St. John's Lutheran School Alumni News

Newsletter 24

The Principal's Perspective

The month of December went by quickly as we held many Christmas services.

Our Kindergarten through 5th grade students started the Advent season off with their service "Behind the Manger Scenes" on December 3rd. The many new songs and a much larger group really played into a great experience for all who attended. I saw many a tear shed at both morning and evening services, which was a testament to how well the students delivered the songs. We thank our teachers for taking the time to teach these songs so well and inspiring the children to deliver them so fantastically. The students blessed us all with their message on that day and then were a blessing again on December 17th, when they visited Garden Place for Christmas Caroling. I even heard some residents had to turn down the volume on their hearing aids. Thank you for starting our Advent season so well.

The next week, on December 10th, our Daycare and Preschool students completed their service entitled "To Us a Child is Born." These young boys and girls amazed me with how well they could sing and play their colored bells. Thanks for starting that tradition, Mrs. Steele. The service was well attended in both the morning and the evening, and their message of the birth of Christ was proof that God can use any and all means to spread His Word.

The final Christmas Service performed by the 6th through 8th grade students was entitled "Hope in a Manger." This service was held on December 17th. It mimicked the Road to Bethlehem in actions by actors but was a revamping of the speaking parts and songs. The new songs had the students enthusiastic about singing, but there was still a bit of stage fright from the junior high students on the day of the event. We are blessed to have so many parents, grandparents, and loved ones attend all these services. They are a great way to have the school evangelize for the church.

Also in December, our boys' and girls' basketball teams had a lot of games and even participated in some tournaments. Our girls' team competed in three tournaments, with two of them being all Lutheran Tournaments, which allowed for fellowship and worship along with the competition. The team's most notable finish was 7th place in the Edwardsville Tip-Off Tournament, which had 16 teams. Our girls' basketball team has remained around the 500 mark for the season but has seen a major event happen for one individual teammate. Aubrey Kiefer (pictured at right) scored her 1,000th career point at St. John's on the varsity level during our game at Immanuel Lutheran in Perryville on December 18th. We are blessed to have her as a player and leader for our team. The girls' team prepared for their last games after Christmas break and entered Regional Play as the number three seed.





Girls basketball team left to right: 1st row: Sophia Zeiger, Elle Sutton, Aubrey Kiefer, Layla Kilpatrick.
2nd row: Cassidy Palm, Maggie Kuehn, Blakelynn Grohmann, Ava Kiefer, Sophia Voss.

The St. John's Lutheran School boys basketball team is enjoying a season with only one loss so far. They currently sit at nineteen and two, with their only loss coming in the Championship game of the Collinsville Good Shepherd tournament. Another notable event for this team is their



Boys basketball team left to right: 1st row: Aiden Arbeiter, Maverick, Cowell, Holden Wagner, Lucas Summers, Sutton Jones, Colton Albert, Brody Rahn, Easton Ruebusch, Grant Florreich.
2nd row: Jacob Arbeiter, Brad Jones, Evan Muench, Aiden Kiefer, Brayden McCarthy, Max Voss, Blaine Rohlfing, Austin Stellhorn, Danny Moll, Adam Cowell.

first-place finish in the Okaw Valley Conference regular season play. They followed this up with a first-place finish in the Okaw Valley Conference Tournament; St. John's Lutheran is blessed to be repeat champions in both instances. Congratulations to these young men and their coaches, and we pray God's blessing on the remainder of their season.

The closing of December allowed for much needed rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation for our teachers to work through the remainder of the school year. Our teachers were blessed to have over two weeks at Christmas, but I saw many of them in the school on one or multiple days during the break. We are blessed to have such dedicated teachers and look forward to the many upcoming events they so diligently help with or run.

Mrs. Schnepel planned activities during Lutheran School's Week for the kids to enjoy. She prepared our daily devotion that we did all together in the new gym, the dress-up days, and who we supported with donations during the week-long event.

Mrs. Miller heads the one keynote event of February, Heart Challenge, formally known as Jump Rope for Heart. It's a great way for the kiddos to burn off some extra energy and can be a reminder as a teacher that we can probably be in better shape. The main event on "Jump Rope for Heart" day is always the group jump and end of day dancing. I look forward to the many great pictures of fun from this day.

