



# FAITH NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 61  
ISSUE 3  
MARCH 2026

## A BLESSED END

HOW DOES GOD  
"BRING HIS  
CHILDREN HOME?"  
THROUGH YOU!  
WHEN YOU INVITE  
THEM TO HEAR  
THE WORD OF GOD  
WITH YOU!

Ever since Eden, life ends in death. That's true for people, and also at times for congregations.

INVITE  
A FAMILY MEMBER,  
NEIGHBOR,  
CO-WORKER,  
FELLOW  
STUDENT, OR  
FRIEND  
TO JOIN YOU ON  
SUNDAY  
IN ATTENDING.

It was a bright Sunday afternoon in early autumn 1971 when we were wed. I remember the light in Jane's eyes as she answered the pastor's question, "Will you love, honor and keep him in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to him alone, so long as you both shall live?"

SUNDAYS 9:00 AM

"I will," she promised.

And she did.

REV. GENE SMITH  
~ PASTOR ~

When we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary with family and friends in 2021, Jane had already been in home hospice care 12 months. Not four months later, she died. We buried her late in December amid gently falling snowflakes – in joyful anticipation of her resurrection on the day when Christ returns to claim His own.

ANDREW SHAFFER  
DAVID JUENGEL  
~ DEACONS ~

All life long Jane was faithful to the Lord who claimed her in the waters of Baptism as an infant. She was faithful to me for more than a half century, and then she died. Was Jane a failure? Of course not.

VIST US AT WWW.FLCRIV.ORG  
E-MAIL US AT  
FAITHRIVERSIDE@ATT.NET

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Facebook.com/faithlutheranriversideca  
Facebook.com/paulgwenz

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Phone: (951) 689-2626,



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In this fallen world, all who are born will die. But in Holy Baptism, Christians are reborn in Christ Jesus. All life long they live in Him as He lives in them. It's a good thing, that life. But good things come to an end in this world of ours. Death stings (1 Cor. 15:56). It's no fun to say goodbye to someone we love. I can tell you that from my experience. But whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). So when Christians die, we bury them. We do grieve and mourn, but not as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

That little church on the prairie where Jane and I were married so long ago holds a special place in my heart. I was baptized in its font. Before its altar I was confirmed, ordained and married. Thank God, it's still going. But just barely. Someday it might be forced to close, God forbid. It could happen, though, because churches have a natural lifespan too. Of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelation, only one still exists today. Things change. Cultures shift. Congregations come and go, but Jesus said His church continues forever. The power of hell itself cannot overcome it (Matt. 16:18).

When my home congregation was planted in 1884, new settlers were breaking prairie sod and starting generational farms. With an average of four families per square mile, each with five or more children, people were everywhere. When I was a child three-quarters of a century ago, 50 kids were in Sunday school. Things have shifted dramatically in rural America. My dad raised his family on 160 acres. That's no longer possible. Farms today commonly have thousands of acres under cultivation.

When many LCMS congregations were planted 150 years ago, churches were built six to 10 miles apart. Three miles was about as far as you could travel to church on a Sunday morning with horse and buggy. Those days are long gone. Likewise, our great cities today are not what they were when urban churches were planted.

Maybe your home congregation will grow and thrive, but it could also shrivel and die. God alone knows. Let's get ahead of the curve, read the signs and be prepared. We need to proactively reach new people groups in every era. There may be individuals you've been overlooking. Remember, though, that when churches are dying, it's cruel to extend their lives artificially. We tenderly cared for Jane all through her long final illness. But when she breathed her last, we lovingly gave her into God's hands, confident of the joyful resurrection ahead for all Christ's own (Rom. 8:18).

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

For centuries, pastors have prepared the faithful to live for Christ — and die in Him. That blessed end is always the goal; in this life we want to finish well. We all must be prepared to commend ourselves confidently into God's hands when that time arrives.

People who die are never failures. They are God's gifts to us as long as they live. But when they die, we bury them in hope. So too, when congregations die a natural death, we commend them to God with joy. They haven't failed, and there's no shame in realizing it's time to say goodbye with thanksgiving.

