid pandemic has caused many disruptions in families, schools, and workplaces in the last couple years. The way we communicate, care for others, educate our children, and work. There has been a shift in behaviors, the economy, in medicine and so many others. Even though the variant viruses are present and continue to cause disruptions, there are many people trying to get back to a normalcy of life ... or create and initiate a new normal – some using guidelines and protective gear.

As children head back to school, many parents and teachers are encouraging students to “get back to basics” – especially those who spent time (or were supposed to be) with long distance learning. They need the reminder to look inside themselves for their own creativity, resilience, and strength to allow them to problem solve unexpected issues that they may encounter. Parents and teachers can empower kids to face situations and conceive solutions.

It seems some students have fallen behind in the learning curve for their grade level. Whether students are studying for tests or catching up on missed assignments, students need encouragement and motivation.

As summer comes to a close and children ready themselves for classes, parents are shopping for clothes and supplies to help motivate and initiate excitement for a new year. Some students are influenced by inspirational quotes or passages to help in the process of getting into the spirit.

Adjusting to new schedules including getting up earlier, being on a time schedule, meeting new friends and teachers, and the challenges of a new grade can be daunting and demanding.

Families can help each other by committing to prioritize everyone’s mental health. This can be done in a number of ways including encouraging a good night's sleep, staying active, and eating healthy meals. Small acts of family togetherness can be the anchor that helps kids deal with the uncertainties that they’re facing.

Adults have been experiencing changes as well. Many professions have been inundated with people deciding to change their vocation – either during the pandemic or more recently, during the emergence from the pandemic situation. A new job or profession can be quite daunting during “normal” times, but during a pandemic the stress can build exponentially and get out of hand quickly. Adults also need reassurance and empowerment to carry on, tap into their reserve of patience, and adjust to the changes happening in their life.

Reminding people that uncertainty and change are to be expected and that being flexible and adaptive in the face of change will help them feel more resilient, confident, and at ease. Assisting people with finding the help they need will ultimately be best for their welfare – no matter their age.

Living Faith @



Happy Easter! Christ is Risen - Alleluia!

How are you celebrating Easter this year? Easter Egg Hunt? Easter Baskets? Chocolate Bunnies? All of this is so much fun, especially when kids are involved! But don't forget the real reason for the season! Here are some facts about Easter that you might want to share with others – young and old alike, as a reminder of why we celebrate Easter:

- **Easter** is the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb on the third day after his crucifixion. That's why we also call it Resurrection Sunday.
- **Easter** is the foundation of the Christian faith. Jesus, the Son of God, fulfilled prophecy and through his death, has given to us the gift of eternal life in heaven. Easter highlights the resurrection – but we also celebrate Christ's resurrection every Sunday!
- **Easter** is celebrated on a different date each year - unlike Christmas. It is always on Sunday, but the actual date is set to coincide with the first Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon, the first full moon after the vernal (spring) equinox. Easter Sunday always falls somewhere from March 22nd to April 25th. This year it falls on April 4th.
- **Easter** next year (2022) will be celebrated on April 17th in case you are wondering! 😊

Here is an idea I've seen pop up lately on social media sites. It is a great way to let people know the importance of Easter and a fun way to invite them to your church (In-person or Online.) You will need a bunch of plastic eggs and some pre-packaged candy to put in 11 of the 12 eggs. Pick some homes to visit and sneak the eggs into their front yard. Make sure to put a door hanger on their front door so they will know what you are doing! It would be a fun project for Sunday school kids! The door hanger can say something like:



You've Been Egged!

**There are 12 eggs
hidden in your yard!**

**Enjoy the Hunt! But don't be discouraged when you find the empty egg. It is a simple reminder of Jesus' empty tomb... for HE IS RISEN! We would love to have you join us for our worship services at:
(Church, Address, Time of services, Name of website, Face Book page, etc.)**

Earth Day is celebrated on April 22nd. It is a wonderful way to involve ALL of God's children in learning about and caring for God's creation. It's also the perfect time of the year to get everyone outside (after a long winter) to appreciate the beauty of springtime and the great outdoors!

Here are some easy and fun ways to observe Earth Day:

Turn the Faucet Off: Did you know you can save up to eight gallons of water a day just by shutting off the faucet when brushing your teeth? You can also conserve a lot of water while washing your hands — just turn off the tap for those 20 seconds you're scrubbing with soap.

Use only reusable products for the day: Use cloth towels and napkins; regular plates, bowls, cups, and utensils instead of paper or throw away plastic; take reusable bags to the store with you; and be mindful of anything you do throw into the trash can! How can you eliminate all the extra trash and garbage every day? What can be recycled? Discuss if this is something you might be able to do regularly.

Adopt a plant! Bringing some greenery into your home can help regulate the temperature through the moisture they release into the air. This also helps reduce the energy required to heat and cool your home. And plants make any room look fresh and inviting!

Create art from recycled materials. Locate extra buttons, used jars and cans, fabric scraps, pieces of yarn, etc., and get creative! Make necklaces, pretty containers, key chains, refrigerator magnets – let your imagination go wild! Even small children can have fun with these types of recyclable projects.

Pick up trash in your yard, or on your block – or around your church! Plan a fun spring cleanup day – have contests to see who can come up with the strangest looking piece of trash – or the most colorful, or the biggest or the smallest! Celebrate with a potluck lunch afterwards. Thank everyone by giving them a new plastic water bottle (find them at the dollar store!)

Make an Earth Day Jar. On scraps of paper, write down simple, easily executable ideas and reminders that you and your family can do to be good stewards of our earth. Put the jar in a central location, and periodically draw a piece of paper and follow the instructions.

Read the Creation Story in Genesis 1 – take turns reading the different verses about what God created and reflect on ways we are either harming or helping God's creation. Talk about what it means to be a good steward of our earth and its resources.



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Dear Faith-Shapers,

We find ourselves in the midst of Advent. As Deacon Lisa wrote about last month, we are waiting ... waiting for Christmas plans to be decided, waiting for a vaccine, waiting for the number of infected people to go down, waiting for more people to wear a mask to help lower the spread of the disease. There are many factors to take into consideration when planning for Christmas services - the number of people who can attend and are in-person services possible with reservations and distancing, what does a virtual Christmas program look like and how can it be done ... so many questions and variables. But no matter what gets decided, we need to remember that God is always present. Jesus birth is able to be celebrated — Christmas will happen even if we don't worship inside the church building.

This is a picture of a pin that I wear during Advent and Christmas. My mom gave it to me many years ago while I was in college. It is a great reminder of why we celebrate Christmas.

~ Sue Cira, Student Pastor, TEEM



The Twelve Days of Christmas

The actual twelve days of Christmas are the ones following Christmas — Christmas day through the eve of Epiphany on January 5th. Epiphany is celebrated on January 6th. In the calendar of the church year, the 12 days of Christmas are the season of Christmas.

Here are some ways to celebrate the Christmas season:

- *Use placemats for drawing paper — let the kids decorate them with Christmas pictures.
- *Continue to light your advent wreath. Light all four candles and the white Christ candle in the center. This is especially meaningful during devotion time.
- *Write the names of Jesus on ornaments. Here are just a few from Scripture:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Immanuel, Holy One of God, Christ the Lord, Lamb of God, Messiah, King of Israel, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, The Way the Truth and the Life, Rod of Jesse, Lord of Lord, King of Kings, and Morning Star

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Random Acts of Kindness Ideas

Take time as a family to set up 12 Random Acts of Kindness during the Christmas season — Do an activity each day that is kind for someone else.

Here are some examples:

- *Make a card for someone in your neighborhood and deliver it
- *Do a chore without being asked or one that is not your normal chore
 - *Share something with a friend
- *Give compliments to every member of your family
 - *Tell or read a story to someone
 - *Hold the door for someone
- *Fill a bag full of clothes to donate
- *Fill a bag full of books to donate to a library
 - *Help make dinner
- *Tell your parents (or children) about a happy memory you have with them



The Advent Wreath is the widely recognized symbol of Advent. The wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches laid flat to symbolize eternal life. Four candles stand in the circle and each one represents one of the four Sundays of Advent. In the center of the circle is a fifth candle (traditionally white), the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas Day. The circle of the wreath reminds Christians of God & God's eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. Advent worship is a journey of waiting, anticipation, and preparation.

The four traditional advent themes, takes place as Lighting the Advent Wreath -

- God's people - **Hope**
- Old Testament Prophets - **Love**
- John the Baptist - **Joy**
- Mary the mother of Jesus - **Peace**

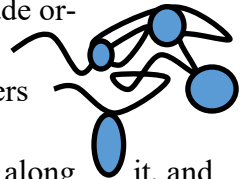
These candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus, God's Son, Our Lord & Savior.



Christmas time crafts with the children or grandchildren can be great fun. Each child can use their skills according to their age or help some that are younger. Even adults but have found that coloring is quite relaxing during this pandemic -



which means a there's a whole bunch of coloring going on!! Homemade ornaments or decorations that can be used at home or given to others are a fun craft to make.



Draw a squiggly line with ovals along it, and color them in with multi-colors. (similar to a string of lights)

Put a series of circles in order to make a shape like a cane - color in the circles with alternating red & white - trim around it and hang it up.



This can be used on a tree or in a window. One other fun project we've done recently with our grands ... and this grandma doesn't do paint. I traced around their foot and drew a hat on top and stick arms. The toes are the base of the snowman and the heel is the head. They colored the hat and used color crayons to make a scarf around neck (arch area). Dark color dots for eyes and mouth with orange triangle for the nose. CUTE!!

Love your Enemies

It is easy to show love for our friends and even strangers, but what about people who are not kind to us. People we would see as an enemy. In Luke 6:27-29(NIV) the Bible talks about loving our enemies.

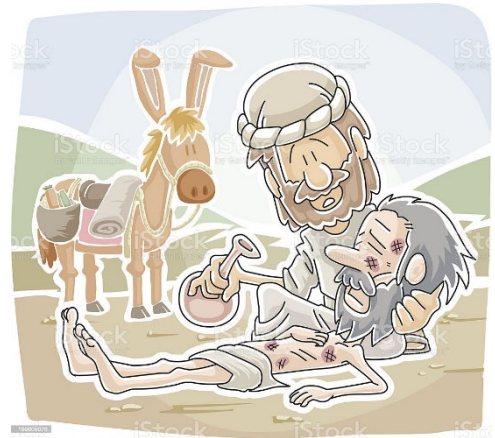


27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Love In Action

One of my favorite missionaries often says, “Love is something you do”. Love is a verb. Jesus taught about “love your neighbor” in action using the parable of The Good Samaritan. Read Luke 10:30-37 and answer the questions below.

1. Why did Jesus tell this story?
2. Why do you think the man asked Jesus to explain who his neighbor was?
3. Who did not treat the hurt man with love and what might have been their reasons?
4. Why was it strange for the Samaritan to help? How did he help?
5. How did Jesus’ story answer the first man’s question? How should we treat others?



Love Activity

How can we show love in action every day? Make a list of ways to show love to your family, friends and strangers and post them on the bulletin board or refrigerator where they will remind you to look for opportunities to show love for others each day. At dinner or evening prayers talk about how you made love into action during your day.