March brings spring picture day and those one or two occasional warm days, but it is also known at St. John's as Dinner Auction Month. We are so blessed that Erin Krick leads this event that has gathered a great and rather large group to prepare for the Dinner Auction. Ms. Amanda Ruhmann and Mrs. Sara Shepherd are part of this group and help to get the book and marketing complete for the Dinner Auction. You can buy tickets by contacting the school office, 618-282-3873. Come and join us on March 16th for a good time that helps out our parent-teacher league to provide so many opportunities for the children each and every year.

Easter and the 8th grade trip will divide up the month of April this year. Mr. Becker is responsible for the lead-up to both of these events. He coordinates the Lenten meals before the services each week. He has also done so much planning and preparation for the 8th grade trip, which is a staple of St. John's and a huge educational opportunity to all who attend it. Also squeezed into this month is the school musical, and we thank Mrs. Valleroy for leading the actors and actresses in preparing for the show.

With so much going on after the Christmas break, we will very soon be at the end of the school year. We look forward to graduating 23 students this year and wish them God's blessings in high school. We hope to have a large group of Preschool and Kindergarten students to replace our 8th grade class and plan to start this process on Open House Night, March 19th, when we welcome these new students and families to St. John's Lutheran School.

May the Lord bless and strengthen all of us and all of you as we work to fulfill His Great Commission laid out in Matthew 28:18-20.

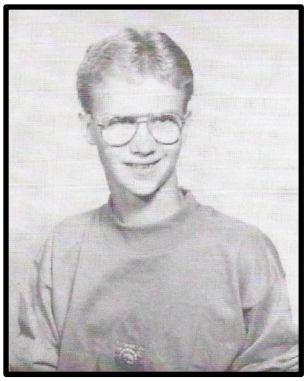
God's blessings and a Happy New Year! I pray for health and safety for everyone in 2026!
Justin Palm

A Visit With an Alumnus: Michael Hemmer

Thirty-five years have passed since I sat in Mr. Snyder's 8th grade classroom, yet the lessons learned within those walls feel as present as ever. My name is Mike Hemmer, and I am proud to be a graduate of St. John's Lutheran School, Class of 1991. My history with St. John's runs deep; my grandparents, Arnold and Lizzie Schoenbeck, were lifelong members of the congregation and strong supporters of the grade school. My parents, John and Ella, continued that legacy—my mom, Ella, graduated from St. John's in 1968, and my brother, Daniel, in 1993. In a unique twist of fate, all three of us had the same teacher: Mr. Snyder.



My time at St. John's shaped many of my foundational values. I have vivid memories of walking with the Prigge's, Nick Kassing, Ted Wiatr, and my little brother, Dan, to school every morning and our shenanigans along the way. I remember the excitement of our 8th grade class trip to Chicago and basketball with Coach Grohman and Carroll (*pictured above*). While many of my memories at St. John's are lighthearted, one remains frozen in time: January 28, 1986. I remember our third grade class gathering in the library, all of us huddled around a single small TV perched on a rolling cart. We were there to see history—the first teacher in space. The room was buzzing with the kind of



Mike's eighth grade year book picture.

pure excitement only children have, until the moment the Challenger took off and the unthinkable happened. I can still recall the sudden, heavy silence that fell over the library before we were quickly ushered back to our classrooms.

I am incredibly grateful for my Lutheran education at St. John's. It instilled a strong sense of discipline, community values, faith, and a robust academic foundation. Thinking back now, I realize that these experiences played a critical part in my career in designing buildings and providing meaningful, lasting contributions to the built environment.

After graduating, I pursued my passion for design, studying Architecture at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). In 2002, I married my wife, Stacy Pflueger, and we moved to Waterloo, where we still reside and are active members of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Professionally, I am a Licensed Architect in the State of Illinois, and I work as a Senior Project Architect and Design Manager at Jacobs. While I have worked on all types of buildings over the years, my current focus is designing facilities for the US Air Force. I am truly passionate about architecture and design—it's my hobby, too, along with kayak fishing. Currently, I am immersed in designing and constructing facilities for the B-21 Raider and a High-Altitude Electromagnetic Pulse Facility for SATCOM-MILSTAR. My wife, Stacy, works at Ameren as a transmission policy specialist.





Mike with his family, Stacy, Nathan, and Ava.

Stacy and I have two children, Nathan and Ava. Both have played soccer their entire lives and share my love for art.