### **Church Leader Checklist**

Some things for you to consider as your congregation numbers its days and applies its heart to wisdom for rigorous mission and ministry:

1. Track your church's spiritual vital signs (attendance, membership growth, Baptisms, Communions, funerals, giving) over the last 50 years. What trends do you see?
2. How have the demographics in your community shifted over the generations? What is its current population compared with 50 years ago? What ethnicities and languages surround you now, compared to when your church was first planted?
3. What can you do to actively connect with new people groups and cultures in your vicinity? How can you better utilize the social and business relationships your members already have built? How can you be better neighbors to your neighborhood? What new evangelization efforts will you begin?
4. Who are the "invisible" people living in your area (renters, shift workers, immigrants, etc.)? How will you connect with new residents using both social media and in-person events?
5. How can you better position your congregation's building and property to serve their proper mission: linking your community to Christ and His gifts?
6. As vital signs (see #1) fade, which sister churches in your area can you partner with for meaningful mission? How can you make that partnership more about ministry than mere finances?
7. If your church reaches the end of its natural life, how will you plan for a blessed end?

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

- a. Transfer remaining members to congregations holding your same confession.
- b. Sell real estate to entities that serve your community's best interests.
- c. Hand over corporate assets to your church body, its congregations and missions.
- d. Hold a service of thanksgiving and decommission your sanctuary and its furnishings.
- e. Gift your sacred vessels and objects to sister churches or mission congregations.
- f. Celebrate your church's mission lifespan; gather past and present members for a celebratory meal to share stories of God's grace
  - in times of both joy and sorrow.

Congregations may come and go, but the church as she really is lives and abides forever!

*By Harold L. Senkbeil*

<https://witness.lcms.org/2026/a-blessed-end/>

# Understanding Epilepsy

## A Surge of Signals

Your brain contains a complex network of nerve cells, called neurons, that send signals to the rest of your body. These signals allow you to sense the world around you, control your body's movements, and experience emotions.

But sometimes things can go wrong. Groups of neurons may send abnormal bursts of signals all at once. This surge of brain activity is called a seizure.

Any seizure is a cause for concern. Epilepsy is a condition in which you have repeated seizures. But not all seizures mean you have epilepsy.

A seizure can cause strange sensations or feelings. You may experience uncontrollable movements or suddenly stare off into space.

These symptoms can be confusing. People who have them or see them may not realize they are signs of a seizure. The signs of a seizure depend on where signal surges happen.

Some people have a seizure only once or once in a while. But others have them regularly—even up to hundreds a day.

Scientists are still not sure what causes epilepsy in about one-half of people diagnosed with the disorder. NIH researchers are working to find better ways to diagnose and treat it.

### Unraveling Symptoms

Anything that disturbs the pattern of normal brain activity can lead to seizures. Seizures may develop from illness, infections, damage or tumors in the brain, genetic factors, or problems during brain development.

There are two main types of seizures: generalized and focal. Generalized seizures start in both sides of the brain. Focal seizures start on one side but may spread to both sides. Some people have both types of seizures, with no clear pattern.

“People often get the wrong idea about generalized seizures from TV,” says Dr. Adam Hartman, an epilepsy specialist for children at NIH. “Usually someone is shown lying on the floor with all four limbs stiff or shaking. While that happens, other signs of generalized seizures are less obvious, like staring into space.”

# Health Notes Cont.

During focal seizures, some people may be unaware of what's happening. They may look confused or dazed, pick at their clothes, or smack their lips. They may be unable to answer questions or respond to directions for a few minutes.

People can lose consciousness in both types of seizures. When that happens, even briefly, they may fall or injure themselves. If seizures last longer than five minutes, seek medical care immediately. They can be life-threatening.

Children with delayed brain development and other developmental delays are more likely to have seizures. They're also more likely to die suddenly. This is referred to as sudden unexpected death in epilepsy, or SUDEP.

Children who develop a rare type of epilepsy called Dravet syndrome are one example. Dr. Lori Isom, an epilepsy expert at the University of Michigan, is looking into why they are less likely to survive. Studies have shown that people with this condition have genetic mutations, or changes to their DNA sequence.

"These genetic mutations affect not only the brain but also the heart," says Isom. "They can cause the heart to beat irregularly, as well as seizures."