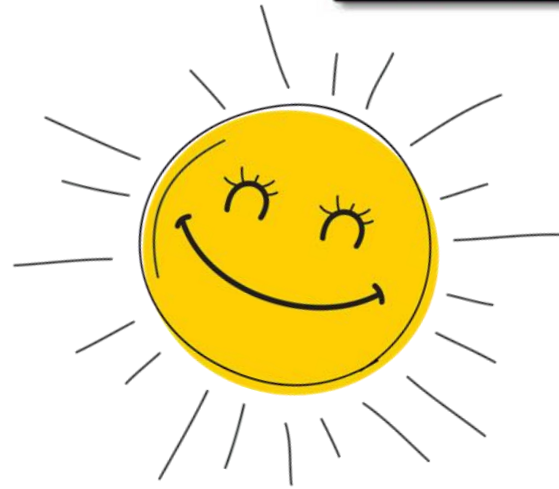
Suggestion: Make and send Valentines for the residence in the local care facilities near your home or where you have church members living.

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The lazy, hazy days of summer are truly upon us! I hope you and your family are able spend a little extra time just enjoying the slower pace that summer can bring. Last year, due to the pandemic, there were a lot of summer events cancelled, and many of our usual summer destinations were shut down. One thing that 2020 taught us is that we can still provide a lot of fun for our families without going to a whole lot of trouble and planning. Good old-fashioned walks in the park, Bicycling trails, backyard picnics & camping were once again quite popular!

Even though places like amusement parks, zoos, museums, and municipal swimming pools are now opening up again to the public, I hope that we can still take some time to enjoy God's creation and the beauty of nature in the simple ways like we did last year.

It will not be long, and our fall calendars will start filling up again and before we know it, we'll be heading to the store with our back-to-school list in hand.

May you enjoy and savor the precious days of this summer while they last!

25 Responses to "I'm Bored!"

- Play Hopscotch
- Look at Old Pictures
- Write a Story
- Do a Puzzle
- Have a Fashion Show
- Blow Bubbles
- Create a Super Hero
- Give the Dog a Bath
- Read a Book
- Play Tag
- Wash the Car
- Dance to Music
- Have a Tea Party
- Look for 4-Leaf Clovers
- Write a Letter (and Mail it!)
- Pick Flowers for the Table
- Practice a Sport
- Take a Bubble Bath
- Learn a Magic Trick
- Pick Some of Your Toys to Donate
- Make a Nature Bracelet
- Paint a Picture for a Neighbor
- Play Charades
- Take Pictures of Nature (A-Z)
- Make Sock Puppets

Planning for Fall and Faith Formation

I'm always a little bit "caught off guard" when August rolls around and I realize that school is starting soon – especially in Iowa, where many schools start classes the third week in August. And that means also being prepared for going back to Sunday School, Confirmation, and other youth activities. Here are some things to think about *now* so that you are ready! If you are a pastor or a faith formation leader or volunteer, start now in preparing your congregations for what they can look forward to this fall. Here is a list of some things to start thinking about:

- Blessing of the Backpacks – a fun way to send the kids off to school knowing that God is watching over them. Start letting everyone know now so they will bring their backpacks on the Sunday you designate. Our Synod has resources on their website for a backpack blessing: <https://www.neiasynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Milestone-Ministry-Blessing-of-the-Backpacks-worship-sheet.pdf>
- Plan a Rally Day for the First Day of Sunday School – What I've learned is that it doesn't have to be complex – create a simple theme and focus your activities on that. One year we created the theme "It's SWEET to Love Jesus!" – we had lots of simple, fun games with pieces of candy: Contests for throwing Tootsie Rolls in a bucket; Guessing how many pieces of candy were in a big jar; Jenga type contests with Candy Bars; and the favorite: Making homemade ice cream in a bag: <https://www.thebestideasforkids.com/ice-cream-in-a-bag/> Involve the adults as well – they'll have a blast!
- Plan a Mission Project for the school year – Start out the year with a planned mission or outreach project. It can be supporting a local cause such as a food bank or some other charitable organization, or a world-wide cause such as Lutheran World Relief. Maybe incorporate it into a "God's Work our Hands Sunday" or "Rally Day Sunday." You can visit our Synod website for mission ideas: <https://www.neiasynod.org/ministries/>
- Decorate Church Bulletin Boards for Fall – a couple of weeks before the beginning of Sunday school, invite some families to come and decorate church bulletin boards – make them welcoming and inviting! Make it a party and have snacks or a light lunch available.
- Plan for ways that children, youth and families can assist during worship services. Children love to participate! Find simple ways for them to help with ushering, reading scripture, praying, acolyting, and helping with communion and worship offerings. Put out a signup sheet now and start encouraging families and children to sign up.
- Prepare (or update) Worship Activity Bags for children to use during the worship service. Make sure they are clean and that broken crayons, marked up activity/coloring books, etc. are replaced.
- Make sure to pray special prayers for the beginning of the school year – for our children and families, for teachers, for all those who are involved in the care and education of our youth.

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What Can You Do This Summer to Deepen Your Kids' Faith?



It's now June and summer is just beginning. For many families, that means a (slightly) less hectic schedule for a few glorious weeks. At the same time, it can mean small-scale panic at what to actually do with the extra time your kids have.

Solution: Take the opportunity to get more creative with engaging together spiritually as a family. Here are some ideas to get you started!

1. Choose a gospel to read as a family (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). Decide on a timeframe (days or weeks) and divide the chapters accordingly.
2. Find a way to serve others together as a family.
3. Attend Vacation Bible School. VBS is a fun week offered by many churches for kids to play and learn together.
4. Invite your pastor over for dinner. Invite him to dinner and give your kids the opportunity to ask questions they may not want to ask you (or that you may not know how to answer)!
5. Encourage your kids to invite a friend to church
6. Visit a different church (another denomination or religion). Then discuss the difference in beliefs and practices versus your own...and why they differ.
7. Write letters to God. Have each family member take 10 minutes to write a letter to God. Pick a topic that is relevant at a given time for your family—it could be something light-hearted like complaints you'd like to "file" or something more serious like expressing disappointment about unanswered prayer. Share your letters.
8. Go to a Christian bookstore together and pick out a devotional. It doesn't have to be January 1 to start a devotional habit. Take your kids to a Christian store and select a devotional book to start.
9. Create a family prayer list. Write down the biggest needs for your family and those you know and commit to praying together consistently throughout the summer.

Adventures of Flat Jesus

This summer let's take Jesus everywhere we go. Let Flat Jesus be a reminder of Jesus' real presence in every place we find ourselves and as a fun reminder to help others to encounter God.



1. Decorate your Flat Jesus and laminate him if you are able.
2. Take Flat Jesus everywhere with you and take lots of pictures and share them.
3. Talk with friends and family about what you and Flat Jesus experienced.
4. Set up a Facebook or Instagram page for your church family to share their pictures and experiences.

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Living Faith @



HAPPY SPRING!!! — it seems like with spring comes the normal “Iowa” weather! One day we have warm temperatures with sunshine and only a little wind. The next day finds us in hooded sweatshirts and covered with a blanket - mostly because the wind is blowing and it’s cloudy. Just walking outside can be a struggle if the wind is blowing at your face!! Yes, spring actually arrived in March, but the excitement extends on - at least for me. I really look forward to warmer weather so we can be outside more. Spring is the season of new beginnings - fresh buds bloom, animals awaken and the earth seems to come to life again. Farmers and gardeners plant their seeds and wait for the young sprouts to emerge from the ground. I especially like the idea of new beginnings. We can look forward to new beginnings everyday from God. God provides a place for you even when you see nothing but desert and wilderness. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.” *Isaiah 65:17*

Spring brings the birds back from the south where they stayed for the winter - robins are the birds most often associated with spring; however, hummingbirds and orioles are my favorites. I start putting out the feeders a few days before May 1st; then we wait for them as they start to arrive ... first a few at a time and then more - to remind me of all God’s new beginnings. Include with that the flowers that bloom in the spring and the world becomes all new for the year. It is truly a marvelous season - renewal of life!!

Student Pastor Sue Cira, TEEM



Coloring opportunity

Here is a picture to color. Flowers blooming with green leaves and grass - bees buzzing around ready to do their job. Pollination is essential for the continuation of the life of plants.

What kind of flowers do you see in the picture? What kind of flower is your favorite? What color flower is your favorite?

Spring is a time to take care of all the aspects of our wellbeing including Social, Emotional, Intellectual, Financial, Physical, and Vocational areas of our life. Exercise and taking care to be healthy are a way to help with living a faithful life. A prayer is offered here with some ideas for individuals, families, and congregations to encourage wellness through bicycles. Going on a bike ride is a great way to connect with each other through conversation, see God's beautiful creation, make memories, learn something, and get the body moving. Many areas in north Iowa offer bike trails that are safe and meander through breathtaking scenery. Blessings on the Journey!

Prayer for the bicycles and the riders:

Let us pray. God of play and transport, We are thrilled to be able to experience your world from the seat of our motorcycles and bicycles, from our skateboards and scooters and rollerblades. Keep those who ride mindful of cars and animals, rocks on the trails, and rounding corners. Keep those who drive aware of speedy bicycles, new riders wavering in their steadiness, and the tenderness of training wheels. Bless these wheels that they would move us from place to place safely. Bless the helmets that we wear that they would protect us if we fall and be a sign to those around us that we value the life you have given us. Be the wind at our back and the strength to push up a hill. Grant us safe travel throughout our days, may it be well with our souls, and guide us safely home each night.

In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Ideas for Home:

- Talk about bike safety. For help go to:
<https://icsw.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/kidsandbikesafetyweb/>
- Go for a bike ride as a family. Talk about God's creation, about sunrises and sunsets, or how important it is to tend to our health by exercising.

Ideas for Congregation:

- Sponsor a bike rodeo - invite local law enforcement officers to teach about safety. Offer healthy snacks and treats. Have a blessing of the bicycles.
- Have an all congregation BRTTN ("Bike Ride Through the Neighborhood"). Invite those along the way to join you.
- Have a blessing and sending for those in your congregation that are attending "RAGBRI". If you are near the trail, offer the church building as a sanctuary.

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Dear Faith Shapers,

Advent is coming. I don't know about you, but I really need an advent this year. Advent is a season of waiting. With all of the unknowns we have faced in 2020 it is comforting to come back to advent. Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting for the gift of the season which is Jesus. If we pay attention, God will surprise us with God's presence in unexpected places. Just like Jesus being unexpectedly born in a manger in Bethlehem.

Preparing our hearts for Christmas is not just another thing to accomplish on an already overflowing to do list. Advent leads us to pause, to breathe, and to capture those simple moments. Advent invites us to slow down and enjoy the hope and miracle of the season. When we embrace advent, we will find what we are seeking- Emmanuel- God with us.

May your advent be filled with good news of great joy!

