

St. Paul Lutheran Church

The Church on the Highway

Loving others into the Love of Christ

February 2026 Edition

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A Message From Our Senior Pastor

Rev. Dr. Brian Hesse

Email: pastorhesse@splcwaco.com

February 2026 – Set Free

Where did January go! Between the inclement weather that spread across our area and a flurry of other activities, it is already February. The new year of 2026 is already down to 11 months and it is hard to believe that the penitential season of Lent is now just days away.



It may sound strange, but I am looking forward to Lent! I am looking forward to the time for reflection and focus on the gifts of Jesus in my life. I am looking forward to our Lent Series for this year titled, "Set Free." I am looking forward to a theme from the book of Exodus and how the Book of Exodus points us to a Savior. I am looking forward to the evening worship times that we will once again have on Wednesdays (except Ash Wednesday) in the family life center. It may sound strange to be looking forward to Lent, but in my humble opinion Lent is the buildup to the greatest holiday of the year, Easter.

Prayer Opportunities:

There are some other prayer opportunities that you should consider during this season of Lent as well. If you are a member of the Board of Directors, then you already know the discussions. If not, these prayer items will be shared with you in greater detail at the congregational meeting in April.

Prayer Request #1: A transportation ministry has been discussed at the Board of Directors. This means purchasing a congregational bus for a variety of ministry needs including college campus ministry, youth and senior adults. This project also will be considered for Mission Mite Dollars at the Texas District LWML Convention where we could receive \$20,000 for the project.

Prayer Request #2: A new outreach ministry to connect with our Bellmead neighbors. At our recent Board of Directors meeting, we received a presentation from Rev. Ben Gonzalez and Rev. Jaime Gonzalez on the opportunities and feasibility to begin an English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry here at St. Paul. Nearly 60% of our community is Hispanic and ESL is a great need. Join our Board of Directors in praying over the need for the right leaders and people with the right giftedness to help us with this opportunity or to find an equally effective opportunity to reach out and connect with our neighbors.

Our 70th year at St. Paul is off to a great start. We have wonderful, spirit-led opportunities that will be led by you the wonderful spirit-led people of our congregation. It is a blessing to join you in loving others into the love of Christ.

Pastor Hesse



Sunday Worship
8am & 10:30am

Online: www.splcwaco.com

Bible Class/Sunday School
9:15am



A Message From Our Youth & Family Director

Josh McNamara, D.C.E.

Email: FamilyMinistry@splcwaco.com

Death, Denial, and Desire: A Love Story Greater Than February

As a Director of Christian Education and as St. Paul's Director of Youth and Family Ministry, I've long felt drawn to living out the ministry God has called me to in a way not unlike St. Paul himself—seeking to be “all things to all people” so that some might be won for the sake of the Gospel, and using familiar stories and ideas (like the “unknown god” in Acts 17) as bridges that lead people to Jesus.

Because of that—and because I'm a lifelong pop-culture and science-fiction enthusiast—I recently found myself watching the final season of Netflix's *Stranger Things*. This is a show that has spanned five seasons and nearly a decade of my life, and like many others, I was eager to see how its story would finally come to an end.

Like much of the entertainment we encounter in our world, *Stranger Things* is not without elements that require Christian discernment. Yet, as I watched the series finale, I couldn't help but notice a striking connection between the story's conclusion and the hope we confess in our Christian faith.

If you're willing to join me on a brief journey into the Upside Down—and back again—through the lens of our shared faith in Christ, I invite you to read on. Just know that what follows contains spoilers for the series finale. You have been duly warned.

One of the central moments of the *Stranger Things* finale revolves around a question the audience is left to wrestle with after the story ends. Did Eleven—the young woman whose life has been marked by super-human abilities, suffering, sacrifice, and love—truly die? Are her friends simply living in denial because they cannot accept the loss? Or is it possible that she is alive, living somewhere peaceful, hidden from the world?