Isom's team is trying to unravel how the brain and heart each contribute to SUDEP. In previous years, they helped develop a gene therapy to treat Dravet syndrome. Their gene therapy showed promise for improving seizures in an animal model they developed with NIH funding. Now, a private company is testing the treatment in children in a clinical trial.

## Diagnosing Epilepsy

Epilepsy can develop at any age. But infants, children, and older adults are at the highest risk.

Diagnosing epilepsy involves a review of your medical history. You may have **neurological** testing and blood tests done. Blood tests can check for infections or genetic conditions. Several measures of brain activity can also help with diagnosis. These include electroencephalograms, or EEGs, and brain imaging scans.

Epilepsy can sometimes be hard to diagnose. Adults with the most common focal epilepsy, which occurs in the temporal lobes, often go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed. The temporal lobes are located on either side of the brain. Brain tissue in the area can deteriorate from seizures over time and with repeated seizures.

Faint patterns of brain damage can appear on MRI scans. But these aren't always visible to a **radiologist**. Dr. Carrie McDonald, a scientist who specializes in imaging at the University of California, San Diego, is testing artificial intelligence (AI) to identify these brain patterns on MRI scans. Her group found that AI could correctly identify over 80% of individuals with temporal lobe epilepsy.

# Health Notes Cont.

“Using AI to identify brain areas with specific patterns of damage will not only help radiologists but also surgeons,” McDonald explains. “Surgeons can use the information to help guide them with implanting electrodes in an individual’s brain. The electrodes monitor seizure activity and can help pinpoint the location of seizures.”

Combining this technique with other brain activity testing can help doctors locate where a person’s seizures are coming from. Understanding where seizures happen can help doctors choose the right treatment.

## Getting Treatment

Doctors usually prescribe antiseizure drugs first to control seizures. But some people don’t respond to these drugs. They may need to see a nervous system specialist, called a neurologist, who focuses on epilepsy.

Dr. Sara Inati, an epilepsy specialist at NIH, is researching better ways to evaluate and treat people with drug-resistant epilepsy. They may have repeated seizures that can damage specific areas of the brain over time.

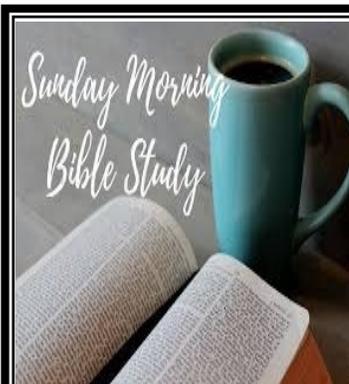
Inati’s recent study looked at brain scans of people with drug-resistant epilepsy. She analyzed scans with abnormal results. She found that the size of two brain areas, the hippocampus and the amygdala, often changed. These brain changes were not in the same place that seizures happened. And they differed depending on which side of the brain seizures were located.

“Brain changes can start in one part of the brain and cause damage in other parts that doctors may not know about,” says Inati. “Having this information can help them adjust their treatment plan.”

Other treatment options can include surgery or implanted devices. These devices send electrical impulses to the brain. Some people may also benefit from changes to their diet.

Learning to live with epilepsy can be challenging. But many people do well with treatment and live a full life.

<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2026/02/understanding-epilepsy>



**You are all Welcome to Join us for Bible Study in the Fellowship Hall every Sunday after 9:00 a.m. Service except for the last Sunday of the month when we have the Fellowship Brunch.**

**The topic will be: “A Warrior’s Guide To Spiritual Battle” Led by Deacon David Juengel**

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEACON ANDY!



## *Women's Bible Study Bake Sale*



*Great work, Ladies!*

# Chili Cook Off

David Tito took home the trophy this year!



# A Labor of Love: New Windows for the Parish Hall

Thank you to Rocco Tito for all his time and hard work in replacing stained glass windows in the parish hall. Rocco along with David Tito, David Juengel, Jamie Creacy and Bruce Duerfeldt repaired and replaced 22 cracked and damaged windows. Rocco even built new windows at his home in Arizona.



THANK  
😊 YOU



## Fellowship Brunch

THE NEXT FELLOWSHIP BRUNCH WILL BE

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2026

**Join us for our Sunday Fellowship Brunch and Visitor  
Welcome! After Sunday service**

We hold these on the last Sunday of the month. We want to encourage fellowship for our whole congregation, as well as encouraging you to bring a guest with you that week! Bring them to our 9:00 am service and stay later for Brunch! The church will supply some of the brunch food, but we ask each family to bring a brunch item to share (muffins, egg casseroles, quiche, etc.), so we will have enough for our guests.