Deacon Lisa Kammerer



10 Benefits of Giving Thanks to God

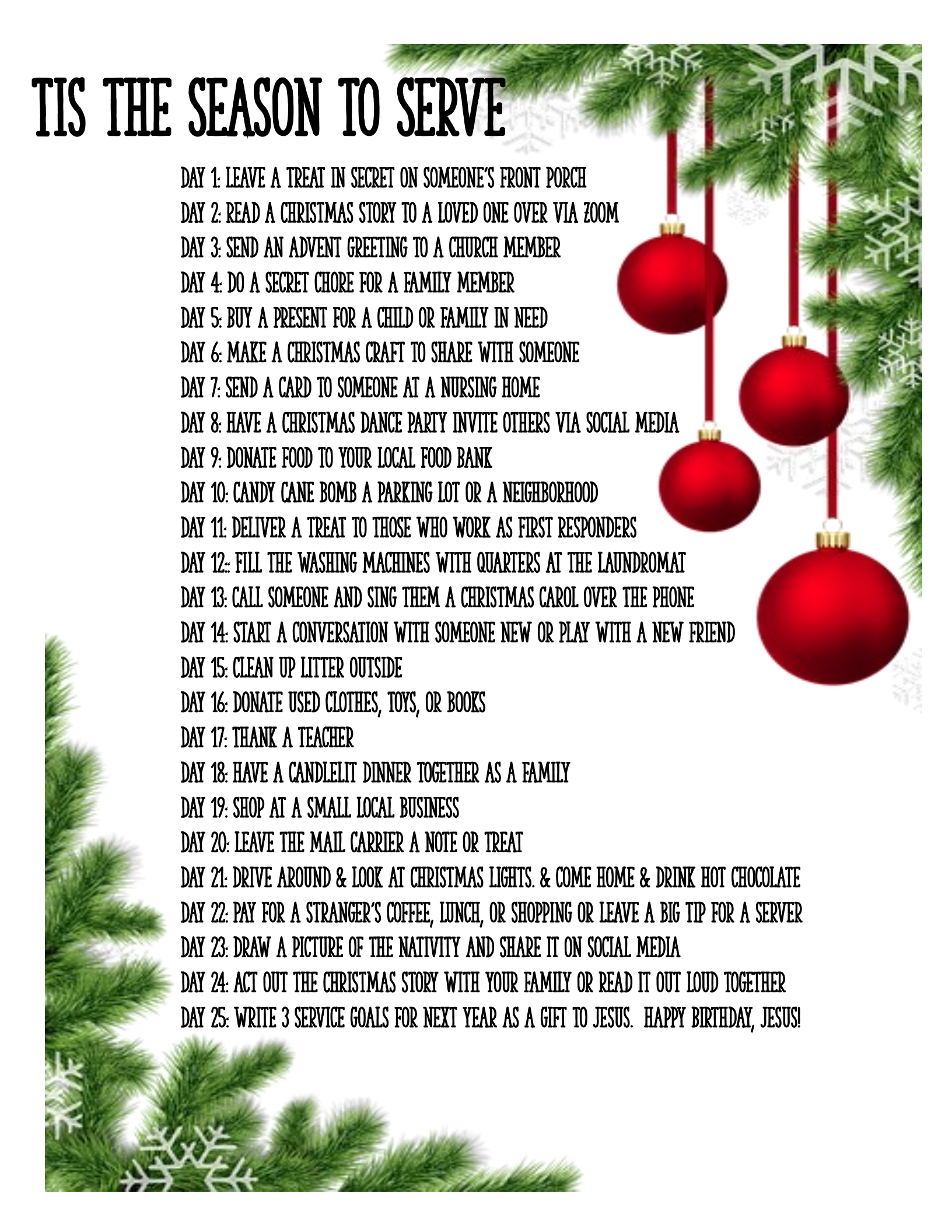
1. **Gratitude Glorifies God.** Our gratitude glorifies God when we exalt not the gifts but the Giver. Gratitude helps us realize all we have comes from God and not from us.
2. **Gratitude Opens Our Eyes.** There's a beautiful cycle in giving thanks. The more we thank God, the more we will see God working in and around us.
3. **Gratitude Brings Peace.** Gratitude helps us see God's hands over all of our circumstances which gives us peace.
4. **Gratitude Draws Us To God.** Gratitude for the magnitude of undeserved kindness draws us to God.
5. **Gratitude Brings Contentment.** It's not happy people who are thankful, it's thankful people are happy! Gratitude turns what we have into enough.
6. **Gratitude Deepens Our Faith.** Keeping record of God's past faithfulness is a faith boost when we face difficulty.
7. **Gratitude Leads To Joy.** Realizing God's abundant goodness, even when times are hard, is a gateway for joy.
8. **Gratitude Guards Against Envy.** Gratitude makes us realize we have far more than we deserve. A grateful heart has no room for envy.
9. **Gratitude Helps Us Live In The Present.** Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days.
10. **Gratitude Is A Testimony to God's Goodness.** When we acknowledge what God's done for us we show God to the world around us.

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TIS THE SEASON TO SERVE

- 
- DAY 1: LEAVE A TREAT IN SECRET ON SOMEONE'S FRONT PORCH
- DAY 2: READ A CHRISTMAS STORY TO A LOVED ONE OVER VIA ZOOM
- DAY 3: SEND AN ADVENT GREETING TO A CHURCH MEMBER
- DAY 4: DO A SECRET CHORE FOR A FAMILY MEMBER
- DAY 5: BUY A PRESENT FOR A CHILD OR FAMILY IN NEED
- DAY 6: MAKE A CHRISTMAS CRAFT TO SHARE WITH SOMEONE
- DAY 7: SEND A CARD TO SOMEONE AT A NURSING HOME
- DAY 8: HAVE A CHRISTMAS DANCE PARTY INVITE OTHERS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA
- DAY 9: DONATE FOOD TO YOUR LOCAL FOOD BANK
- DAY 10: CANDY CANE BOMB A PARKING LOT OR A NEIGHBORHOOD
- DAY 11: DELIVER A TREAT TO THOSE WHO WORK AS FIRST RESPONDERS
- DAY 12: FILL THE WASHING MACHINES WITH QUARTERS AT THE LAUNDROMAT
- DAY 13: CALL SOMEONE AND SING THEM A CHRISTMAS CAROL OVER THE PHONE
- DAY 14: START A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE NEW OR PLAY WITH A NEW FRIEND
- DAY 15: CLEAN UP LITTER OUTSIDE
- DAY 16: DONATE USED CLOTHES, TOYS, OR BOOKS
- DAY 17: THANK A TEACHER
- DAY 18: HAVE A CANDLELIT DINNER TOGETHER AS A FAMILY
- DAY 19: SHOP AT A SMALL LOCAL BUSINESS
- DAY 20: LEAVE THE MAIL CARRIER A NOTE OR TREAT
- DAY 21: DRIVE AROUND & LOOK AT CHRISTMAS LIGHTS. & COME HOME & DRINK HOT CHOCOLATE
- DAY 22: PAY FOR A STRANGER'S COFFEE, LUNCH, OR SHOPPING OR LEAVE A BIG TIP FOR A SERVER
- DAY 23: DRAW A PICTURE OF THE NATIVITY AND SHARE IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA
- DAY 24: ACT OUT THE CHRISTMAS STORY WITH YOUR FAMILY OR READ IT OUT LOUD TOGETHER
- DAY 25: WRITE 3 SERVICE GOALS FOR NEXT YEAR AS A GIFT TO JESUS. HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JESUS!

Where Christ is present in faith, the home is church, too.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you as we enter into the crisp fall season. As congregations continue to meet the needs of members and invite and serve others while considering the safety of all during the pandemic, the goal of this newsletter from the Synod Home Life Network is to share resources for this season. Some of the seasonal topics this month include: fall, Reformation, pandemic, Halloween, stewardship, and harvest. May your soul be nourished and inspired to share your faith in our loving, grace-filled God.

Robin Souhrada, Home Life Network member

We Plow the Fields and Scatter (ELW 681, public domain)

We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand:
He sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes, and the sunshine, and soft, refreshing rain.

*Refrain: All good gifts around us are sent from heav'n above;
Then thank the Lord, oh, thank the Lord, for all His love.*

He only is the Maker of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower, He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey Him, by Him the birds are fed;
Much more to us, His children, He gives our daily bread.

We thank Thee then, O Father, for all things bright and good,
The seedtime and the harvest, our life, our health, our food;
Accept the gifts we offer, for all Thy love imparts,
And what Thou most desirest—our humble, thankful hearts.



As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. Genesis 8:22

Harvest time is here. What are you looking forward to in the fall season? Where have you recently seen God's abundance in your life? How might you share the gifts God bestows upon you?

A word for the weary:

Many of us, myself included, feel the weight of weariness during this time of unrest. Unrest in pandemic, unrest in injustice, unrest in political opposition, unrest in laboring differently, to name a few. Let me remind you of God's desire for us when we find ourselves struggling and anxious.

Cast all your anxieties on God, because God cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

Come to me all you who labor and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts...
Romans 5:3-5

May you rest in the compassionate love of God, find strength to cast your worries unto Jesus, and hope in the breath of the Holy Spirit that we, once again, are restored to abundant joy.

Live into the fullness of resting and gaining strength, trusting in God's grace.





THE PUMPKIN PRAYER

Dear Jesus,
As I carve my pumpkin,
help me pray this prayer:

Open my mind
so that I can learn about you.
(cut the top off the pumpkin)

Take all my sin and forgive
the wrong that I do.
(clean out the inside)

Open my eyes so your love I will see.
(cut eyes shaped like hearts)

I'm sorry for times I've turned up my nose
at what you've given to me.
(cut a nose in the shape of a cross)

Open my ears so your word I will hear.
(cut ears shaped like a Bible)

Open my mouth to tell others you're near.
(cut the mouth in the shape of a fish)

Let your light shine in all I say and do!
(place candle inside and light it)

Don't have a pumpkin to carve?
Draw and color a pumpkin to go along
with the poem.

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Original source unknown.

Looking Ahead

All Saint Day will be celebrated in many congregations Sunday, November 1st. It is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and the saints among us. Light a candle and say a prayer to remember and honor the saints who have impacted your faith journey.

REFORMATION AND MARTIN LUTHER TRIVIA

(for youth and adults)



1. Who was the main influence in the protestant reformation?
2. What reformer was an early advocate for the translation of the Bible?
3. The publishing of what paper by Martin Luther is regarded as sparking the Protestant Reformation?
4. What city were the 95 Theses thought to have been posted on the church door?
5. What was the first protestant church?
6. What reformer expounded on the doctrine of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God?
7. In the Bible, Martin Luther found that we are saved by what?
8. Who invented the printing press that allowed the reformers to spread their ideas rapidly?
9. Martin Luther translated the Bible into what language?
10. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German for what purpose?
11. Martin Luther left lawyer school to become what?
12. Luther rejected what doctrine that said the bread and wine of communion became the body and blood of Christ?
13. What year marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation?
14. What language was used in the church before Martin Luther translated the Bible into German?
15. Who was Martin Luther married to?
16. The widespread theological division by Martin Luther and many reformers against the Roman Catholic Church is called _____.
17. When is the Reformation celebrated?
18. Who is the man, who was a leader of United States racial reform, that is often confused with Martin Luther?
19. In the Small Catechism, Martin Luther says the household is a _____.
20. In the Small Catechism, what phrase does Martin Luther use at the end of each meaning?

Answer: 1. Martin Luther 2. John Wycliffe 3. The 95 Theses 4. Wittenberg, Germany 5. The Lutheran Church 6. John Calvin 7. Faith 8. Johannes Gutenberg 9. German 10. So all people could read it. 11. A monk 12. Transubstantiation 13. 1517 14. Latin 15. Katharina von Bora 16. The Reformation 17. October 31st 18. Martin Luther King, Jr. 19. House church 20. "This is most certainly true."