In the end, the show refuses to give a definitive answer. Instead, viewers are left to decide for themselves what they believe to be true. Was it death, denial, or desire?

That lingering ambiguity may be compelling storytelling, but it also reflects something deeply human. We long for love that lasts. We ache for endings that are not final. We want death to not have the last word.

When it comes to our faith in Christ, however, we are not left with uncertainty. For Christians, the question is not “death, denial, or desire?”—because in Jesus Christ, all three have already taken place, and they have been decisively answered.

God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, into the world to live a perfect, sinless life. At the appointed time, Jesus willingly became the spotless Lamb of God, offering Himself on the cross to pay the price for your sin and mine. His death was real. His suffering was real. His sacrifice was complete.

While the stone still sealed the tomb, the risen Jesus descended into Hell—not in defeat, but in victory—proclaiming that sin, death, and the devil had been conquered once and for all. Satan, though already defeated, continues to exist in denial, raging against a victory that is no longer his to claim.

On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. The tomb was empty. Death was undone. And with the resurrection came the fullest expression of God's love for humanity.

Continues on page 3

What had been broken by sin was restored. What had been separated was reunited. God's desire—to dwell with His people in love—was fulfilled through Christ's death and resurrection. Because of Jesus, there is now nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8). Not sin. Not suffering. Not doubt. Not even death itself.

This is the love story we live in—not one marked by ambiguity or unanswered questions, but one grounded in the sure and certain hope of Christ's victory. A love that did not avoid suffering, but passed through it. A love that did not deny death, but defeated it. A love that fulfilled God's deepest desire to save and restore His people.

As we make our way through the month of February, you'll likely encounter heart-shaped balloons, candy, and Valentine's Day cards that point us toward romantic affection and fleeting expressions of love. Those can be good gifts. But they are not the foundation of our hope. Instead, I encourage you this month to fix your eyes on the One who loves you unconditionally — the One who gave His life so that you would never have to live in fear of death, denial, or unfulfilled longing. Jesus paid it all, so that we might live in the freedom and assurance of His love.

May you be blessed by this reminder of our shared Christian faith, and may the Holy Spirit embolden you to share this Good News—the greatest love story ever told—with those around you.

In Him,
Josh McNamara
Director of Youth and Family Ministry



**Stop by the LWML tables on Sunday, February 8, 2026,
between worship services, and following the 10:30 a.m. service
To get your Game Ready savory and sweet treats
to enjoy while watching the Big Game!**

Disclaimer: LWML does NOT endorse either team

Please Remember in Your Prayers:

- † We pray for continued healing for all those who have suffered physical problems in the last month, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). We pray the Lord lay His healing hand upon them.
- † We pray for all who are undergoing cancer diagnosis/treatment, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). We pray the Lord keep His healing hand upon them.
- † We pray for all who struggle with ongoing health concerns, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). We pray the Lord keep His healing hand upon them.
- † We pray for all who are home-bound, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). We pray the Lord give them comfort and peace with their living situation.
- † We pray for all those in nursing care or assisted/independent living facilities, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). We pray the Lord will give them comfort and peace with their living situation.
- † We pray for those who have lost loved ones in the past month, including: (a complete list is available in the church office). May the Lord provide these families comfort and peace during their time of grief.
- † We pray for those serving in our Armed Forces (a complete list is available through the church office). We pray the Lord keep them safe in their stead as they defend our freedom and safety.

Please contact the church office if you, someone in your family, or a family friend is in need of prayer. **Prayer requests will be listed for 4 weeks.** Please keep the church office advised of the status of those you add to the prayer list, so that our list remains up-to-date. If you wish to remain on the prayer list after 4 weeks, please call the church office (254.799.3211) or send an email to: wecare@splcwaco.com.



Our Monthly lunch meal for February will be held following our Ash Wednesday, February 18, at 11:00 a.m. Everyone is invited to join us for this time of fellowship!
Desserts are appreciated for the luncheon, but not required. If you have any questions, please call the church office (254.799.3211).

