

THE EAGLE
JULY/AUGUST 2026
FROM PASTOR'S DESK



Liberty in Christ: Celebrating 250 Years of American Independence with
Gratitude and Reflection

On July 4, 2026, the United States will observe a remarkable milestone: the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Known as the Semiquincentennial, this anniversary invites Americans to celebrate the nation's founding with gratitude, humility, and renewed reflection on the blessings and responsibilities of liberty. For Christians, it is also an opportunity to give thanks to God for the freedoms we enjoy, to remember that every person bears the image of God, and to consider how faith has shaped the moral inspiration of American life since 1776.

Independence Day has long been a time for fireworks, parades, music, family gatherings, and patriotic traditions. In 2026, those familiar celebrations will carry extra meaning. Communities across the country are expected to host special events, historical programs, service projects, and local gatherings that reflect on America's past while looking ahead to its future. Christians can enter this anniversary not with triumphalism, but with thankful remembrance, honest repentance where history reveals sin and injustice, and hope rooted in the conviction that God calls His people to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

The 250th anniversary is also an opportunity to remember the significance of the Declaration of Independence itself. Adopted in 1776, it expressed a bold vision of liberty,

self-government, and equality. While the nation has often struggled to live up to those ideals, Christian theology reminds us that true freedom is never merely personal independence; it is freedom ordered toward love of God and neighbor. As Scripture teaches, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1), reminding believers that the deepest liberty is found in Christ Jesus and lived out through faith, love, and service.

A Christian Historical Perspective

From the colonial era through the founding period and beyond, Christian belief, biblical language, church communities, and religious convictions influenced many aspects of American public life. Churches served as places of worship, moral formation, education, and community gathering. We must not lose this heritage but be equally committed to herald these truths today. Our nation needs leaders to speak to these issues.

Freedom in Christ Jesus

Scripture invites us to receive freedom not first as a national possession, but as a gift of grace in Christ. Jesus proclaimed, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). This is freedom of the soul: freedom from sin that enslaves, fear that controls, pride that divides, and guilt that weighs us down. In Christ, we are set free to belong to God, to walk in truth, and to live each day as people forgiven, restored, and sent to love.

The apostle Paul reminds the church, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (Galatians 5:13). As we give thanks for civil liberty, we are invited to ask: How is Christ calling us to use our freedom? May our celebrations lead us to prayer, our gratitude lead us to service, and our remembrance lead us to humility. True freedom in Christ is not freedom from responsibility, but freedom for faithful love.

Ways to Take Part Faithfully

- Attend a local parade, concert, fireworks display, worship service, or community celebration.
- Pray for the nation’s leaders, communities, churches, families, and future generations.

- Visit a museum, historic site, library exhibit, or church history program to learn more about the people and events that shaped the country.
- Volunteer for a community service project as an expression of love for neighbor.
- Share family stories, photos, or memories that connect your community to the American story and to God's faithfulness through generations.
- Read or discuss the Declaration of Independence alongside Scripture passages about freedom in Christ, justice, humility, stewardship, and love of neighbor.

Local Events and Ways to Celebrate

- **Stephenson County:** Check the Greater Freeport Partnership calendar and weekly events guide for Freeport and Stephenson County happenings, including community celebrations, local activities, and special summer events.
- **Jo Daviess County:** Galena Country lists several Fourth of July events across the county, including the Galena Independence Day Celebration, Elizabeth Freedom Festival, Hanover Days Parade and Fireworks, Stockton Independence Day Celebration, and holiday weekend events at Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa.
- **Warren:** The Fields of Gold Pro Rodeo at the Jo Daviess County Fairgrounds is scheduled for July 2–4, 2026, with rodeo events, live music, food vendors, and fireworks as part of the patriotic weekend.
- *(Remember - Schedules may change, so please confirm times, locations, parking, and weather updates with local organizers before attending. I'm just pulling these off the internet.)*

As America reaches its 250th birthday, the occasion offers more than a celebration of history. It is a time to thank God for the gifts of freedom and community, to repent of the ways we have fallen short of our highest ideals, and to recommit ourselves to faithful citizenship. Most of all, Christians can remember that our truest freedom is found in Christ Jesus, who frees us to live in grace, truth, and love. Whether through worship, a neighborhood gathering, a moment of prayer, or an act of service, believers can mark this once-in-a-generation anniversary by bearing witness to hope, pursuing peace, and serving the common good – because Christ created us for times such as these.