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Living Faith @ HOME

Dear Faith Shapers,

It has been a very weird year. Being socially distant has been difficult. My family has struggled. We are trying to look at the gifts of now and trying to embrace the gifts of now. Here's some things we've been able to embrace:

- ◇ Cooking together
- ◇ Reading a book together
- ◇ Campfires
- ◇ New flavors of s'mores
- ◇ Retelling my own faith shaping experiences
- ◇ Calling Godparents
- ◇ More meals together
- ◇ Exploring new parks
- ◇ Online vacation Bible School & Worship
- ◇ Zooming with relatives
- ◇ Mailing notes of encouragement or gratitude
- ◇ Camping in our backyard
- ◇ Acts of Kindness
- ◇ The musical Hamilton
- ◇ New family board games
- ◇ Family bike rides
- ◇ Gratitude journaling

May your fall be filled with Holy Joy & family fun,

Lisa Kammerer, Deacon



20 Fun Activities To Do When You're Social Distancing

Experiences are what people remember. Create some fun experiences while maintaining social distance.

* Do Random Acts of Kindness

- * Have a Dance Off
- * Facetime a relative
- * Start a book club
- * Look through baby books
- * Google 'waterfall near me' and go for a hike
- * Read a book together out loud
- * Make a Fort
- * Yoga
- * Create a piece of massive art
- * Take a virtual museum tour
- * Ride bicycles
- * Start a Gratitude Journal
- * Repurpose something
- * Have a fun photo shoot
- * Mail a care package
- * Outdoor Movie Night
- * Make Homemade Ice Cream
- * TRY GEOCACHING
- * Draw pictures & positive messages around town with sidewalk chalk

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30 Day Family Mental Health Challenge

Day 1

Deep breathing exercise

Day 2

Watch a silly pet video

Day 3

Eat a healthy meal

Day 4

Have an electronic free night

Day 5

Donate something you no longer use

Day 6

Watch a movie that makes you laugh

Day 7

Listen to your favorite music

Day 8

Go for a hike

Day 9

Do your favorite hobby

Day 10

Read for 30 minutes

Day 11

Call a friend

Day 12

Say no to something

Day 13

Drink more water today

Day 14

Write a thank you note

Day 15

Do a 5 minute meditation

Day 16

Try a new food

Day 17

Color a picture

Day 18

Set an achievable goal

Day 19

Go to bed 30 minutes early

Day 20

Have a board game night

Day 21

Learn a new dance

Day 22

Name 3 things you are thankful for

Day 23

Cook a new recipe

Day 24

Stretch your body

Day 25

Organize a space

Day 26

Do a random act of kindness

Day 27

Try doing yoga

Day 28

Draw a picture

Day 29

Give someone a compliment

Day 30

Adopt a new habit

Living Faith @



I find myself staring out the window - watching the snow fall and the wind blow outside and thinking about all the gatherings and events that will be happening soon around the world in recognition of the holiday happenings. Pearl Harbor Day of Remembrance on December 7th, the celebration of Kwanzaa, the Festival of Hanukkah, and Christmas are all special holiday observances. I always find it amazing how many other special days occur in a month if you google "holidays and observances" for the month.

It is time to plan the food for the family as we come together to eat, play games, and enjoy our time together ... a whole house full of noise!

**We members of the Home Life Network want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas!!
Our wish that you can take time to appreciate the Reason for the Season - Jesus Christ!**

December brings us Advent leading into Christmas.

Last month's newsletter included information about the Advent season of waiting and preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. The candles invite us to have Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy as we light a candle each week with the white candle being lit on Christmas Eve.



Christmas falls on a Sunday this year which means Christmas Eve is Saturday night. We worship to welcome the light of the Christ child. Isaiah declares that the light of the long-promised king will illumine the world and bring endless peace and justice. The grace of God through Jesus Christ brings salvation to all people. The angels declare that Jesus' birth is good and joyful news for everyone, including the lowly shepherds.

January - the beginning of the calendar year - brings us the naming of Jesus. Jesus is given the name announced by the angel before his conception. Bearing Christ's name, we pray that with Christ as our example, we share the love of Christ with all people. Love has come - a light in the darkness!! Alleluia!!

Epiphany

The feast of Epiphany concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ whose glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the water of baptism. We are sent to beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people.



Baptism

In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is revealed as the beloved Son of God. Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will bring forth justice and be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism we too are washed by the Word, anointed by the Spirit, and named God's beloved children.



As we continue on our way through the month of January, we know Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world & the one anointed by the Spirit. Jesus begins his public ministry by calling the disciples. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near - and we have seen a great light!!

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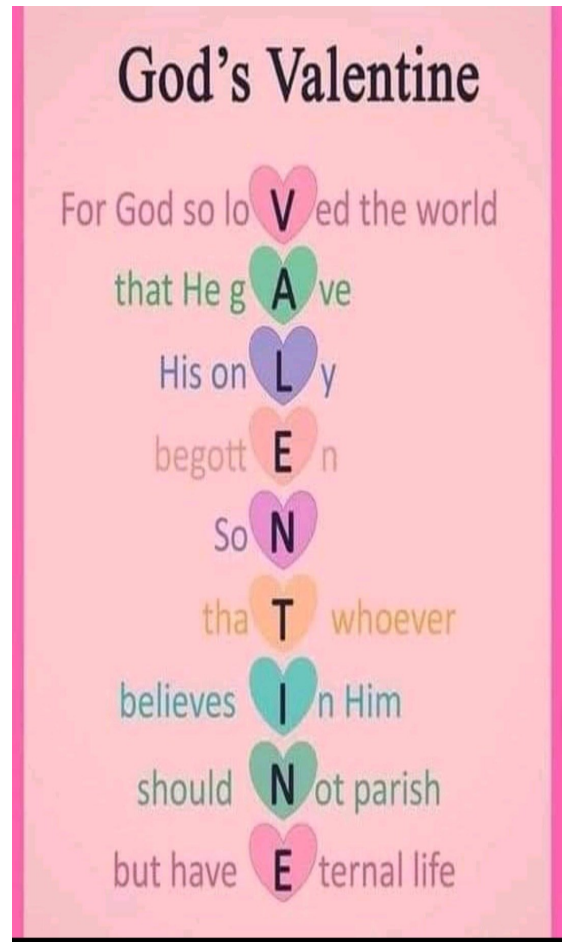


February ... the month with the least number of days on the calendar but seems like the longest. The weather can be cloudy, foggy, snowy, cold, rainy or sunny (sometimes all of them on the same day!) February has a number of special days - the best known of which are Valentine's Day, American Heart Month, Groundhog Day, Super Bowl Sunday, Presidents' Day, and, this year, Ash Wednesday.

I found a few others that aren't as well known: Random Acts of Kindness Week, Dark Chocolate Day, Tater Tot Day, Ice Cream for Breakfast Day and a whole lot more. The ones we recognize most are Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday.

These are the ones I will highlight here in this article. Enjoy your month of February and let's hope the weather doesn't bring too much more snow!

Sue Cira, Zion & Immanuel
Crane Creek Congregations



■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ A Valentine's Day Service Project

(taken from Feb. 2019 Faith at Home)

Encourage your kids to show their love for God by serving someone else. They could complete a simple service project like making a meal, shoveling snow, or cleaning for someone who could use help. Have the kids make a valentine for the person and include the words: "We love because God first loved us" or "We are valentines of God."

✚ LENT ✚

Lent is a 40-day liturgical season that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Easter. Sundays are not included in the 40-day count because every Sunday is a joyful celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Though not biblical, Lent has long been a tradition in the Christian Church, and it is thought that the tradition of the 40 days recalls the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11), the 40 days and nights Noah and his family spent on the ark and the 40 years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Focused on the Easter promise of new life and renewed faith, Lent invites us to look honestly at ourselves as we seek to be strengthened in the call to be Christ's disciples. Lent is considered a time when many people make a special focus on enhancing their ever-growing and loving relationship with God. Christ's life, ministry, and death are remembered during this season. It's also a time to think about how God is with us all the time. You may choose to do this through prayer, reading the Bible, helping others, or something else. Anything that connects you with God is a great practice. We can ask what is breaking down (in individuals, our congregations, our communities, and in the world) and what is waiting to be recreated or revitalized ... the hope of new life that comes through baptismal waters.

Ash Wednesday



*Remember that you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:20

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. On this day, Christians

focus on their complete sinfulness and Christ's suffering and death to insure their salvation. Ashes are referred to many times in the Old Testament as signs of sorrow, mourning, humility, and repentance, and on Ash Wednesday they are used to remind people of their mortality; that "you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19).

Here's an Activity to try ... Pretzel Prayer Pals

With the pretzel being a common food associated with the season of Lent and prayer, it is a great way to share your faith with others. The shape of the pretzel twist is patterned after the common posture of early Christians in prayer - arms crossed or folded across their chest, each hand touching the opposite shoulder.

Bake your own pretzels or buy the twists from a store. Place a few pretzels in a clear plastic bag, seal the bag, and attach a card or a note letting your "prayer pal" know you are praying for them during this season of Lent. You can add decorations to make it personalized.



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Living Faith @



Dear Faith-Shapers,

As I write this on a very warm evening, it's difficult to imagine that in only a few months we will be watching the weather channel for the amount of snowfall to expect along with the possibility of blizzard warnings. Hopefully between now and then you have the opportunity to spend time with the "littles" in your life and help them catch some faith. Those of us who makeup the Home Life Network believe that faith is caught rather than taught ... how do you demonstrate your faith so you can be observed and allow it to be caught by others?

Others, especially children, watch **you** to see how faith is done and expressed in your life ...

- ✦ Time spent reading and studying the Bible - which includes continued learning to grow our faith
- ✦ Volunteering to help at functions, for activities & events
- ✦ Helping others in whatever way they need help - whether physically, mentally, or spiritually.

Faith is an important expression of hope for something better. It is more than a wish as it includes the assurance that the Lord is working, even though we cannot see it. Faith is the anchor that keeps us secure in our awareness of God's presence. Knowing God is within and all around through all the challenges, messes, and turmoil in life - like choppy waters in high winds - God is with us providing calm beneath the surface.



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Fall in Iowa is a great time to spend with family doing activities that you cannot do in the heat of summer ... nor in the coldness of winter. Even though there are many activities and events on this list, just as was suggested in the last newsletter, there's nothing wrong with some relaxation/downtime! Taking time to read for 20 minutes a day - or read to someone - can be a refreshing time to relax while learning or rev up your imagination or just to read for pure enjoyment. Here are some suggestions for outside activities:

- **Go apple picking.** There are many apple orchards to visit ... near and far away
- **Get lost in a corn maze.** Maybe only get lost if you really know your way out
- **Play a game of touch football.** You don't need a whole team but have fun
- **Plant bulbs in your garden for next spring's growing season.**
- **Collect some colorful leaves.** There may be some in your own yard 😊
- **Go on an excursion.** To the mountains, a lake, or somewhere special
- **Visit a pumpkin patch.** There are usually some fairly close to you
- **Pitch a tent in the backyard for a camping adventure.** Notice the stars
- **Visit the farmers market for vegetables now in season.**
- **Go on a scavenger hunt for acorns, pinecones, leaves, rocks, etc.**
- **Make s'mores by a backyard fire.**
- **Write down all the things and people you're thankful for.**
- **Pray for all the things and people you put on your list. Remember that when we pray, we don't have to be fancy. It doesn't matter when we pray. God just wants us to ask our questions and voice our needs ... seeking truth and wisdom and strength. No magic words. No rules to follow. Just pray. God is listening.**

Living Faith @



The month of July is going by fast - isn't it odd how once July 4th has gone by, the rest of the summer goes very quickly. Many vacations will be coming to an end - ball games are winding up the season - the people on RAGBRAI are pedaling across the state during some of summer's hottest days - county fairs are occurring - people are looking to August when schedules will change from summer busy to school busy with the all the fall activities.