Valentine Dinner
 Saturday, February 21
THEME: PROM NIGHT

Join us for an evening of Fun, Fellowship and a meal including fajitas, rice/beans, and Dessert.

Cost: \$12.50 individual/\$25.00 couple

ALL ARE WELCOME!
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: FEB. 8



Those who are scheduled to Serve at SPLC for February 2026

Servants are listed by initial and last name only in an effort to protect their identity.

ELDER OF THE MONTH:

B Holobaugh

ALTAR FLOWERS:

2/1 J & C Banta
 2/8 K Shelton/G & K Owen
 2/15 R Baugh/K Holland
 2/18 **OPEN (Ash Wed)**
 2/22 J & M Michaelis
 2/25 **OPEN (Lent)**

ACOLYTES:

2/1 W Hatfield (8:00am)
 L Gonzalez (10:30am)
 2/8 C Gonzalez (8:00am)
 E Williams (10:30am)
 2/15 B Petrich (8:00am)
 W Hatfield (10:30am)
 2/18 B Petrich (6:00 pm)
 2/22 L Gonzalez (8:00am)
 E Tindle (10:30am)

LAY READERS

2/1 T Albers (8:00am)
 J Uptmore (10:30am)
 2/8 J Lamar (8:00am)
 H Strickland (10:30am)
 2/15 T Albers (8:00am)
 B Dube (10:30am)
 2/22 J Nawara (8:00am)
 N West (10:30am)

SUNDAY MORNING GREETERS:

2/1 A & S Lassetter (8:00am)
 D Reinke (10:30am)
 2/8 D & G Tynes (8:00am)
 G Hurta (10:30am)
 2/15 B Dube (8:00am)
 B Reinhardt (10:30am)
 2/22 F & D Kubitza (8:00am)
 L Graf (10:30am)

NURSERY VOLUNTEERS

2/1 A Bush (9:00am)
 A Gilcrest (10:30am)
 2/8 W Ehlers (9:00am)
 S Cone (10:30am)
 2/15 M & C Borchardt (9:00am)
 P Price (10:30am)
 2/22 K McCullough (9:00am)
 A Gilcrest (10:30am)

USHERS FOR WORSHIP

8:00am Worship: Group 5

R Shelton, H Pick, H Strickland, L Springman,
 M Perry, D Tynes, K Koester

10:30am Worship: Group 6

D Reinke, R Randolph, S Reinke, D Galler,
 D Bood, T Randolph, D Caffey

6:00pm Ash Wed. Worship 2/18: Group 8

F Spross, T Kersten, B Holobaugh, D Savage,
 L Swiggum, BDube, D Newman

6:00pm Lent Worship 2/25: Group 7

M Jugert, J Banta, D Wolfe, J Strauch,
 Z Ferguson, H Bush, ALassetter

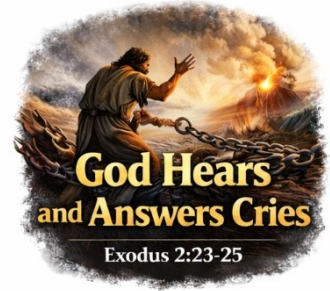


Lent Themes and Information for 2026

February 18, 2026: Ash Wednesday

Theme: God Hears and Answers Cries (Exodus 2:23-25)

All worship services will be held in the sanctuary with Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes. Worship times are 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. **Our monthly Fellowship Luncheon will follow the 11:00 a.m. worship; but there will be no meal served at the evening worship.**



February 25, 2026: Lent Midweek 1

Theme: God Reveals Himself to Us (Exodus 3:1-15)

Worship at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the AFLC with meal sponsored by the College Students LDLT Group.



March 4, 2026: Lent Midweek 2

Theme: God Sends a Deliverer (Exodus 4:1-20)

Worship at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the AFLC with meal sponsored by the Fellowship Committee.