Our son, Nathan, is currently a junior at Kansas State University, studying architecture—against my recommendation, I might add! He still plays soccer on a KSU intramural team that he set up with club players he competed against back in the St. Louis area.

Our daughter, Ava, is a high school senior. She is a great pianist and also dabbles with guitar, bass, drums, and sometimes plays the organ at church. She recently qualified and played in the High School State Tennis Tournament in Chicago and is planning on studying nursing after high school.

My journey from the halls of St. John's to designing facilities for national defense has been incredible, and I often look back and see how the lessons learned during those formative years built the foundation for where I am today.



1991 Confirmation Class
Left to Right: 1st Row: Chad Grohmann, Joy Prigge, Lisa Heller, Tara Voss, Kelly Juereziz, Gretchen Liefer, Kirk Liefer.
2nd Row: Mr. Ron Snyder, Matthew Ruwald, Joanna Prigge, Kristy Heller, Sara Schnepel, Jamie Nehrt, Angela Mallott, Jackie Buch, Christopher Wolters.
3rd Row: Mac Moeller, Michael Hemmer, Nicholas Kassing, Rev. Donald Schultz, Vicar Gary Osburn, Ted Wiatr, Travis Niklich.

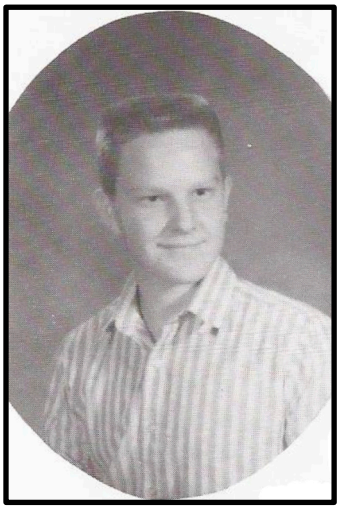
A Visit With an Alumnus: Bradley Wolter, PhD

Guarding a Heart and Preparing a Mind – My St. John's Lutheran School Experience

Nearly 50 years ago, Christ began a development project – a venture that would foster a connection between myself, livestock, and communities. My story started as a first-born son to Floyd and Vernitta Wolter, who parented me with Christian values and practices on a pig farm near Evansville, Illinois. The responsibility that came with caring for the animals, as well as the community within which this farm operated undeniably shaped my future.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis 1:28

As a youth attending vacation bible school at St. John's Lutheran School, I remember learning The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The story spoke to me in a way that brought meaning to caring for pigs on my parents' farm. It provided inspiration and a purpose for me to learn to become good at raising pigs with the aim of supporting and sustaining creation. Over the coming years, I grew passionate about pursuing this goal through a Christian education system focused on excellence. I thank St. John's Lutheran Church and School as I share my story.



Bradley's eighth grade year book picture.

In 1980, following a scary long bus ride from Evansville, I began a developmental journey in life provided by the experience of attending St. John's Lutheran School. A prior student, my shepherd on the bus, managed the necessary bus transfers to get me home that night - my earliest lesson in supporting others' success. Countless others served as role models of Christian behavior - far too many to list in this brief note - but I feel compelled to reflect on the lessons learned both inside and outside the school during my eight years there.

Keep the heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23

Each day for eight years, I started my education with a devotion or a lesson from Luther's Small Catechism. It was a robust curriculum of English, history, math and science that prepared me for later scholarly activities. I remember preparing for a week to lead chapel services for schoolmates and their grandparents, an activity that demonstrated early the importance of community service and engagement. It's only with the benefit that comes with these reflections do you fully appreciate the role of learning to practice Lutheranism has in guarding the heart throughout a lifetime.