In the meantime, the month of August gives us the opportunity to plan and implement the remainder of the summer-time endeavors. Bible school, ice cream socials, and other fundraisers are happening within congregations. Personally, there might be books to read, crafts to finish, go to the movies, plan a picnic with fresh produce from the farmer's market, and/or go camping either in the backyard or in a campground near water so you can take a dip to cool off during the hot days. August gives us the time to spend time with family before the hustle of fall begins.



Family time is important, not only for personal growth of communication skills between parents and children and learning problem-solving skills, but also for studying more about Jesus, reading the Bible, and praying together.

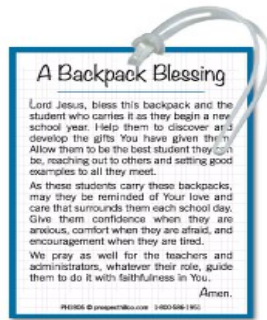
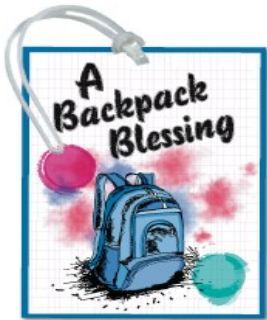
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Planning for Fall and Faith Formation

August is just around the corner which means school is starting soon – many schools in Iowa start classes the third week in August. That means it's time to start preparing for all the fall programs. There are some things to think about **now** so that you are ready, especially if you are a pastor, a faith formation leader, or volunteer.



Blessing of the Backpacks – One fun way to send the kids off to school knowing that God is watching over them. Start letting everyone know now so they will bring their backpacks on the Sunday you designate. Here is an example of one backpack tag that can be used.

- **Plan a Rally Day for the beginning of Fall activities** – A rally celebration doesn't have to be complex – create a simple theme and focus your activities on that. Here are a few ideas: Tie-Dye, Superhero, Neon Colors, Camouflage, Sweets.
- **Plan a Mission Project for the school year** – Start out the year with a planned mission or outreach project for the whole congregation to focus on. It can be supporting a local cause such as a food bank or some other charitable organization, or a world-wide cause such as Lutheran World Relief. You can visit our Synod website for mission ideas: <https://www.neiasynod.org/ministries/>
- **Decorate Church Bulletin Boards for Fall** – Invite some children or families to come and decorate church bulletin boards - make them welcoming and inviting! Make it a party and have snacks or a light lunch available.
- **Plan for ways that children, youth and families can assist during worship service** Children love to feel that they are an important part of the congregation and they love to participate in worship! Find some simple ways for them to help with ushering, reading scripture, praying, acolyting, and helping with communion and worship offerings. Put out a signup sheet now and start encouraging families and children to sign up.
- **Organize Worship Activity Bags** - for children to use during the worship service. Make sure they are clean and that broken crayons, marked up activity/coloring books, & etc. are replaced and updated.
- **Pray special prayers for the beginning of the school year** – for our children and families, for teachers, for all those who are involved in the care and education of our youth.

*** Note: some of these ideas are repeats from a previous year and can be molded to fit smaller or larger congregations

Living Faith @



The month of June is a great time to plan summer activities — for the kids, for the adults, and for the whole family. Some days will be jam-packed with some people in the family going one way and others going another... which might cause some scheduling issues. Other days might include times that kids and adults are participating together. Being together as much as possible during the summer can help with faith shaping — even when

intentional faith building activities are not included.

Sometimes just being together counts for more than what you do ... here are a few ideas:

- Fly a kite
- Go fishing
- Have a water gun fight
- Bird watching
- Grow veggies in a garden
- Camp out in the living room
- Write cards to older people
- Go to a ballgame together
- Draw with sidewalk chalk
- Visit a farmers market

Summer provides a necessary break for many families - it can be a time to be out in creation to learn about the Creator - which can help initiate and develop faith conversations. Here are a few ideas to help with faith formation:

- attend Vacation Bible School
- jump rope while reciting Bible verses
- write Bible verses on the sidewalk
- volunteer to help someone with their lawn or garden
- volunteer at a food bank or other “helping” organization
- Visit grandparents, god parents, and other older members of your congregation
- Have a campfire story-telling time
- Invite friends to a movie night (either inside or outside) with popcorn & snacks
- Go on a nature hike to look for parts of God’s creation
- Go to a bookstore or library to find some books to use for devotions or prayer

Enjoy the summer - increase your spirituality - share your observations in a journal, a letter to relatives, or during coffee time at church.

Rev. Sue Cira Zion, Alta Vista & Immanuel Crane Creek, Lawler

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Prayer



Summer is a good time to practice your prayer life ... and, our relationship with God by following the example Jesus set for us, we can seek to find ways to talk with God. If you could see God's face when we talk with God - when we pray - imagine the delight we would see. The authors of the Psalms knew that prayer was the communication with God that sustained their relationship. They prayed when they were sad, happy, thankful, angry, or hurting. Jesus did the same - prayer was the center of his life and important enough that Jesus taught his disciples how and when to pray. We can learn a lot about prayer from his teachings.

1. Jesus prayed alone. Even though Jesus was in constant demand to heal & care for people, discuss issues, and teach, Jesus would take a break from the disturbances to go off to pray.
2. Jesus prayed with others. Jesus encouraged his disciples (and us) to pray together. God's presence in prayer unites us together. As we become aware of the needs of others, we can provide comfort. We are better together.
3. Jesus prayed before a meal. Jesus used the ritual of praying before a meal to remind his disciples of the blessings God has provided - that God is the source of everything we have.
4. Jesus prayed for others. Jesus prayed for his disciples that God would bless them with perseverance, unity, and spiritual satisfaction during their witness to the world. Jesus prayed for his enemies - to those who persecuted him. Jesus prayed for all people.
5. Jesus prayed for us. Jesus continues to pray for us as our advocate. We too have the Holy Spirit as our advocate because we can do nothing without God. I encourage you to pray today ... every day ... right now.

Connect-A-Prayer

A few years ago in our newsletter, Robin Souhrada wrote about a way to pray that could be used during a meeting or in a group setting.

Using a connecting type of toy (like in the picture or a lego), each person takes a piece & says a prayer, adding the piece to another piece. Watch how all the prayers of the community connect and build together.



Living Faith @



According to the calendar, we are in the season of Spring. We've changed our clocks to Daylight Savings Time and the robins are bouncing around outside ... today in the snow. Some areas got bunches of snow which makes me wonder whether the flowers will recuperate. Blooms of tulips, daffodils, and other lovely spring flowers had begun their growing process. March is the month of windy conditions and we have felt those all month - even on warmer days, it seemed cool outside because of the winds! As we make our way through the month, through the season of Lent, and into Holy Week, we begin with Palm Sunday (and a forecast of snow, wind, and rain). Children will have the joy of waving palms ... yes, adults also participate, but they don't seem to have as much fun as the children. This time of transition from Lent, into Holy Week, & culminating with Easter morning sunrise worship ... Wow! It's spectacular!!

I hope you all have a chance to attend a service that day - maybe not at sunrise but sometime.

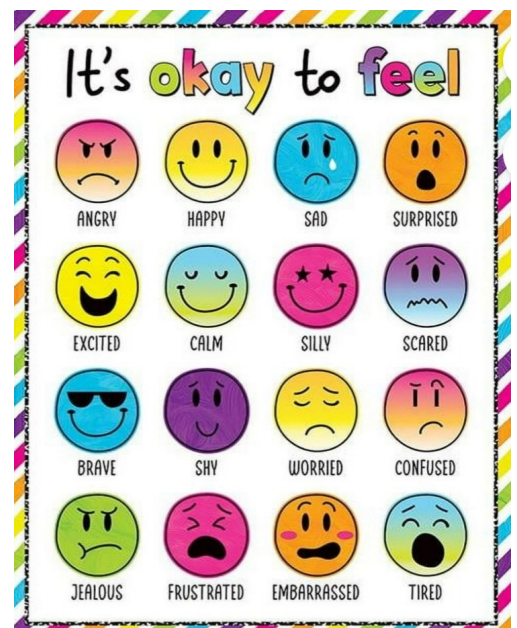
All the days to follow Easter in April will hopefully bring us rain - much needed rain. I thought you might need a few artsy/craftsy ideas to keep your children entertained, so I've included those in this issue ... along with a little information about the covenants we covered during Lent.

Happy Easter to you all!!

Rev. Sue Cira

Do you find yourself or someone around you struggling with an emotion? You just can't describe it - you only know how you feel ... perhaps this chart will help you figure it out.

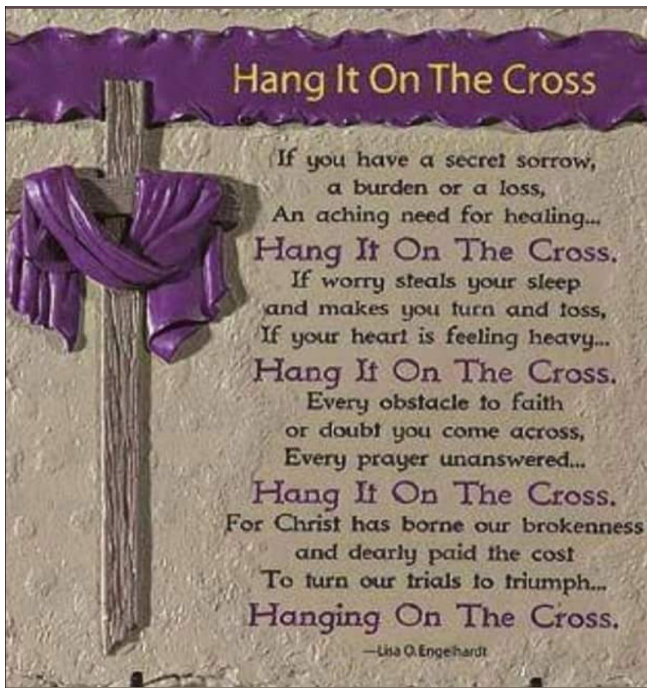
Remember it's okay to not be okay - some days are just harder than others!!



