

Surprise, Surprise!

Part of me always enjoys this time of year. Many news and media outlets publish a "look back at 2025" list of some sort that highlights some of the year's biggest events and news stories in the last 12 months. I don't know if you have followed any such stories, but I noticed a theme among them. Many of these top stories came as a surprise, when unexpected things happened.

Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost's election as Pope Leo XIV. The fact that we had a new pope is not necessarily surprising, but the big surprise is that there were very few who expected the new resident of Vatican City to call the United States his home.

A Contentious Oval Office Encounter. On February 28, President Donald Trump and Vice President Vance publicly criticized Ukrainian President Zelensky, ending the meeting abruptly and leaving a crucial minerals deal unsigned.

Los Angeles Wildfires. In January, wildfires swept across Los Angeles County, burning nearly 50,000 acres and forcing mass evacuations. There aren't many that would envision such a populated area suffering losses like this one.

The Texas Flooding. Devastating flash floods swept through parts of Texas in early July 2025, following intense rainfall over the Fourth of July weekend. The disaster resulted in more than 120 deaths, with more than 150 adults and children still reported missing in the aftermath.

Other surprises occurred this year. In sports, the Philadelphia Eagles surprisingly dominated the Super Bowl against the Kansas City Chiefs, and we saw the blockbuster trades of Luke Dončić (NBA) and Micah Parsons (NFL). In pop culture, we saw the surprising emergence of things like Labubu, KPop Demon Hunters, and 6/7.

As I looked at this list, it reminded me of the surprises in Scripture. One theme throughout the Bible, as in 2025, is that unexpected things happen to people. This theme is especially prominent in the Gospel

according to Luke. Just look at some of the key parts of Mary's famous song, the Magnificat, in Luke 1:

- Proud people are scattered in their thoughts (v. 51)
- Mighty people on thrones are brought down (v. 52)
- Humble people are exalted (v. 52)
- Hungry people are filled (v. 53)
- Rich people leave empty-handed (v. 53)

This song was a preview for some of the other themes and stories we know so well from Luke, many of them with elements of surprise:

- It was a surprise that our Savior was born in a tiny town in a feeding trough (Luke 2)
- It was a surprise to see that a Samaritan helped the stranger who was beaten and left for dead (Luke 10)
- It was a surprise to see the Prodigal Son's father embrace his son with open arms (Luke 15)
- It was a surprise to see Jesus welcome and eat with a tax collector like Zacchaeus (Luke 17)

Most importantly, though, we are the beneficiaries of such a surprise. We are sinful people who have not even come close to doing everything that God has set for us. And yet the greatest surprise of all is that God still loves us. God surprises us by sending Jesus to save us. We are the beneficiaries of being surprised by the Great Exchange when our sins are swapped out for Jesus' perfect righteousness. God surprises us by giving us WAY more than what we could ask for or deserve with all of the things we have been given in our lives, PLUS the hope of an eternal life in heaven!

It really is surprising when you think about it, isn't it?

—Pastor Gimbel

Note: A version of this article first appeared in the January 2017 edition of the Koinonia.



"Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14

Dani Richardson
Preschool Director
& Lead Teacher

Rebecca Nutter
Assistant Director
& Extended Care

Parent Reviews of Our Preschool

Having recently relocated to the area from a small rural town I was hesitant of where to send Callie for preschool. As a raised Lutheran, a Christian education and environment was very important to me. Holy Cross Lutheran School came highly recommended. From touring the school to present day, all of the staff have gone above and beyond! Your patience, positive attitudes, caring staff, and attentiveness has not gone unnoticed! Since starting preschool Callie's language skills have blossomed, she loves singing about Jesus and talks constantly about friends and staff! As a parent there is no greater feeling than knowing your child is safe, well cared for and shown love while they are with others. I am thankful for Holy Cross! ~ Johnna Dennis

If you are looking for a preschool for your child, we would highly recommend Holy Cross Preschool! We have sent two of our children and plan to send our youngest when she is ready for preschool. We are even considering their three-year-old program for earlier development opportunities. I love knowing my child is at a Christ-centered school and learning about the love of God and our savior Jesus while learning curriculum necessary to be kindergarten ready. My children and I love their teachers; they go above and beyond! To be part of a school that is fun, organized, secure, has easy communication, and shares extra ordinary care for my child is a blessing. I also love that they are active in the community and share info of events that are happening within the community. Thank you, Holy Cross Preschool, for all you do! It's a no-brainer for us to recommend others to send their children to this preschool!~ Rachel Klaus

I'm so thankful for the little ways my daughter is being introduced to Scripture. One of my absolute favorite moments is walking her into school and hearing her point to the statue of the two kids reading together and say, "Those two kids are reading the Bible." It's such a sweet reminder of how her heart is already drawn to God and how excited she is to notice those things on her own. Moments like that mean a lot to me as a dad.
~ Matt Dennis



"Candy Cane Christmas Program"

December was a busy month with Candy Cane Christmas program and Happy Birthday, baby Jesus' parties. The children worked hard on their turn-taking skills, playing games and making gifts for their families.