March 11, 2026: Lent Midweek 3

Theme: God Passes Over Us (Exodus 12:1-14)

Worship at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary with Holy Communion and meal to follow in the AFLC

Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the AFLC with meal, **Meal Sponsor still needed.**

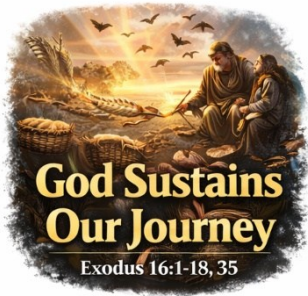
March 18, 2026: Lent Midweek 4

Theme: God Makes A Way For Us (Exodus 14:5-31)

Worship at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the AFLC with meal, **Meal Sponsor still needed.**





March 25, 2026: Lent Midweek 5

Theme: God Sustains Our Journey (Exodus 16:1-18, 35)

Worship at 11:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the AFLC with meal, **Meal Sponsor still needed.**

April 2, 2026: Maundy Thursday

Theme: New Passover (Luke 22:7-20)

Worship Services are at 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary with Holy Communion at both services. This service will also include the stripping of the altar ceremony at the end of the service.



April 3, 2026: Good Friday

Theme: New Passover (Luke 22:7-20)

Worship Services are at 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary. This service will also include a service of darkness.

April 5, 2026: Easter Sunday

Theme: New Tombs (Matthew 27:57-66)

Worship Services and Easter Breakfast information to be announced soon.



Classes for All Ages

Please join us for Sunday School and Bible Classes at 9:15 a.m.

Adult Bible Study (Albers Family Life Center)

This class will return to the Nehemiah study they were working on before the holidays, studying sections of the Book of Nehemiah to learn what change looks like and how to adapt in a world that seems stacked against faith.

ASK PASTOR HESSE: Outside Pastor Hesse's office you will find a box to place any questions that you would like Pastor Hesse to answer during the Adult Bible Study class on Sunday mornings.

Men's Bible Class (classroom behind the Parish Hall)

This class is finishing up a study by author Max Lucado: *Ten Men of the Bible*. The men depicted in the Bible were not perfect by any means. We find story after story marked by scandal, failure, and intrigue. Yet we also find many stories of men who were able to look beyond their circumstances, completely trust in the Lord, and follow Him wherever He chose to take them. Like us, these men made both good and bad decisions along the way—and experienced both good and bad consequences—and we find our struggles and hopes in the pages of the Bible that tells their stories.

Ladies Bible Class (Conference Room)

This class is going through the study, *Strong and Courageous*, by Donna Snow. Life is full of conflict, daunting tasks, and roadblocks. Few people experience this as viscerally as Joshua did as he was called to lead God's people Israel into the Promised Land. Join us for this verse-by-verse Bible study looking at the life of Joshua and see how you, too, can be strong and courageous amidst any challenges you face.

Grades Nursery - Kindergarten: Simply Loved (classrooms)

This class teaches children to love Jesus and each other, created with the truth found in 1 John 4:7 in mind which says, 'Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.'

Grades 1-4: Bible Basics (classroom)

This class is learning how to use the Holy Bible and where to find their favorite Bible stories and characters.

Grade 5: Catechesis Training (classroom)

This class undergoes instruction in the Catechism and how to apply it to their daily lives.

Grades 6-8: Select Devotions (classroom)

This class is learning from a devotion study in preparation for new curriculum.

High School and College Students (Youth Room)

All high school and college students are invited to join in the Youth Room every Sunday for Bible Class! This will be a great time of study, building relationships, fellowship and fun! *Breakfast is usually served.*

Other Bible Study Opportunities:

College Student Evening Bible Study/Fellowship (LDLT - Lutherans Doing Life Together)

The LDLT group has resumed their Monday evening meetings; beginning with a meal and fellowship at 5:00 p.m. and Bible study beginning at 5:30 p.m. They meet in room 207 of Rogers Hall on the BU campus. If you have any questions, please contact Karen Shelton or Pastor Hesse.

