

THE LIGHT



Lebanon Evangelical Lutheran Church

*A congregation of the North/West
Lower Michigan Synod of the ELCA
Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop
Yehiel Curry, Presiding Bishop*

**1101 S. Mears Avenue
Whitehall, Mi 49461
231-893-5745**

Rev. Douglas M. Ogden

**Sunday Morning Worship
10:15 AM in person
YouTube Worship on the Web**

Office Hours
M-Th 9AM-1:00PM

Office Manager
Margaret Everling

Church Council

Cheri Crouch Dave Dusenberry
Laura Hollister Wiestse Schaafsma
Sarah Schmalz Amy Swope
Al Wheeler
Treasurer: Terry Beekman
Financial Secretary: Curt Crouch

**"We are baptized members of
God's Church, forgiven and set
free by grace through faith."**

www.lebanonlutheranchurch.com

Pastor's Note

January 1, 2026

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,
'Give me a light that I may go safely into the unknown.'

And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God.
That will be to thee better than light,
and safer than a known way'''

This is the first part of a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins in 1908. The entire poem was read by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast for 1939. "The darkness" for King George was the early days of the Second World War.

Our synod has a newly elected Bishop, the Reverend Julie Schneider-Thomas, and the ELCA has a new Presiding Bishop in Bishop Yehiel Curry. Julie recently served as Pastor in Grand Rapids, Yehiel as Bishop of Metro Chicago Synod. We will hear more from them in the years to come, and I look forward to their leadership. At the end of 2025, Lebanon's Church Council made a gift to Bishop's Discretionary Fund of our Synod, and to ELCA Living Water Ministries, which is the camping ministry of our synod. It is truly a delight that Lebanon has the resources to make these gifts and is such a staunch supporter of "Lutheran things".

Our support for Samaritans is driven by a long-standing commitment to refugees and displaced persons. There is some debate among some Christians whether Jesus and his family were refugees in what we call "The Flight into Egypt" story Matthew 2:13-23.

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We also recall when after World War II some 20 to 25 percent of all the Lutherans in the world were refugees or displaced. The work of Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services grew out of that experience. The work today continues with AAMPARO, the ELCA ministry to support unaccompanied minors refugeeing into the United States. Samaritas is the major player in our synod for these international ministries, in addition to Samaritas' work for foster care kids, and affordable housing facilities,

Look for us to make another hundred personal care kits starting February 11, 2026, which is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent

Through the Lutheran benefit work of Thrivent Financial we have a huge stack of boxes near the organ containing personal water filters and personal solar lights. Thrivent connects us to helpful projects around the world. For the water filters Thrivent has connected us to Wine to Water, a global non-profit serving communities in disaster-stricken areas with chronic water scarcity. With access to clean water, health problems are reduced, and fewer people are forced to migrate away from home. For the solar lights, Thrivent connected us to WeHero, which makes the lights available to children who will no longer have to do homework while breathing in kerosene fumes when the village generators are turned off. These lamps provide 7300 extras study hours over three years.

We begin assembling at 9:00 am, January 11, 2026, and continue into fellowship time after worship. While the lights are a little trickier than the filters, the hardest part for most people has been the personal note you get to write to accompany them on their way.

Lutheran World Relief also gets the benefit of our quilting group, meeting Monday mid morning. Ruth, Donna, Meg, Carol, Mary are your best contacts if you would like to help.

These are just some of the things we will be thankful for in worship. We see these as God-opportunities, and maybe Lutherans sometimes forget to give thanks that there is so much we can do to make lights in the darkness, these opportunities to put our hands into the hand of God.

So . . . Thanks be to God for the inexpressible gift of being church together in 2026.

Pastor Doug Ogden

Lebanon Lutheran Church Annual Meeting

After Worship on Sunday, January 25, 2026

Congregation Potluck to Follow – Please Bring a Dish to Pass

Using Our Gifts for Ministry - Pr. Alex Aivars

For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12:4-8

I've been running from using my technology skills in ministry, ever since I first felt the call.

When I met with the synod candidacy person almost 12 years ago as I was discerning the call to ministry, I was told that it was going to be helpful that I had another skill set to use while being in ministry. I remember thinking, "nope, once I become ordained, I will never use my technology skills again."

When I started seminary, I firmly believed that my days working in technology were behind me. However, not two months in, the on-campus job I ended up with was working on the internal website for the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. I remember thinking, "this will only be while I'm in school, once I graduate, I will never use my technology skills again."

When I graduated and then moved through the first-call process, the church that wanted to call me, and the one I felt called to, was a half-time call in Lansing at St. Stephen Lutheran Church. In order to make it work financially, I would need other part-time work. Free-lance web development work would be the easiest for me to do, so that is what I did. I remember thinking, "this will only be until I am in a full-time ministry call. Then I will never use my technology skills again."