In class we discussed, if you could give Jesus one gift, what would it be? Some of the answers were mittens, a blanket, a toy, birthday cupcake, or a dump truck. The answers they gave were not our focus, but to open-up a discussion that Jesus is the ultimate gift of eternal life. He came in the simplest and humblest of wrappings to save us from our sins. The preschoolers enjoyed hiding "the Elves Jingle, Jangle and Elfie" in the church offices in December!



As we shift our focus to January's winter unit, each child will practice writing first and or last names independently and use their fine motor skills to cut-out a snowman and discuss which animals hibernate.

Our enrollment for 2026-2027 preschool classes is open! If you any questions, please Contact Dani Richardson at drichardson@hcross.com or 636-272-4505 Ext. 106.

Monthly Music Minute

A series in which the music director shares some thoughts about the music coming up in church this month

On a Sunday morning while we're singing a hymn, you may have heard something that sounds a bit like jingle bells ringing in the back of the organ. I've gotten a couple questions about that: what is that sound, and why does the organ make it? I thought it might be helpful to explain those bells, called the **zimbelstern**.

The word "zimbelstern" literally translates to "cymbal-star," named because zimbelsterns were traditionally made in the shape of a star with small bells at each point. The zimbelstern is an organ setting that, when engaged, causes the star to rotate, producing a continuous tinkling sound. This is different from most other organ stops, which only sound when you are actively holding the key down. The zimbelstern operates instead on an on-off switch; that way, it will sound even while the organist is playing other things.

If it is star-shaped, the zimbelstern is often visible on the exterior of the organ case; when it is not visible, but instead placed out of sight with the other pipes (like ours at Holy Cross), it may or may not have a star shape. See the pictures included with the article to see both a star-shaped and a non-star-shaped zimbelstern.

To operate, the star or wheel is turned, either manually or automatically. The bells are either rotated and struck by stationary clappers mounted around the star; or, if the bells are stationary, a rotating device in the center strikes the bells. You may have seen a child of the zimbelstern in a popular Christmas table decoration where candles turn a windmill which strikes small cymbals.

As the zimbelstern has been in existence for hundreds of years, over time some traditions and practices for using the zimbelstern have developed in liturgical contexts. These largely stem from the fact that the bells tend to bring to

mind images of angels or images of heaven, celestial things, and things from above.

So, it has become a standard practice to use the zimbelstern while singing things that might join us with the choirs of angels in heaven.

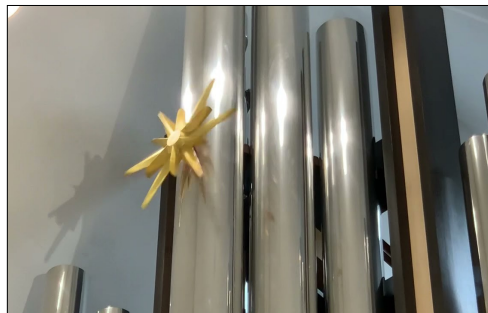
Take, for instance, the Sanctus. When we sing the Sanctus, we are singing the very words that the cherubim and seraphim sing in Isaiah chapter 6. We are transported to the banquet hall of heaven in the Lord's Supper. That is why the pastor says "Therefore with angels and archangels..." Since we're singing with the angels, we use the zimbelstern.

Or take, for instance, doxological stanzas — you know, those verses that we stand for with the triangle by them. If you remember the words of the doxology, we sing "Praise Him above, ye heavenly host" — that is, praise Him, all you angels. In praising the Trinity we join again singing with the angels, acknowledging God for who He is, and so we use the zimbelstern.

Since the zimbelstern is usually added to hymns of great triumph and joy, another practice that some organists will follow is to omit its use, even during the Sanctus or doxological stanzas, during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. Think of it like the organist omitting his "Alleluia" from worship until Easter, withholding fullest praise until those great festivals.

It's important to remember that these uses of the zimbelstern are not law but tradition; as such, just like with any church tradition, we are free to include more use of the zimbelstern or less. It really doesn't matter much in the grand scheme of things, but, like many of our liturgical practices, hearing the zimbelstern can be a useful tool in helping us focus more intently on what is truly happening in worship.

— David Gilson



Meet Your Elder

A series in which members of the Board of Elders introduce themselves and share some thoughts

Greetings and God's peace to all. I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and that this new year will be filled with many blessings. Having been newly elected to the Board of Elders as the chairman, I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself and share some of my hopes and goals for Holy Cross and for all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ.



I was born in St. Charles, raised in Foristell, lived for a brief time over the river (please don't hold that against me), and currently reside in O'Fallon. I graduated from Wentzville High School in 2001 and attended St. Charles Community College and Mizzou before receiving a BA in Christian Ministry Studies from Lindenwood University. I have done post-graduate work on a Master's of Divinity at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis; I hope to complete that work one day.