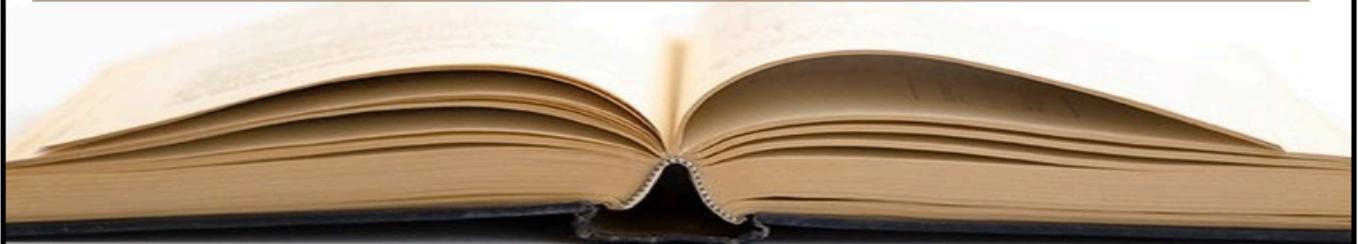


**A GINORMOUS THANK YOU** to our Faith Family and Women's Bible Study Group! The Bake Sale on February 15, 2026 was a BIG success! The baked goods were sold out and enough money was made to put a big dent in the cost of trimming Faith's palm trees!

**GOD BLESS YOU ALL!**

## *Catechism Class*

**Will be held on the last Saturday of the month at 10 am.**



## Fellowship time after services:



If you would like to bring some goodies to share between services, please sign up in the Narthex on the bulletin board. There are a few Sundays open. Thank you to all who have taken a date.



The new Byzantine Service will be held on the first Saturday of every month at 5:00 pm. Please join us for a new worship service.



### "FOOD FOR FAITH"

Faith wants to take care of our families! Whether it is to celebrate the birth of a baby, help during chemotherapy months for our brothers and sisters, or provide meals when a family member is sick or has passed away, Food for Faith wants to help our families. But we cannot do it without the help of all of you. Food for Faith needs volunteers who would be willing to provide a meal for our families that are in need. If you are interested in helping, there is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in the Church Narthex, or you can contact Sherry Llamas at 714-337-7201.

*"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." ~ Hebrews 13:16*



Next BOD  
Meeting  
March 18 @  
5:30 pm



Next Elders  
Meeting  
NO MEETING THIS  
MONTH



## St. Patrick's Day Dinner!

Please join us on Wednesday, March 18, 2026 at 6:00PM for our St. Patrick's Day Dinner & a special activity for our children for our Mid-Week Lenten Worship Service at 7:00PM.



## SCRIP Sales Schedule 2026

March 1, March 15, April 5, April 19, May 3, May 17,  
June 7, June 21, July 5, July 19, August 2, August 16,  
September 6, September 20, October 4, October 18,  
November 1, November 15, December 6, December 20

Updated SCRIP List is on the table in the Narthex.

Pancake  
Breakfast



**Come join us for Faith Lutheran Church's  
Annual Easter Sunday Pancake Breakfast!  
Immediately after our Sunrise Service!**

**Date: April 5, 2026**

**Time: 7:00-9:00AM.**

**Location: The Fellowship Hall**

**Donation: "Free Will"**



## Reminder

LWML Mite boxes will be collected on the first Sunday of the month and given to the LWML at Good Shephard Church!

*Pastoral Care*



*And  
Visitations*

On Saturdays, Pastor Gene would like to make home visits to Faith Lutheran Church families. If you would like/ need a Pastoral visit, please see Donna to sign up for a time that works best for you, or call the Church Office at 951-619-2626.

WOMEN'S  
Bible Study



**Women's Bible Study** is being held every Sunday from 8:10 am to 8:50 am in the Fellowship Hall.

Starting February 22, 2026 we will be studying the book "**Perfectly Flawed**" (God transforms our weaknesses into strengths) by *Lisa Toney*.