With full dependance on Jesus,

Jason Shaw



ST. JOHN'S ON THE MOVE

Worship Folders have been received from---

Alvin & Dorothy Wire-Georgetown Baptist Church, Georgetown, Kentucky

Nick Leiendecker-Ohio City UMC, Ohio City, OH

Brenda & Faith Offermann-Trinity Lutheran Church, Bloomington, IL



FLOWER CHART 2026:

The 2026 Flower Chart is posted in the Narthex. When you visit the church, please take a minute to sign your name on a weekend of your choice to provide altar flowers for the worship services. We sincerely appreciate your help in adding the beauty of altar flowers to our worship services. Thank you.



MAKE-A-SMILE CARDS FOR LENA LIVING CENTER

We are hoping to have July/August Cards, using a

Patriotic/Summertime theme, donated next. If you are creative and are a card maker, please be a part of this wonderful venture and **please include a sentiment inside the card.** A basket will be placed

on the table, outside the office, for your beautiful creations and we will get the cards to Good Shepherd Church who in turn will get them to the Activity Director at the Living Center **around the 10th of each month.** Thank you in advance for your willingness in being part of this venture. For questions, please contact the church office.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS FOOD BANK TRUCK will be at St. John's parking lot in Lena on July 2 and August 4th. Then September 1st at Jane Addams Trail head in Orangeville.



CRADLE ROLL NOTES

The following members are celebrating birthdays this summer:

Eliza Solverson 7-19-24

James Isenberger 7-22-23

There are no birthdays in August. We wish them all God's richest blessings!



VBS UPDATE St. John's will be hosting Vacation Bible School (VBS)

August 3-7th from 2:30-5pm. Our theme this year is *Rainforest Falls:*

Exploring the Nature of God. We will explore what it means to be rooted in a relationship with God, our Creator, a safe place in life's storms. Kids can expect a full week of rainforest adventure full of faith discoveries, memorable music, and fellowship! Ages 3 (potty trained)-5th grade are invited to attend. VBS is **FREE** and open to the public, so please **INVITE** your friends and family! Registration is open; register

your child before July 12th to receive a free VBS t-shirt! Use the QR Code listed! **Check out our**

VBS Amazon Wish List for requested supplies. Links are posted on our church website at stjohnslena.org and on our church Facebook page. Please contact Lindsay Bader (815-291-9637) if you are interested in helping or have any questions.

There will be a VBS meeting for all Pre-K and elementary station leaders and crew members on Sunday, July 19th at 9:15 AM in Hannah. Please contact Lindsay Bader (815-291-9637) with any questions or if you are unable to attend.



UPCOMING COUNCIL MEETING JULY 23rd @ 6:30 PM

All newly elected vice chair people please plan to attend your respective board meetings in July when the new office terms begin and to attend the July Council meeting. Incoming and Outgoing members are encouraged to attend July meetings as well.

Vice-Chairman of the Congregation: Don Bamberg

Vice Chairman of the Board of Elders: Kevin Keltner

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Education: Erin Korte

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Evangelism: Dan Park

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Stewardship: Lisa Thene

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees: Gary Erickson

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Youth Ministry: Whitney Holmes

Vice-Chairman of the Board of Finance: Tillie Coomber

Board of My Friend's Closet: Sandy Keltner and Jean Engel-both 2nd term

These folks will serve as Vice-Chairman for one year and then become Chairman for one year. They are eligible for two terms as such, after which they must take a one year break from any office. Those serving on the My Friend's Closet Board serve a three year term. Thank you to all who serve our church family and our Lord Jesus Christ by giving of their time and talent.

ALL ST. JOHN'S BOARDS

As we head into July and board chair people change, many of the boards will have changes in their appointed membership also. Please let the office know any of the changes in your boards and any vacancies that exist. This helps us keep our lists up to date.

WHO ARE THE LEADERS IN YOUR CHURCH THAT YOU CAN CALL UPON?