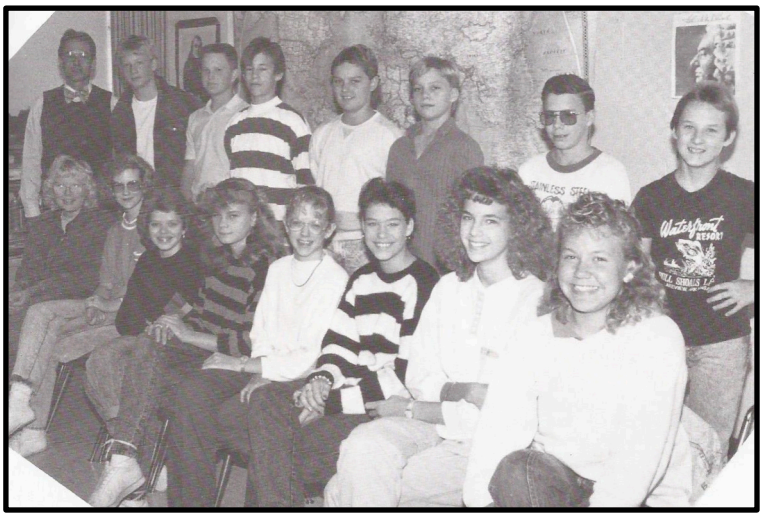
My friends and fellow students were from families that had different occupations and family traditions, but we had a common belief system that has enabled life-time relationships. I always looked forward to the bus that brought my friends from Wartburg, as it taught me about cooperation early on. A biblical-based framework for embracing diversity remains one of the most important lessons retained from my experience at St. John's.

I remember sharing experiences with my friends as well. For example, I only had one pair of boots, and when we received snow, I had to clean up my over-shoes after pig chores to wear to school. After a few hours by the boiler furnace, they brought a distinct aroma to my mostly city-raised classmates. Now they know the true origin of the winter scents!

The discipline of caring teachers and coaches throughout the eight years prepared my mind for the road ahead. These leaders had lofty standards for education and sports that required hard work and countless hours of practice and rehearsals. Upon reflection, I acknowledge the importance of maintaining ambitious standards of expectation, and it set the tone for the balance of my endeavors along life's journey.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 1 Peter 1:13

Field trips outside of school provided experiences and perspective for additional life lessons. There were visits to farms and manufacturing that added real world context and inspiration for scaling ambition. A journey to explore the history of our Missouri Synod heritage, along with a memorable visit to the nation's capital (*pictured below*), inspired me to later pursue a brief career as a lobbyist. The



enabling fundraising efforts that brought parents and other church going volunteers together served as a brilliant illustration for a young man to commit to serving his community and investing in the next generation. The entire experience laid a foundation for Christian living and the importance of investing in knowledge. Moreover, it solidified a belief that local community ownership for the critical role of educating the next generation remains the best, less-than-perfect model for improving society.

I followed on from the eight years at St. John's attending Red Bud High School owing a sincere debt of gratitude to my four years in agricultural education courses and the FFA for exposing me to further development and leadership opportunities. With the support of these prior experiences, I attended the University of Illinois to major in Animal Sciences with a Business Management option to complete Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. I remain on the faculty in an Adjunct Professor appointment today in that Department within the University.

I left the University to join the Maschhoff family near Carlyle, Illinois, and support these Missouri Synod Lutherans in scaling their pig production business from its Southern Illinois roots to become a multi-state operation that included poultry production and agriculture technology ventures. I became Maschhoff Family Foods' Chief Executive Officer, and following a career of over 20 years with the family, I stepped away to focus on my own business in recent years.

Today, my wife, Kimberly, daughter, Lauren, son, Blake, and I focus on building a Pasture to Plate beef business with headquarters near Aviston, Illinois.



Community is at the heart of our commitment. Rather than focusing on control or ownership, we've built a network of family farm partners who share our values. Together we aim to produce premium genetic seedstock and beef, supporting each other and our communities. I invite you to discover more of our story at www.windyhillmeadows.com.

My family and I are members of Hope Lutheran Church in Highland, Illinois, and we remain thankful for God's continued blessings, not the least of which was the critical investment made by St John's Lutheran Church and School, and I remain forever appreciative of the teachers, coaches, vicars, pastors, and members of the congregation that provided the development.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:18



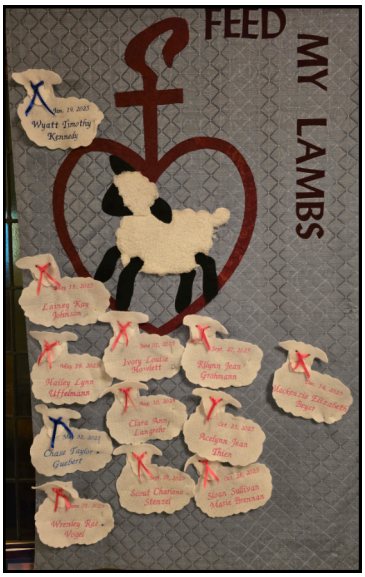
1989 Confirmation Class:
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2nd Row: Rosemary Uffelmann, Kenneth Buch, Scott Hanebutt, Kari Graper, Tracy Wegener.
3rd Row: Vicar Randall Schlak, Keith Van Hoy, Rev. Donald Schultz, Bradley Wolter, Mr. Ron Snyder.