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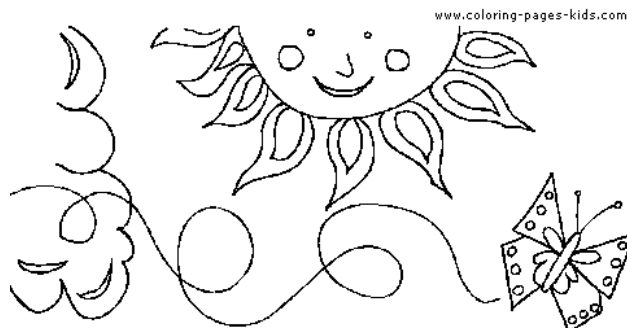
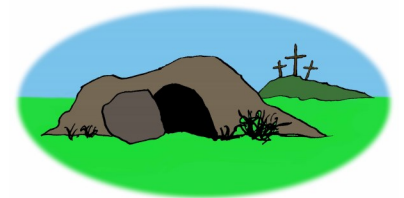


God's promises in our readings during Lent came through something tangible: Noah building an ark and God's promise never again to use floods to destroy the world.

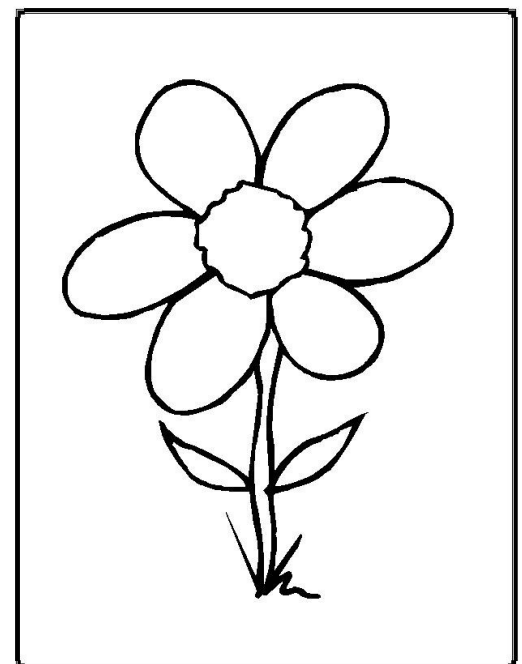
Yes, that rainbow ... that even small children can recognize! What a beautiful



physical sign. The faith of Noah in God's promise of salvation was so strong that he moved to action. What floods are you facing, and how is God calling you to live out your faith ... having faith in God's promise that the waters will not overwhelm you?



Here are a couple pictures for you or your kiddos to color ——— enjoy!!



Living Faith @



*Dear Readers,
May is a month with many new beginnings - the spring grass is greening up, plants are beginning to bloom, classes are winding down for the summer, & vacations are being planned.*

Some beginnings start as a result of an ending. College might follow high school in education ... a promotion might be in next at a job ... but any new beginning means you are allowing yourself to accept changes. You can grab the change and transition into the "greater" that God has established for you. Look around -- see all the new beginnings ... join with

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17



others ... and enjoy the journey!! Happy Spring!!!

*Rev. Sue Cira
Zion - Alta Vista
Immanuel Crane Creek - Lawler*

Accept a change which results in transition, be grateful - be thankful. By practicing gratitude everyday, there is a significant benefit to physical and emotional wellbeing.

There are four gratitude practices to engage in daily.

1. Reflection and meditation.

- ◆ Light a candle (or other light source) as a reminder of God's presence.
- ◆ Ask yourself or share with others:
 - What am I most grateful for? How is God present in that?
 - What is troubling me? How is God present in that?
- ◆ Close with a prayer and extinguish the candle.

2. Journaling

- ◆ Many journaling teachers encourage writers to use pen and paper, believing that when we write with our hands, our words are closer to our hearts. Choose a medium that feels secure (notebook, computer program, blog, etc.).
- ◆ Start by writing for five minutes. Work up to 10 minutes or more.
- ◆ Respond to these questions:
 - What am I most grateful for? How is God present in that?
 - What is troubling me? How is God present in that?

3. Footsteps

Our bodies often register emotions before our minds do, if only we stop to listen. This option invites you to slow down one of the body's most routine motions to focus on a single step.

- ◆ Take one step and ask yourself: What am I most grateful for? How is God present in that?
- ◆ Pause to scan your body. Notice where you feel gratitude — for example, a loosening of the jaw, or relaxing of the shoulders. Repeat this process two more times.
- ◆ Take another step and ask yourself: What is troubling me? How is God present in that?
- ◆ Again, pause to notice physical sensations. Repeat this process twice more for a total of six steps.

4. Movement

Regular walkers often say it takes several minutes (or even several miles) along the path before they start to sense mental calmness. With this option, engage your body as a way of quieting your mind.

- ◆ Choose an activity that doesn't require too much concentration — like walking, jogging, or a familiar yoga routine.
- ◆ Once you fall into a rhythm, reflect on these questions:
 - What am I most grateful for? How is God present in that?
 - What is troubling me? How is God present in that?

From PorticoBenefits.org/wellness

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The season of Autumn has once again come to North Iowa. As I was talking with my grandkids about this season the other day, I asked why they thought it was called fall by most people. Their response was “because it’s the time the leaves fall off the trees!” They think grandma is silly sometimes with my questions. But, they’re correct! The leaves fall off the trees, the corn is being harvested in some places, the beans are being harvested in other places, the temperature at night gets low enough to make foggy early mornings, and with all the dust or smoke in the air, the sunrises and sunsets are very colorful!

Many people look forward to fall for the football and the cooler temps - while some others of us would be fine with keeping the warmer temps around for a while longer. The grass and other cover crops need this change in seasons to provide respite and recuperation for the land in order that the crops can be planted again next year ... just as our human bodies have the need for rest, recuperation, and refreshment. This time can be experienced in different ways. Reading books, sitting by a fire, watching a movie, or simply taking a nap are some of the ways to help our bodies with rest.

Fall brings the smells of cider and cinnamon, apple picking, and pumpkin flavored food and drink.

With school starting up again, though, the schedules are filling up with activities - both of school and of church varieties. This next month we can look forward to education classes, Reformation Sunday, and Fall Theological Conference.

What is your favorite part of fall? Are you ready to have new experiences, learn new skills, or put your God-given gifts to use in some new ways?

Take the time to enjoy the color changes going on around you, practice gratitude because gratitude draws us closer to God.

Have a blessed fall.

Rev. Sue Cira



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Reformation Day

October 31st is not only Halloween, it is also a time to remember the Reformation and its importance in church history. On this day in 1517, Martin Luther (the reformer, not MLK Jr. the civil rights leader) nailed his ninety-five theses (discussion points) to the door of the Wittenberg castle in protest of the abuses of the church. One of the main messages Martin Luther taught was that salvation cannot be purchased or earned. He said “We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.” When Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to the door the Protestant Reformation was born.



Rest Your Weary Heart

I have discovered that some weeks are more exhausting than others. By the time Sunday afternoon arrives, I sometimes feel like my reserve tank is empty. Whether your week has involved heart-break or victories; whether your laundry is all washed, folded, and put away; or whether your heart is full of disappointments and the weight of your to-do list; whatever your week has brought ... stop. Don't worry about what has already passed. Take the time to stop and rest. Rest from the trials - rest from the victories - and center your heart on God, our Maker.

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ~ Isaiah 43:18-19

The week will fade away and like all of our days, they are being recreated. Your burden is no longer yours, it is being lifted up by the glory of the cross.



Rock Painting is one of the newer hobbies that I would

like to try. As you can see above, the website rockpaintingguide.com is one place to find painting ideas and tips. You are encouraged to find flat rocks and use Mod Podge Outdoors to seal the rock before painting your design. According to the directions, more than one coat of paint is a good idea. Once the rocks are dry, you can hide them in parks. How exciting to go for a hike and find some pretty painted rocks! And, maybe even some flowers ... or some kids playing on the swings ... or an interesting tree with leaves that are falling ... or just a bench — to sit and rest.

Living Faith @



Dear Friends,

September is a month of changes ... in seasons, as we start Fall programs, the leaves are turning colors or falling off the trees, the daylight hours are getting shorter, the heat and humidity have decreased, the excitedness of anticipated Reformation Sunday, Advent, and Christmas planning. There is a lot to do and hopefully, you have plenty of volunteers to pitch in and help.

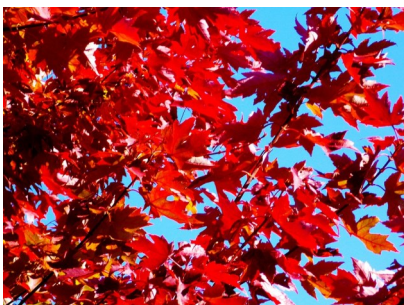
We, who write these articles to help folks with faith formation at home, are seeing changes as well. Our group began when the Synod made the change from committees to Networks. Those who believed that faith formation begins at home, met and determined ideas to pass along through articles written and delivered with the *Star* every month. Our numbers have become less throughout the years, so with two left, we have made the decision to take a break. We know and understand the number of you readers who utilized our newsletter will now be without; however, you can still find past newsletters on the synod website at www.neiasynod.org/download-category/home-life. With that in mind, I will include a few ideas for fall and the upcoming holiday seasons.

May the peace of the Lord be with you all in your planning and teaching the faith to the "littles" in your house, your congregations, and your communities.

God Bless You,

Pastor Sue Cira and Deacon Lisa Kammerer - Home Life Network, NEIA Synod

here is the link to our Facebook page: [Northeastern Iowa Synod Home Life Network ELCA](#)



**Playing in the leaves is a
fun activity!!**

(Always make sure there are
adults to supervise)



There are many fall activities to do with leaves ... or leaf shaped paper cut-outs. Here's one idea of thankfulness:



If you find a picture you like that you can make into a window cling decoration ... here is an example for Halloween:



Put your image into a ziplock bag. Trace around the image with puffy paint & let dry. Peel them off and stick to your window.



Winter brings snowflakes.

Pipe-cleaners and beads make a fun snowflake ... just remember to bend the ends over to keep the beads from falling off.

A D V E N T

Advent - means arrival or coming. We often use an Advent Calendar to help count the days of Advent. Advent is a four-week period intended to be a time of preparation for the arrival of Jesus Christ. Advent begins on Advent Sunday, which is the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Many calendars are made of paper with little doors that contain a prize of candy, puzzle pieces, or a scripture reading. The First Sunday of Advent this year is on December 1st — it ends on December 25th with Christmas.

We leave you with the following reminder:
Be like Jesus and use your voice, ears, arms, hands, mind & heart accordingly.



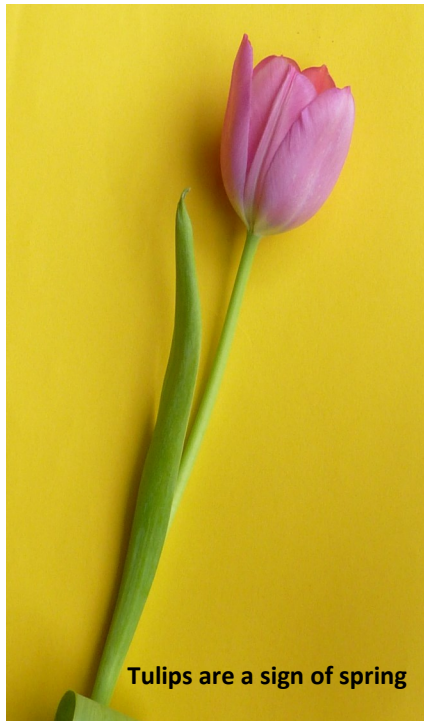
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Dear people who shape the faith of others:

Spring is here - with summer on its way! The much needed rain has arrived and is almost too much ... at least all at once. The flowers are blooming, the grass is growing and needs to be mowed, the birds are returning from their winter habitat, so we see bird feeders with many types of birds we haven't seen for a while. Some favorites are hummingbirds, orioles, indigo bunting, & the little goldfinch. All have different needs for eating but as they gather at the feeder, the sugar water container, or beside the grape jelly, they flitter and flap their wings at each other. As we get ready for the approaching summer, we look for ways to walk or spend time outside, if possible. Self care can be difficult to accomplish. We need to focus on the things that make us happy - the activities that we feel good about while we're doing them — and there are many! Let your imagination go ... read through some of the suggestions on the next page & take care of yourself and your family members. Help others find ways to relax and refresh.