Then the pandemic hit. My technology skills would be vital in figuring out how to livestream our worship services and how to stay connected when we had to stay physically apart.

While in my second call at Christ United, another part-time call, I continued doing free-lance web development work off and on.

Then, Bishop-elect Julie Schneider-Thomas called and asked if I'd be on her staff as the Director of Technology.

I realized I needed to stop running. I accepted the position.

Using our Gifts

We can use our gifts for the church in many different ways.

Some of us are called to be pastors and deacons. Some of us are called to be lay leaders. Some of us are called to be musicians. Some of us are called to be greeters. Some of us are called to be treasurers. Some of us are called to provide food. Some of us are called to give abundantly. Some of us are called as readers. There are so many other ways that I'm not able to list in how we are called to serve.

Some of us are called into parishes. Some of us are called into campus ministry. Some of us are called to be staff members in a synod. Some of us are called to be staff members of a church. Some of us are called to para-church organizations. Some of us are called into ministry settings that have no current category.

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So, what about you?

What gift (or even gifts) is God telling you to use in the church? What have you been running from?

Peace and blessings,

*Pastor Alex Aivars
Director of Technology, North/West Lower Michigan Synod*

Merry Christmas (all 12 Days!), and joyous New Year, and a good Epiphany season to you all

Thank you for making it such a splendid year of worship, music, ministry, projects, and fun.

Thank you for all your work and support. Thank you for the Christmas cards and gifts, and the basket of treats.

Thank you for those who led worship in my absence this past year. Not only did it make it possible for me to be in Springfield with my mom, but it was fun seeing you all up front in leadership positions.

Thank you to our staff for such competence and fun. It has been a good year, with some thorny challenges too.

Thank you to our volunteers: councils, committees, scouts, pantry, backpacks, kits, quilts, klubs, and the hundred acts that happened when no one was watching.

It has been a good hundred and fifty-three years.

Thank you,

Doug and Monica Ogden



The Fund of the Month for January is the Lebanon Quilting Ministry.

Please consider a donation to this group to help cover expenses for fabric, backing, and fillers. The Quilting Ministry makes quilts to keep people warm in the US and all over the world through Lutheran World Relief. Donations may be marked either January Fund of the Month or Quilting. Thank you for supporting their work!

Prayer Concerns



It is an important part of our ministry to be praying constantly for one another. We add names to the prayer list with consent to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

This month in your prayers, please remember:

Prayers for those who are homebound:

Jane Blyth, 28801 Jefferson Ave., Apt. 332; Saint Clair Shores, MI 48081

Chris Claus, American House - 17383 174th Avenue, Spring Lake, MI 49456

Shirley Glass, with health concerns, 3121 Lake Michigan Dr. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504

Marlene Holmstrom, at home. 2643 Benston Road, Whitehall, 49461

Ken & Sandy Kolb, with health issues - 6755 W. Old Channel Trail; Montague 49437

Elaine Liska, Sunrise Senior Living—Sunrise of Troy; 6870 Crooks Road, Troy, MI 48098-1704. Elaine Liska—Room 130.

Phyllis Monte, at Legacy of Caring - Whitehall—1302 Warner Street, Whitehall 49461

Ruth Nurmi, with health concerns —308 E. Dayton Street, Fremont, 49412

Lois Szcerbinski, at Robinswood Assisted Living, 2650 Ruddiman, N. Muskegon 49445

Special Prayer Concerns:

Brianne Beekman, (Terry & Mary Beekman's granddaughter) diagnosed with multiple brain tumors

Jenna Brown, at home recuperating after surgery

Lucas Carlson, (Terry and Mary Beekman's grandson) for new treatment

Diane Eastman, health concerns and awaiting test results

Shawn Erwin, hip replacement surgery on January 6, 2026

Sheila Fretty, re-occurring cancer and health concerns

Margaret Fountain, (Mary Koenen's sister) diagnosed with multiple myeloma, beginning new treatment

Brian Holmblade, with heart issues

Mary Lewallen, recovering from spinal surgery

Dwight Mead (Paula Moreau's brother-in-law), non-Hodgkins's lymphoma mantel type (stage four)

Gil Norwick, with health concerns

Martha Ogden, with health concerns

Wendy Shalifoe, at home under Hospice care

Bev Statz, with health concerns

Stella Strong, (5-year-old friend of Donna and Ernie Stacy) in remission after battling cancer for 3 years

Darlene Willbrandt, in treatment for re-occurring pancreatic cancer

For our partners in faith, our companion synods in Salud para la Vida in San Pedro Sula, Honduras for their mission and ministry in their place as we fulfill our mission in our place; for all the churches of the Lutheran World Federation, for people of the gospel throughout the world.