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the congregation along with our Elders are sincerely happy that you are an important part of our family. There are many Bible Classes, services, and fellowship organizations that would more than welcome your involvement. We encourage you to take a leadership role and help us in our goal to win souls for Christ.

We want you to feel at home here and really know it as YOUR church and that we are here and available to help at any time, If ever you have a question or concern, please don't hesitate to call your Chairman, Vice-Chairman, or Elder. We are more than willing to help.

Presently (beginning July 2026) the Chairman of our congregation is Kory Gerbick, and his phone number is 815-757-9120. Vice Chairman of our congregation is Don Bamberg and his phone number is 815-291-8080. Following is the list of our Elders and the members that they have been assigned alphabetically.

A-B	Craig Kroeger	765-491-8489
C-D	Kevin Kelter	815-266-2425
E-G	Jon Werkheiser	815-238-9521
H	Dave Thompson	708-710-9762
I-K	Brett Richardson	815-275-6637
L-M	Donny Fox	815-821-5353
N-P	Tom Bannon	573-822-9010
Q-S	Rob Cobine	815-590-3566
T-U	Jeff Jones	815-275-6681
V-Z	Mike Rothschadl	815-297-2490

SHUT-INS: We visit with our shut ins both in their home or in local facilities. Would you please pray about becoming a part of this ministry? We rotate and each volunteer's turn comes up about once every other month. Please contact the church office if you have any questions. If you have a heart for our shut-ins and would like to get to know them a little better and brighten their day with a visit, please consider joining our team.



SIMPLY GIVING - Simply Giving is a great way to give your regular offerings to St. John's. Your regular offering can be electronically transferred eliminating the need for you to write checks and you'll never forget your offering. It is safe and protects you. The Board of Finance will record your offerings for your IRS records the same as they do now. To join those at St. John's who are already a part of the Simply Giving family, give Michelle a call and she will get you set up. It's a great way to "bring the best of the first fruits...to the house of the Lord your God." Exodus 23:19. You can also set up your own electronic giving by credit card by going either to the church web site and click on "donate to our church" or the Universal Church Directory App on your phone and click on "Online Giving".

LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS TO DRIVE PEOPLE TO APPOINTMENTS

We are looking for volunteers who would be willing to drive people who need a ride for doctor appointments. Typically, the appointments are in Lena, Freeport, or Monroe. You can use the church van or your personal vehicle. Please let the office know if we can add your name to the list. Your help is very much appreciated!!



DID YOU KNOW??? Whether you are gone for vacation or unable to make it to Church for service, you can still participate in worship each weekend and/or whenever it's convenient for you! Each service is LIVE STREAMED and then is available in the RECORDED SERVICES section on our website HOME PAGE (stjohnslena.org). You can also WATCH the CROSS TALK message each day from our website or on our Facebook Page (St John's Lena). Please stay connected!



FROM THE BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP

-an excerpt from an article from the Presbyterian Outlook, by Farley Lord & Christian Peele

Many churches in the United States, from mainline to evangelical and beyond, host a Stewardship Sunday every year. Usually in the fall, Stewardship Sunday typically signifies that a congregation's stewardship

season is underway. The day often includes a series of elements that most churchgoers have come to know well: testimonials during worship from church members who tithe, one brave sermon on money based on a Scripture that includes the phrase "gave her last mite," "cheerful giver" or "rich young ruler" and an afternoon all-church meeting about the budget. While nothing about Stewardship Sundays is inherently bad, the catch is around what they (and the approach they so often represent) say about the real meaning of stewardship. Personal testimony is inspiring. Talking about money is a critical part of Christian community. Budgets are necessary planning tools. But were you to attend a "stewardship" service, you'd likely leave with the impression that stewardship is mostly the same as fundraising and describes an event or campaign that happens once a year, involves giving envelopes and a pledge drive and is designed for the purpose of asking congregants to help offset church expenses.

That's problematic because the core of stewardship isn't money. It's love. Stewardship isn't an event or campaign. It's a spiritual practice.

Of course, stewarding financial resources is part of stewardship. But to practice Christian stewardship and be moved by it is to consider how we shepherd our whole lives – through word and habit, and with God and each other – to be expressions of gospel love in the world. The challenge of Jesus is nothing less than to question every system in which we take comfort that is not love. A holy practice of stewardship helps us see our dependence on those systems and slowly release our grip on their handles. Christ's gospel calls for an alternative way of being in the world that places love at the center — not money, power, validation, possessions, popularity or even security.