Rev. Sue Cira, Immanuel Crane Creek, Lawler



Tulips are a sign of spring



Hummingbirds are fun to watch



Orioles

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As we encourage on another and strive to be healthy, we remember the promises made during our baptism. Living well is a spiritual practice. There are spiritual practices with which we feed our souls as well as our bodies through social interactions, emotional well being, physical well being, financial well being, vocational well being, and intellectual learning. Are you able to be healthy in each of these areas? Which ones do you need to work on? For most of us life is hard and sometimes overwhelming. It helps to know we're not alone and that we're part of a community of believers. These communities of faith are where we find support and hope.

Pray using a Labyrinth indoors
 one on paper or made of clay
 Or find one outdoors



Healthy Ideas to Try

- ◇ *Drink at least 60 oz water per day*
- ◇ *Walk 30 minutes a day*
- ◇ *Pray thanks*
- ◇ *Eat fruits and vegetables*
- ◇ *Get plenty of sleep*
- ◇ *Try a new hobby or interest*
- ◇ *Take the stairs*
- ◇ *Watch the birds in your yard*
- ◇ *Pick some flowers*
- ◇ *Have some fun - alone or with others*
- ◇ *Read a book*
- ◇ *Dance to some music*
- ◇ *Follow the Portico wellness resources*
- ◇ *Investigate and implement one spiritual practice*

The Wholeness Wheel



Living Faith @



Dear Faith-Shapers,

February finds us in the depths of winter, with cold weather and short daytime hours. You and your child may be looking at the calendar to plan special activities for the month. There are opportunities that can be arranged to provide emotional, social, physical, and spiritual health and well-being. The goals that you set for the new year are either being accomplished or have fallen by the wayside.

There is a list of holidays and observances for the month that includes some interesting reasons to celebrate. I found it fascinating that almost every day includes a food item — no wonder we have trouble keeping ourselves fit and trim ... we get bombarded with temptations on every side.

With that in mind, here are some ideas for staying on a positive wave-length:

Seek understanding and listen before jumping to a conclusion — especially when dealing with other people.

Focus on the positives — keep a jar of notes to read when you find yourself slipping into negative thoughts.

Try some new or different activities than your usual routine.

Be Generous and practice encouragement — see the next column.



Encouragement Goes Far

We all can use encouragement at times, even some celebration when we meet a goal. Cheering on a friend or family member who wants to stick with a change is a wonderful way to show your support — possibly to be more physically active, to lose weight, to read more, to volunteer for a cause. Congratulate the small steps made and celebrate progress along the way.

Help it happen—don't push too hard—and stay positive with your comments and actions.



As I am writing this for the month of February, it's a frigid cold day in January and I'm still in the "new year" mode. A new year gives us the chance to catch up, to do what we missed out on, or didn't get done last year — which can be seen as quite a challenge especially in these last couple years with Covid-19 present. It can even be a challenge to think of new ideas to try someday. But, here in 2022, we can look with hope to having the best year ever!!!



HAVE hope
TRY new things
BE active
SEE the good
SAY "I Love You ... " more
CHALLENGE yourself
CHOOSE to be happy
EAT better
ENJOY today
FORGIVE more readily
READ more often
BECOME YOUR BEST YOU!!!

THIS YEAR...

In this season of Epiphany, we hear from John 1:5 "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that - and, therefore, we shine our light, we share the light of Christ we carry in our hearts in order to drive out the darkness of sadness, despair, and hopelessness we see in the world ...

- Smile more
- Stay away from negative conversations
- Compliment friends & family
- Send a "thinking of you" note
- Say a prayer for specific people
- Read an uplifting book
- Take time to relax and destress
- Read the Bible
- Recognize the light of others

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Happy Fall! The summer activities are a memory, the kids are headed back to school, the evenings are getting chilly and darkness is coming sooner - but, wow! the setting sun has been quite a sight lately ... such beautiful colors of red!

Fall also means a new year begins at church. There are first communion, confirmation, and Sunday School classes being planned.

One challenge within every family is finding time, especially time to spend together. It was when I was a kid, when my kids were kids, and is even more of a challenge these days. Faith formation takes time - family time - together. Because faith is nurtured and practiced, not taught, it takes time, effort, and is not just a one shot deal. Faith is a gift that flows through the waters of baptism and is activated by the Holy Spirit. It springs from a relationship with God and from living among faithful people, also known as the faith community that begins in a trusted relationship usually at home but not always. This relationship continues as the Body of Christ gathers for weekly worship and fellowship. Faith Formation is not the same as physical and mental development and it has nothing to do with age, but everything to do with the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Have fun on your faith formation journey!

Praying Through the Crayon Box

This is a prayer for parents and grand-parents to use as a guide when praying for and with their children. It uses the colors in a crayon box.

Red: Pray for safety of all in the school day.

Orange: Pray for safe social communication & good attitudes

Yellow: Pray for your child to remember that God is always with them and never leaves them.

Green: Pray for your child's growth

Blue: Ask God to give your child a sense of peace no matter where they are in their day.

Purple: Thank God for your child's imagination

Brown: Ask God to give your child a strong work ethic

Black: Pray for your child's teachers, the staff and

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Fall brings ...

school and time with friends
 colored leaves to walk through
 times of chilliness in the evening
 pictures of leaves to color
 football game
 apples, zucchini, pumpkins
 more cups of coffee
 staying warm with a blanket



Here's a Kindness Calendar for you to experience ... at school, home, or in the community!

Hug a family member	Pick up litter	Start a gratitude journal	Do an extra chore	Feed birds and wildlife	Give some compliments	Write a thank-you note
Make a get well card	Smile at everyone you see	Make a craft to give	Let someone go ahead of you in line	Hold the door for a stranger	Give out "Happy" cards	Make your bed
Donate-canned goods to the local food bank	Tell a funny story	Help clean up after dinner	Remember to use your manners	Read a book to a family member	Clean up a mess you didn't make	Write a letter of appreciation
Ask "how may I help you?"	Color a picture for someone	Stick up for a friend	Encourage your friends to do acts of kindness	Donate your old books to the library	Teach a friend or sibling one of your skills	Make a craft to decorate your home

Of course, there are many more ... if you think of something that would be helpful and kind for someone else, just go ahead and do it!! Know that the love of Jesus is within you and you can let it out to spread love and kindness throughout the world you live in ... your home, your church family, your community!

Serve the Lord --- and, have fun doing it!!

Living Faith @



Dear Friends,

This is July, for sure!! The weather has been hot and humid and rainy ... quite the change from some other years. To repeat the words from one of my newspaper articles, the corn is growing right in front of our eyes! My grandma used to say she could hear it growing. I think that might be true this year.

The rivers and creeks are up, the level of water in the ponds and lakes seems to get higher every day. I just hope the corn and beans have deep enough roots to get them through the hot days of dryness in the soil that is sure to come.

Deep roots ... yep, just like us. We need deep roots, too, to be able to sustain us during events of the world that are tough and difficult to understand. The roots we develop with our lessons at worship, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, and regularly reading the Bible. This falls on the parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors, or others that we like to call faith-shapers. If you're reading this, that might include you! Please share this with others - thank you.

Sue Cira, Pastor, Immanuel Crane Creek Lutheran

We get excited to learn about Jesus at Bible School & at Worship



We need adults and other friends to help us learn ... we discover many things about Jesus by doing crafts, drawing, and listening to you .



We learn to pray

With **August almost here**, it's important to start thinking about fall and school beginning - which means buying supplies. There are many who need help with this, so as you're out finding your supplies, maybe you could slip a few extra items into your shopping bag. Here is the list for school kits collected for Lutheran World Relief ... Learn more at lwr.org

INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING IN EACH KIT

- * FOUR 70-sheet notebooks of wide- or college-ruled paper, approximately 8" x 10 ½"; no loose leaf paper
- * ONE 30-centimeter ruler, or a ruler with centimeters on one side and inches on the other
- * ONE pencil sharpener
- * ONE pair of blunt scissors (safety scissors with embedded steel blades work well)
- * FIVE unsharpened #2 pencils with erasers; secure together with a rubber band
- * FIVE black or blue ballpoint pens (no gel ink); secure together with a rubber band
- * ONE box of 16 or 24 crayons
- * ONE 2 ½" eraser
- * ONE sturdy drawstring backpack-style cloth bag, approximately 14" x 17" with shoulder straps (no standard back-packs)

August is hopefully the last vacation of the season, summer sports come to an end and fall sports begin, county fairs are happening, some congregations worship outside in a park or plan special events for a **Rally Day**, you might have a **potluck** or an **ice cream social**, maybe you could plan a special mission project for the fall.

Back pack blessings take place near the first days of school beginning.

Invite members of the congregation to be **prayer partners** with the children and the youth. Print kids names and baptismal anniversary on the cards that will be distributed. Exchange cards and notes through the year. Sometime during the year have a day where you celebrate prayer partners.

Plan for ways to **involve the children or the whole family with children** of the congregation to participate in the worship service. Help them feel included and important!

Don't forget to have fun while in worship - invite everyone to be involved in singing the children's songs. Adults like to clap and stomp their feet too!



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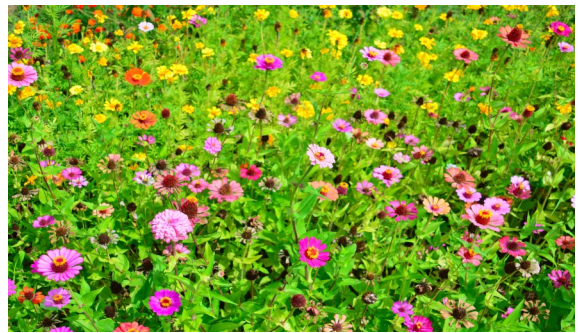
Dear Faith Shapers,

Today is 2-22-22 Tuesday! As I sit and write to you about what is coming in the month of March, the wind is blowing and there is ice and snow outside. I long for the warmer spring temperatures—they can't get here fast enough!! This is an exciting date with many publicity campaigns happening ... big sales, special deals, twin promotions, activities with two-sies, and now, with the weather they have had to be postponed. March brings Ash Wednesday this year so Lent begins but we also have the hope of Easter and the resurrection just around the corner. Stay the course, my friends—

Sue Cira, TEEM
Candidtate

Spring time is coming ...

Spring, Spring, Springtime is here!!
Grass is green, and flowers grow.
Birds are singing. Bees are buzzing!
Kites are flying everywhere.
Spring, Spring, Springtime is here!!