# This Month's Anniversaries



# Birthdays of the Month



Lois Anderson - Stevens	03/01
Sal Brody	03/06
Elaine Clayborn	03/13
Sharon Wang	03/14
David Juengel	03/15
Garrett Smith	03/27

*If we missed any birthdays or anniversaries,  
please contact the Church. Thanks!*

## Early April BIRTHDAYS

Veryl German	04/10
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## MEMBERSHIP CHANGES IN FEBRUARY 2026

GAINS IN MEMBERSHIP — 0

LOSSES IN MEMBERSHIP — 1 (Louise Jackson—abandonment)

MEMBERSHIP NOW STANDS AT: 179 Baptized, 138 Confirmed



# *Come Be A Part Of God's Great Gift!*

As an act of Grace — undeserved love for us — God sent Jesus “to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

— 2 Corinthians 5:21b

Jesus took our sin & death and in exchange — week by week — we receive forgiveness,

eternal life and the status of holy children of God. Please join us at Faith each Sunday for:

**9:00 AM Traditional Worship Service** (inside sanctuary)

**1:00 PM Online Worship Service** [Upload] on Youtube.

[www.youtube.com/@davidtito834/video](http://www.youtube.com/@davidtito834/video)

*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”*

*1 Peter 5:6*



*Seder Meal*

You are invited to join us for our Seder Meal Service on Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2026 at 6:00 pm.

If you are interested in participating please sign up before and after Sunday Service in the Narthex.

# March



Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

*Church Office Hours Tuesday thru Thursday 9:30 AM to 2:30PM and Friday 9:30AM to 12:30PM.  
Pastor Gene available on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 2:30 PM.*

1 8:10am-8am Women's Bible Study 9:00 AM <b>Worship Service</b> Bible Study after 9:00 AM Service	2 7:30 pm NA	3 9:15 am Food Set-up	4 6:00 pm Midweek Lenten Service	5 10am Bible Study 5pm Young Champions	6	7 7:30 - 9:00 am Men's Breakfast/Bible Study <b>5:00 PM Byzantine Service</b>
8 8:10am-8am Women's Bible Study 9:00 AM <b>Worship Service</b> Bible Study after 9:00 AM Service	9 7:30 pm NA	10 9:15 am Food Set-up	11 10:15 am Food Distribution 6:00 pm Midweek Lenten Service	12 10am Bible Study 5pm Young Champions	13	14 7:30 - 9:00am Men's Breakfast/Bible Study
15 8:10am-8am Women's Bible Study 9:00 AM <b>Worship Service</b> Bible Study after 9:00 AM Service	16 7:30 pm NA	17 	18 <b>5:30 pm BOD Meeting</b> <b>6:00 pm St. Patty's Dinner</b> 7:00 pm Midweek Lenten Service	19 10am Bible Study 5pm Young Champions	20	21 7:30 - 9:00am Men's Breakfast/Bible Study
22 8:10am-8am Women's Bible Study 9:00 AM <b>Worship Service</b> Bible Study after 9:00 AM Service	23 7:30 pm NA	24 9:15 am Food Set-up	25 10:00 am Food Distribution 6:00 pm Midweek Lenten Service	26 10 am Bible Study 5 pm Young Champions	27	28 7:30 - 9:00am Men's Breakfast/Bible Study
29 8:10am-8am Women's Bible Study 9:00 AM <b>Worship Service</b> After 9:00 am Fellowship Brunch	30 7:30 pm NA	31				29 

## Schedule 2026



March 4 @ 6pm Mid-week Lenten Service\*  
Reflection

March 11 @ 6pm Mid-week Lenten Service\*  
Reflection

March 18 @ 6pm St. Patrick's Day Dinner  
7pm Mid-week Lenten Service  
Spiritual Warfare

March 25 @ 6pm Mid-week Lenten Service\*  
Reflection

\*No Soup Supper

# Holy Week Schedule



**Palm Sunday**  
March 29  
9 AM Service



**Maundy Thursday**  
April 2  
6 PM Service  
*Seder Supper*



**Good Friday**  
April 3  
6 PM Service



**Easter Services**  
April 5  
5:40 AM Byzantine Light  
Service  
6 AM Sunrise Service  
9 AM Service