Youth Confirmation/Catechesis Training and Music (grades 6-8)

On Wednesday evenings, grades 6-8 meet in the Youth Room at 6:30 p.m. for Opening Prayer. After this time of Prayer:

Grades 6-7 will meet with Pastor Hesse (Conference Room)

Grade 8 will meet with Josh McNamara (Youth Room)

(Children/Youth Music is held on Wednesday evenings in the Music Room from 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. to allow time for any student/family wishing to participate.)

There's a place for EVERYONE to be immersed in God's Word and fellowship with other Christians!

Children & Youth Activities



- ☀️ **Feb. 8 - "All Hands On Deck" servant event:** You and your family are invited to join us on Sunday, February 8th, as we get ready to write thank you cards to our local veterans, as we share our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for the blessing they have been to us and our country. Everyone is welcome to join us during the Sunday School hour.
- ☀️ **Feb. 15, 6-8pm - High School Youth Night:** All high school students (in grades 9-12) are invited to join us for our monthly Youth Night event on Sunday, February 15th, from 6-8pm in the Youth Room. We will enjoy fellowship, a meal, raising our voices in worship and seeing what God's Word tells us about His amazing love for us and how we can live out our Christian faith. Join us for this time of food, faith and fun!
- ☀️ **Feb. 22, 12-4pm - Youth Movie Day** (On-site Youth event): All Youth (students in grades 6-12) are invited to join us for our upcoming Youth Movie Day event! Grab some popcorn or one of your favorite movie snacks and join us in the Youth Room on Sunday, February 22nd, as we enjoy watching a movie together and learning about how it connects to our Christian faith. (The movie and exact timeframe for this event are currently TBD. However, we are currently aiming to have this event take place after the conclusion of our 10:30am worship service that Sunday). Stay tuned for more updates regarding this upcoming Youth Movie Day event!

If you have a student in our Youth Ministry, please contact Josh as soon as possible (email: familyministry@splcwaco.com, phone: 254.799.3211, ext. 103) to help us plan our upcoming Summer Youth Trip. Middle school families also have the opportunity to help shape what our Youth Ministry at St. Paul looks like moving forward.

Please contact Director of Youth & Family Ministries, Josh McNamara, if you have any questions about events.



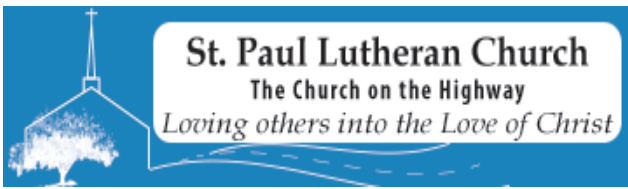
You and your family are invited to join us on Sunday, February 8, as we get ready to write thank you cards to our local veterans, as we share our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for the blessing they have been to us and our country. Everyone is welcome to join us on that Sunday in the Parish Hall at 9:15 a.m.

Puzzle!

Find and circle these words associated with the Lenten journey to the cross.

colt	denial	kiss	repent
confess	donkey	lots	silver
cross	forsaken	palms	sins
crown	Gethsemane	penance	suffer
crucifixion	Golgotha	Pilate	thorns
death	hosanna	prayer	vigil

E N A M E S H T E G R L W Y
 C L E U X B M T H B U C W B
 N R I K Y P A T E T I Y X Y
 A V J G A L B R E Y A R P B
 N G N L I S N L A I N E D X
 E W M P R V R D H B N R D F
 P S O G O L G O T H A B S C
 D L N R O C O N F E S S I K
 O T H T C P E K W U O U N D
 M N S H N P W E D R H F S K
 U N F O E T K Y C S G F O E
 H E C R E V L I S W Q E C M
 H V H N C X S O C C J R L O
 F Q E S U D S H C A A Y M C
 C R U C I F I X I O N S R V



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February 2026 Edition



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Follow us on Social Media:



Please join us for our Lenten Worship services each Wednesday, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 18, 2026.

A complete schedule for our Lenten services (including an evening meal) can be found on pages 6-7).