**Ash Wednesday
March 2, 2022**



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Spring Activity for families to do together —

As many of you who read these pages know, my grandchildren and I like to participate in art projects and crafts. Sometimes we don't have the end result that we anticipate, but we sure have fun trying!! This particular project is a favorite one that we've done. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Yarn wrapped flowers: materials you need

Brightly Colored Cardstock

Yarn

Jumbo Craft Sticks

Buttons

Glue

Scissors



For the pots you will need paper cups and brown shredded paper

Start by cutting out circles from the cardstock paper - it works best for us to use a glass to draw the circles and then cut them out. Cut some yarn to wrap around each circle in different directions - use glue to fasten the ends to the back. Wrap green yarn around the sticks and glue or tape the ends. Glue or tape the stick to the back of the circle. Cut leaves from green cardstock paper and glue to the back of the stick. Glue a button to the center of the flower head. Fill the cup with brown shredded paper and push the stem down into the cup. Enjoy your flowers!!

As we begin the season of Lent, we enter the time of solemnity and preparation.—

- **Some Lenten practices include decorating the church in violet, the color of royalty and repentance.**
- **This period of repentance is marked by a purposeful turning away from our sin and turning toward Christ for mercy and forgiveness.**
- **Ash Wednesday begins the observance of Lent. Ashes on the forehead is a sign of penitence. It also serves as a reminder of our mortality.**
- **During Lent, we forgo using the alleluia, which is a joyous expression of faith in God.**
- **Fasting is giving up eating at particular meal or time in order to devote that time to prayer and meditation.**
- **Many churches observe Lent by gathering for midweek services. These additional times of worship and gathering around God's Word help us prepare to observe Holy Week and celebrate Easter.**
- **Easter invites us into the story of Jesus' sacrificial death and His glorious resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus gives proof that our salvation has been completed and that our hope for eternal life with God is secure.**

Living Faith @

May, 2022



Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff —

they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

When I was growing up, my family raised a small flock of sheep. It was just a hobby, and we only ever had 15 or so ewes (female sheep) and 1 ram (male sheep) at a time. But it meant that my siblings and I grew up getting to know sheep and helping to take care of lambs. My dad did all the shearing, but when lambs needed to be bottle fed, my siblings and I got to help! (This led to some pretty adorable photos, if I do say so myself!)

—Pastor Kristen Rod

The Bible talks a lot about sheep.

Psalm 23 compares God to a shepherd who takes care of the sheep.

In the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep, where a farmer has 100 sheep and loses one, and he leaves the 99 to go search for the lost sheep, because God will stop at nothing to find us when we are lost.

In the gospel of John, chapter 10, Jesus talks about how he is the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep. He also talks about how his sheep know his voice, and when he calls to them, they follow him.

Every year, in the 4th Sunday in the season of Easter, the gospel reading comes from John 10, and we hear Jesus talk about how he is the Good Shepherd. This is one of my favorite days of the year, because I get to talk about the sheep I had growing up!

Children love animals. This means that there are lots of great ways to help kids make connections with the shepherd imagery in the Bible!



* Sheep and lamb stuffed animals are widely available. You

can give some to the children in your family and tell them about how we are like sheep and Jesus is our Good Shepherd. You could even hide one in your house and have the children look for it, just like the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 to look for the lost sheep.

*You can do crafts where you draw a sheep on a piece of paper or cardstock and then have your child glue cotton balls to the sheep drawing, to symbolize the woolly coat of the sheep. You could even draw or paint other images from Psalm 23 in the background, like a field of green grass and a pool of still water.

*You can visit a farm or a petting zoo, and talk about how Jesus takes care of us just like the farmers and zookeepers take care of the sheep.

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Dear Faith Shapers,

Happy April and Happy Easter! *“Christ is Risen – Alleluia!”* Speaking of “Alleluia,” did your church bury the “Alleluia” during Lent? Some churches abstain from saying or singing ‘Alleluia’ during Lent. “Burying” the Alleluia or hiding it is a great visual for both children and adults - but to be clear, this is not a required liturgical practice! It’s simply another way to remind us of the solemnity of Lent, which always leads us to the joy of the resurrection as we once again proclaim: *“Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! ALLELUIA!”*

As a pastor, (and a grandma!) I love getting brightly colored artwork from children. I have included this coloring page that celebrates the Risen Christ! Have your children or Sunday School class color it or decorate it however they want to, and then have them give it to the pastor – they will love it!

A black and white line drawing of a sun rising over a horizon. The sun is partially obscured by the horizon line, with rays emanating from behind it. The text is overlaid on this background.

CHRIST
IS RISEN!

ALLELUIA!

Did you know that the month of April is also "National Humor Month?" Larry Wilde, author and humorist, started National Humor Month in April 1976. He created this day as a way to bring public awareness of the therapeutic value of humor. (nationaltoday.com)



Some churches celebrate the Sunday following Easter with *Holy Hilarity/Holy Humor Sunday; God's Laughter Sunday; or Bright Sunday*. It is believed to have come from early church theologians (like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa) who mused that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead.

The Sunday after Easter is often labeled "Low Sunday" because of low attendance. This might just be the "spark" we all need to keep the joy of Christ's resurrection going throughout the whole Easter season - *Laughter is the best medicine - and so good for the soul!*

Here is a great resource for celebrating *Holy Humor* either in Sunday worship, or with your family throughout April - and beyond: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search?q=Holy+Humor+>



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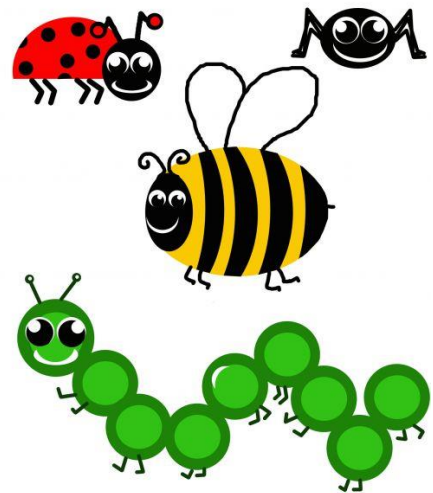
Welcome to June and SUMMERTIME!

Sometimes summer can seem almost as busy as the school year. Often the busyness of school is exchanged for summer sports, bible camps, family vacations, vacation bible school, and family reunions. Hopefully you will have a little time to put your feet up and relax too.

There's nothing wrong with children having some "down time" too – not *everyday* has to be filled with activities. Just like adults, children can benefit from quiet time. Try to schedule some quiet/down-time now and then for everyone in the family. This is the time when laptops, television, smartphones, and video games are set aside. Even if it's just for 15 minutes a day, it gives kids (and adults) time to dream, invent, pray, imagine, and create - all on their own. Just as physical exercise is important to the body, it's important to exercise our mind and our imaginations now and then too!

June can also be a great time to experience God's creation – June is beautiful in Iowa – it is so green, and everything seems so new and fresh. It's the perfect time to take walks in nature – June (usually) isn't quite as hot and humid as July and August – and (usually) the mosquitoes aren't in full force yet (but it might be a good idea to have some bug repellent with you on your walks – just in case!)

ABC's of Creation: On your walk, take a sheet of paper and a pen with you, and on it, list all the letters of the alphabet and a space for writing after each letter. Then tell the children to come up with something that God has created that corresponds to that letter. Example: A: Ants, B: Bumble Bee, C: Clouds, D: Dandelions, and so on. When you get back home, look up the creation story in Genesis. End with a prayer and thanking God for creating everything on your list!



Garden of Faith



Gardening is a fantastic summertime activity for adults and kids alike! Growing your own vegetables and flowers can teach us so much about creation and life, and the Bible is full of gardening stories and illustrations. It's a perfect way to teach children the responsibilities of caring for life, *and* the benefits of gardens – especially when those yummy green beans, tomatoes and cucumbers are harvested and enjoyed at dinnertime! If you don't have space for a garden, you can use large pots or buckets.

Here are some ways to teach God's Word along with gardening:

Good Soil: Matthew 13:23: *But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.* Kids love digging in the dirt! Matthew 13:1-23 is the "Parable of the Sower." As you are preparing the soil in your garden, talk about the different kinds of soil, and how God wants us to have hearts like good soil – ready to receive God's Word and God's love.

Planting Seeds: Matthew 13:31: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field."* As you plant your seeds, talk about how tiny they are to start with and how big they will eventually get. It's a lot like our faith! Read the "Parable of the Mustard Seed." (Matthew 13:31-32)

Weeds: The "Parable of the Sower" can be referenced here as well. (Matthew 13:1-23) As the kids help you pull weeds out of the garden talk about how distractions in our life can sometimes keep us from following God's word or seeing that God wants the best for us.

Watering: John 4:14 *"...whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst."* Water is important to us – Jesus tells us he is the "living water." Watering time is also a great time to talk about how fortunate we are to have running water – and countries where water is scarce. What can we do to protect our water resources?

Harvest: Psalm 67:6 *"The earth has yielded its harvest. God blesses us—our God blesses us!"* As you are harvesting your produce, talk about how God provides. Have the children think about all of the ways that God blesses us!

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November is a time to be thankful!

*We give thanks for the Saints
(All Saints Day)*

*We give thanks for abundance
(Thanksgiving)*

*We give thanks for what is yet to come
(Advent)*



November Blessings

What are you thankful for??

+++++

All Saints Sunday



Do you observe All Saints Sunday in your church? In my church, we remember church members who have died in the last year - since the previous year's All Saints Sunday. We light a candle for each person (saint) and recite a prayer or litany. We also sing the hymn "*For All the Saints*" at the beginning of our service. If you have children in your home, it might be a great time to talk about what a "Saint" is! They are not just people who have died. Saints are ordinary baptized people who love and serve

God! That includes us! Because of our Savior Jesus Christ, we are all one big family of saints in God's eyes!

This might be the perfect time to take out old photo albums and show your children pictures of family members who are now in heaven. Explain to them how they are related and even share a story that you remember about them!

All Saints Sunday is also a great time to talk about the famous saints that we read about in the Bible, like St. Paul, or St. Peter; or others whom the church recognizes as saints: St. Teresa, St. Patrick, St. Francis, etc. - There are many! You can research online to find out more about them – or ask your pastor or a faith formation leader in your church for resources on the religious saints.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite Holidays. It's a time to reflect on all of our blessings. And the food is usually pretty good too! 😊

Take some time with your family to count your blessings – even if it hasn't been a very good year for you or your family – take time to talk about where you *did* see God working in your lives – even in the not-so-good times. Gratitude has a way of lifting our spirits and warming our hearts.

If the kiddos get a little bored while you are cooking the turkey – take a sheet of paper and write “HAPPY THANKSGIVING” on it – and see how many other words they can make out of those two words. The one with the most words gets an extra big slice of pumpkin pie!



Advent begins this year on November 27th. Advent is the four weeks that lead up to the birth of Jesus Christ. The word Advent originates from a Latin word “Adventus” which means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent Season is focused on preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ in

several different ways: his birth over 2,000 years ago; his second coming in the future as the Messiah; and also, as he comes into our hearts every day. There are all kinds of ways to celebrate Advent with your family – there are special Advent calendars that mark each day in Advent with a special bible verse, or an activity like a doing a random act of kindness, (See Pinterest!) or my favorite Advent activity: Get a large box, and each day, add a non-perishable food item to it, Then donate the items to your local food pantry before Christmas so that those in need will have food for the Holidays.

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