The Pastor's Perspective: Rev. Mark Winkelman

Grace and Peace to you in the name of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ, born for us.

This past year was a wonderful start to my ministry here at St. John's Lutheran. While I still don't know everyone *(as evidenced by the many faces I could not name during our Christmas services where we had about 750 in attendance across 4 services on the 24th & 25th, though I'm sure many were visiting relatives*), I have made many visits, learned much about my new family and grown in my love for St. John's. I look forward to learning even more about the members in the coming year as I continue to serve, visit, and care for all those God brings through the doors of St. John's.

This past year, I helped welcome 29 new communicant members, brought 16 souls to Christ through the waters of



Holy Baptism, and united five couples in Holy Matrimony. I also ushered 24 souls into eternal rest where they wait for the great day of resurrection and reunion. These are those whom I tracked since I was installed in February, so the church was certainly active beyond our usual weekend services and day school activities. We give thanks to God for all that He is doing through St. John's to increase His Kingdom and fight back the gates of hell. This year, we plan to grow in our faith, love, and knowledge of God. There have been more than 40 members showing interest in reading through the Bible this year using The Bible Recap and staying in touch with one another to discuss their weekly readings. We've also got men joining Memento and desiring to gather together as we grow in our walk with Christ. There will also be another worship service starting on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 pm to allow more people to gather and receive God's precious gifts.

Everything St. John's does is possible because members are stepping up and serving in many and various ways, it is not just me doing more (thanks be to God!) My desire this year is to make a unified list of all our servants and opportunities for members to become involved, for God did not call us to a lazy faith but gives us an active Spirit that also drives us to love and serve our neighbors even as He drives us to love and receive service from our Father.



New members

As we begin a new year, many make resolutions or have plans to improve their life. There is one way we can all accomplish this, and it is by God's work alone - so I pray this article finds you connected to your church; if not, I encourage you to reach out to your pastor and reconnect. Our Lord Jesus was born for you and seeks to serve you His Word and Sacrament often to forgive, renew, and strengthen your faith. If you are connected, I hope you can find a way to serve, beginning with praying for your church and asking God to show you how you can love and encourage your neighbor in the pew. May God bless you all this new year in Christ.

Rev. Mark Winkelman



"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." Colossians 2:6-7

If you would like to receive your newsletter by email only, please send your email address to alumni.stjohn@gmail.com.



St. John's Lutheran School's 15th Dinner Auction

Saturday, March 14, 2026
Hecker Community Center

The Dinner Auction has become the largest fundraiser for St. John's Lutheran School and your support is greatly appreciated. We recommend purchasing your tickets early in order to accommodate your seating requests.

For further ticket or donation information, please contact
Erin Krick, 618-615-3821,
sjldinnerauction@gmail.com

Tickets are $40/per person
(until February 28th)
($45/per person at the door)
and includes:
Dinner & Dessert
Unlimited refills on soft drinks, draft beer & the specialty drink of the evening.
Doors open at 5:00pm
Silent Auction 5:00-8:30pm
Dinner served promptly at 6:00pm
Live Auction begins at 7:30pm

Make checks payable to:
St. John's Lutheran PTL

Enclosed is my payment for $ _____.
Total number of attendees _____.

I will not be able to attend.
Please accept my donation of $ _____.

(All donations will be recognized in the dinner auction program.)

To reserve your seats, please send this form and payment to:
St. John's Lutheran School
Attn: Dinner Auction
808 S. Main Street
Red Bud, IL 62278

Each couple or individual attending receives special auction material that must be prepared in advance. Please enter complete information for ALL those in which you are purchasing tickets for.

Name (s) _____
Address_____
Phone _____
Email _____

Name (s) _____
Address_____
Phone _____
Email _____

Name (s) _____
Address_____
Phone _____
Email _____

I would like to be seated with:
_____
_____

Tickets WILL NOT be distributed. Once payment is received, your name will be placed on an attendance list and you will be checked in at the door the evening of the auction.