HAPPY Birthday

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

1/1 Julie Johnson	1/10 Sarah O'Donnell	1/22 Helen Bartlett
1/2 John Parks	1/10 Roy Baldridge	1/22 Richard Carlson
1/3 Barbara Brooks	1/11 Lynda Lauterberg	1/22 Nancy Dahl
1/3 Marsha Hulce	1/11 Randy Nurmi	1/23 Gabe DeMumbrum
1/4 Jacob R. Brooks	1/12 Madeline Troy	1/23 Laura Schnepf
1/5 Jim Coddington	1/13 Kerry Fretty	1/25 Virginia Foster
1/5 Robert Eklund	1/14 Steve Albert	1/25 Traci Murphy
1/5 Laura Hollister	1/16 Jeffrey Baker	1/26 Ann Snow
1/5 Katherine Lathrop	1/16 Jennifer Stanhope	1/27 Taylor Ogles
1/5 Luke Thompson	1/16 Al Wheeler	1/27 Erin Wendell
1/6 John Lathrop	1/17 JoAnne Silk	1/28 Barb Aardema
1/6 Scott Veeder	1/18 Linda Decker	1/28 Bill Cloutier, Jr.
1/7 John Lundell	1/19 Steve Green	1/30 Joel Newsted
1/8 Stephanie Larson	1/19 Marjie Bronsink	1/30 Dwight Roesler
1/9 Glenn Eaton	1/20 Becky Bronsink	1/31 Joe Ferrentino
1/10 Sandy Coddington	1/20 John Hildebrandt	1/31 Rosemary Grub
1/10 Alexandra Kesteloot	1/20 Doug Ogden	
1/10 Ann Nessa	1/20 Kathy Scarbrough	

Baptism Anniversaries

Celebrate your baptism anniversary by lighting a candle with this prayer:

“Stir up within me the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and joy, on this day when I give thanks for my baptism into Christ.”

1/1 Diane Eastman	1/9 Lucinda Grover	1/18 Nathan Parker
1/2 Carley Smercina	1/9 Scott Lamiman	1/24 Kristin Wolffis
1/3 James Will	1/10 Mitch Foster	1/25 Lisa Holmblade
1/7 Matthew Ferguson	1/11 Donna Jensen	1/27 David Pearson
1/9 Joshua Cloutier	1/18 Dawn Baker	1/30 Gary Holmstrom

Anniversary Blessings

1/19/02 Michael & Kathleen Palmer

January Newsletter from Thrivent

As we begin a new year, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by big financial goals. Instead of trying to change everything at once, I encourage you to choose just one small, manageable financial tweak to focus on. For instance, start an automated weekly transfer of a small amount to your emergency savings, or commit to tracking every dollar spent for one month to reveal where your money is truly going. Focusing your effort on a single, specific goal will build momentum, reduce stress, and set a strong foundation for faithful stewardship throughout the year.

Your local Thrivent Financial Advisor is here to help! Contact Marci over at the Whitehall Office by calling 231-894-8886 or via text at 231-760-8246.

I hope you all have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Mark Your Calendars for the Country Dairy Sleigh Ride!

January 24, 2026

Time to be announced

Office Volunteers needed: Seeking volunteers for the church office for vacation coverage on the following dates: March 30, March 31, April 1, April 2, April 6. Please call the office at 231-893-5745 if you can help. Thank you!



Worship Notes

Sunday January 4 – Christmas 2 - 10:15 AM

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-14, Psalm 147:12-20, Ephesians 1:3-14, John 1:[1-9] 10-18

Prayer of the Day:

O God our redeemer, you created light that we might live, and you illumine our world with your beloved Son. By your Spirit comfort us in all darkness and turn us toward the light of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday January 11 – Baptism of Our Lord - 10:15 AM

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 3:13-17

Prayer of the Day: O God our Father, at the baptism of Jesus you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful to their calling to be our daughters and sons, and empower us all with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday January 18 – Epiphany 2 - 10:15 AM

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 40:1-11, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, John 1:29-42

Prayer of the Day: Holy God, our strength and our redeemer, by your Spirit hold us forever, that through your grace we may worship you and faithfully serve you, follow you and joyfully find you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Sunday January 25 – Epiphany 3 - 10:15 AM, followed by Annual Meeting

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-4, Psalm 27:1, 4-9, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18, Matthew 4:12-23

Prayer of the Day: Lord God, your lovingkindness always goes before us and follows after us. Summon us into your light, and direct our steps in the ways of goodness that come through the cross of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.