When the value of everything we thought we needed changes, we become free to do things we simply couldn't do while we were carrying the heavy weights of the economies we're so used to. In love, we feel unweighted enough to share our resources with abandon; speak truth to power without worry for consequence; stand with the foreigner who is knocked down by oppressive systems; proclaim that all human beings are worthy just because God created them; and lay down our lives for causes of justice.

Exploring Christian stewardship within a congregational setting, then, involves inviting members of the community into an ongoing spiritual practice of self-giving that supports a release from every system that is not love. The spiritual practice of stewardship forms the

way we see the world and ourselves within it as people of faith. It also hones each virtue muscle on Paul's list of spiritual fruits: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control — in addition to generosity and gratitude. It calls us to steward every part of who we are, not just money, for love's sake.

The following is a list of current needs at the Veteran's Footlocker:
(Stock is Very Low)

Paper Towels	Shave Cream & Razors
Toilet Paper	Peanut Butter & Jelly
Deoderant	Dish Soap
Laundry Soap	Jello & Pudding
Liquid Hand Soap	Cans of Tuna/Chicken/Ham

We are also getting a lot of requests for Gas and/or Food cards to use.

As an FYI at this time, we are not accepting clothing due to fact our shelves are currently full. I plan on doing a fall/winter switch to spring/summer at that time I will have a better idea about what is needed.

Donations can be brought to the Lena American Legion Home on Saturdays from 10:00 to 11:00 at 316 W. Main St., Lena. Donations are greatly appreciated. This list is immediate needs; however other items will always be accepted. Questions call 815-369-4684 or 815-233-5284; vetsvan@stephensoncountyl.gov

CHURCH DIRECTORY APP

If you have not downloaded the Universal Church Directory App yet, it's never too late. Maybe you didn't get your picture taken for it in 2024? You can still be included in the directory by emailing your family or individual photo to office@stjohnslena.org and your photo will be submitted in the online directory. Everyone can change/update their photos as well by the same method. Download *My UCD* from your favorite app store. Once you've downloaded the app to your device, insert the unique identifier code that was emailed to you. If you missed that email, just email or call the church office and we'll resend the code. It takes only a couple of minutes to have access to church services, livestream, crosstalks, a Bible, giving options and the whole church directory at your fingertips. Do it today!

MY FRIEND'S CLOSET



Thank you to all of our volunteers who work so faithfully at the thrift store. Currently, we have some needs for volunteers. We could sure use your help!. Presently, we could use someone as a floater on Fridays primarily to help with bagging and putting things away. Then 1 or 2 more

people in the back room on Monday and Tuesday mornings would be another blessing. Please contact Chris in the church office if you find your can help at these times.



THE CHURCH GROUNDS

We've had several people working very hard at keeping up our church grounds this Spring and Summer and making them beautiful. These people wish to remain anonymous, but we appreciate their time and talents—from mowing and trimming the lawn, spraying for

weeds and dandelions, planting the flower beds, trimming the shrubs, sowing grass seed, repairing damage done by the snowplow. These folks are awesome and much appreciated. Eight acres is a lot to keep up with, so if you see these folks doing their thing—stop and say, "Thank You!"



THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER

Do you have just a little bit of free time to help the Friendship Center with their current staffing needs? We have a little bit of everything available for you to serve. We need a bus driver, a van driver, a bus aide, and an RN to round out our staffing needs. The bus aide position is a volunteer position but the rest are all paid positions. If you'd like to know more about these opportunities,

please call Denise or Jenny at the Friendship Center (815-369-2690) or Michelle at the church office. You don't have to take a shift every day to help. But a shift or two per week would really help us out.



BIRTHS

Nick and Rose Leiendecker are great grandparents again to Amelia Jane Downs, born 6/16/26. Parent's are Jenna and Zach Downs. Grandparents are Jerad & Michelle Bennett, great great grandma is Ursie Broge.

Caregiver's Support Group (sponsored by the Friendship Center)

Please join us for our next Caregiver's Support Group meetings on **Tuesdays, July 14th**, and **August 11th** at 1:00 PM at St. John's Lutheran Church.

Our Caregiver's Support Group's goal is to provide emotional support, information, and re-sources to anyone who is a caregiver. If you know of anyone in this role, please share this

information with them. You may be their only outlet to find out about this much needed support system. If you need someone to help watch your loved one, so that you can attend our meeting, contact The Friendship Center at 815-369-2690 and ask for Jenny or Denise. Please join us on the **2nd Tuesdays each month at 1:00 PM at St. John's Lutheran Church.**



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD (OCC): August is just around the corner and that means it's shoebox time! Samaritan's Purse collects shoeboxes filled with toys and other fun items and delivers them to children around the world in partnership with local churches. Each gift is an opportunity for the Gospel to transform the life of a child, a family, and a community. Since

2012, our congregation has filled and shipped 3,000+ shoe boxes to countries such as Ukraine, Namibia, Madagascar, Togo, Jamaica, Peru, Zambia and Malawi. Leading up to National Collection Week in November, we will be collecting specific donations each month. We are looking for small gifts to fill shoeboxes for both boys and girls ages 10-14 years old. In the month of August we are asking for donations of school/art supplies including: SMALL notebooks, crayons, markers, solar calculators, pens, pencils with sharpeners, colored pencils, small coloring books, scissors, rulers and stickers. If you wish to donate monetarily, it costs \$10 to ship each box and such money may also be used to buy additional items. Starting in August, supply donations may be dropped off near the church office in the gift box and monetary donations at the church office or in the offering labeled "OCC"! We thank you in advance for your continued support! If you have any questions, please contact Lindsay Bader.

DID YOU KNOW???- Whether you are gone for vacation or unable to make it to Church for service, you can still participate in worship each weekend and/or whenever it's convenient for you! Each service is LIVE STREAMED and then is available in the RECORDED SERVICES section on our website HOME PAGE (stjohnslena.org). You can also WATCH the CROSS TALK message each day from our website or on our Facebook Page (St John's Lena). Please stay connected!



REMEMBERING OUR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Our college students have been busy this summer. Some are working part-time jobs, some are traveling abroad, some are teaching our youth at the park programs and day camps--so many things they get involved with. School is not much of a break for some that are taking online classes, getting certified. The list is endless with what our college students are doing.

The summer is going fast, and we want to be ready when they are signed up for classes and heading back in the fall. We will continue to collect care package items, so that we can continue to wish them well, encourage them, and will miss having them around. You can help us do that. The goal is to send encouraging notes and care packages on a regular basis. There is a collection container in the Narthex. If you would be so kind, the next time you are out shopping, add a little extra to share with our college students. This will be an ongoing project for the school year so all seasonal items will be appreciated. Remember it should be easy to ship. Gift cards are especially welcomed. Below is a list of suggestions:

Goldfish
Life Savers
Reese's
Cheetos
Gum
Pringles

Candy
Beef Sticks
Cookies
Mentos
M&M's
Peanuts

Gift Cards—McDonald's, Starbuck's, Subway, Amazon, and the likes.

Packets that just need water added like "to-go" drinks, mac & cheese, Ramen noodles. Cheese and cracker packets, Individual packets of just about anything!!!

If you have any questions, please talk to Brenda Offermann or Fawn Nolan. Thank you in advance!



FROM SADDLE CREEK GARDEN IN LANARK

We would like to warmly invite you and your congregation to visit our Mustard Field Faith Experience here at Straddle Creek Gardens. Rather than charging admission or requiring wristbands this year, we are opening the Mustard Field Faith Experience to everyone free of charge during our scheduled hours. Donations will be gratefully accepted to help offset the costs of seed, equipment, maintenance, and the many expenses that come with farming, but they are absolutely not required. More than anything, we simply want this space to be available to everyone. We can't wait to share it

with you. Bring a friend, encourage those who may need a moment of peace, or share this invitation with your congregation. With gratitude, Straddle Creek Garden 25269 Locust Road, Lanark IL 61046. Contact Darrin 815-821-9462 or Lindsay 636-896-6359 with any questions or to set up a group experience. We also welcome any Men's, Women's or Youth groups to reach out to schedule a private time.