I grew up at Immanuel Lutheran in Wentzville and transferred to Holy Cross in 2012 alongside my parents, Ed and Karen, and my sister Liz. I met my wife Trudy (nee Aston) as part of a Bible study group, and we were married at Holy Cross in December 2023. We have two daughters, Oria (15) and Aleeah (12). I have been fortunate to serve Christ's Church at Holy Cross in many ways, from singing in the choir to chairing a call committee to anything else I am 'volun-told.' And I look forward to serving this congregation as an elder.

Holy Cross is a wonderful church, full of loving and supportive people. We have been exceedingly gracious in our giving, both financially and prayerfully, to many programs and organizations and those in need. I hope that we continue to grow in outreach and engagement to our community, promoting myriad opportunities for all people to hear the Word of God and experience His love through our loving service. At Holy Cross, God abundantly offers His gifts to us all. I pray that we can continue to offer opportunities for everyone to increase in discipleship. Bible studies, servant events, mutual support for each other, and the like are some keys to a thriving congregation. And finally, I hope that all of our members find a way to serve the Church. Besides being included in the command to love others, service to the Church offers a means for us to enrich our connections to each other,

Thank you for taking the time to read this short message. Please remember that I am available anytime you have a question or concern about our church or want to chat about life, faith, worship, or anything on your heart.

In Christ,
Brian Belter
314-608-2534, call or text
bebelter82@gmail.com

INSTALLATION RITE for all Newly-Elected and Incumbent CHURCH OFFICERS, COUNCIL BOARD MEMBERS, ELDERS, as well as Officers of Auxiliary Groups (LWML and others) will take place

January 3, 2026, at all services.

If you are a recently elected official or an incumbent, attend the service of your choice. Please participate in the installation rite.



**American
Red Cross
Blood
Drive**

Save a Life, Give Blood

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026
10AM TO 3PM**

**PLEASE VISIT RedCrossBlood.org and enter:
HolyCrossLC to schedule an appointment
HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH GYM
8945 VETERANS MEMORIAL PARKWAY,
O'FALLON, MO**

Hope Seeds Packing for January

Holy Cross is not packing seeds on our regular first Thursday of January since it is New Year's Day. You are invited to join the Immanuel Wentzville crew at The



Boulevard Senior Living the following Thurs., Jan. 8, from 9AM to NOON. The address is 110 Perry Cate Blvd, Wentzville. You will need to sign in at the desk on the right as you enter the building then take the elevator to the left of the front door to the third floor. The packing room is across the hall from the elevator. Please call Darlene Birk at 314-607-2751 with any questions.

Sponsored by Holy Cross Stewardship Board.

JOIN US!

July 10-14, 2026

Visit hcross.com/trip

CREATION MUSEUM

Prepare to believe.

ARK ENCOUNTER®

Hosted by

Holy Cross Lutheran Church in
O'Fallon, MO

Early Bird Closes January 15th



All women of Holy Cross are invited to attend the meetings of either or both Guilds. Join us as we "serve the Lord with gladness" by raising funds for missions at home and around the world.

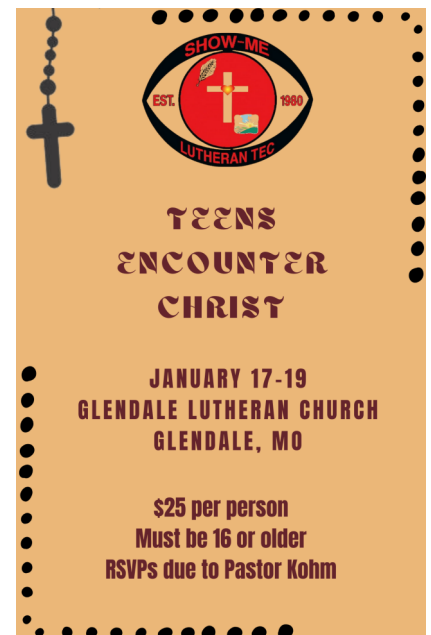
Holy Cross has two LWML groups:
Holy Cross Ladies Guild meets **Fri., Jan. 9, 10AM.**
Grace Evening Guild meets **Tues., Jan., 13, 6PM.**

Lutheran Education Tuition Assistance

Holy Cross Lutheran Church supports families who desire a Lutheran Education. Students who, along with parent(s) or legal guardian(s), are members of Holy Cross are eligible for Tuition assistance. Students must be enrolled in grades K-12 at an LCMS Lutheran school in St. Charles County or in a Concordia University System (LCMS) higher education institution.



Applications are in
the Welcome
Center and must be
turned in by
March 31.



Holy Cross Lutheran Church Calendar of Events – January 2026

Sunday		Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Saturday	
28	8AM Holy Communion 9:30AM Education Hour 10:45AM Holy Communion	29	PRESCHOOL CLOSED CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED	30	PRESCHOOL—CLOSED 8 AM News & Notes Deadline Noon: Church Office Closes	31	PRESCHOOL CLOSED CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: 9AM to Noon	1	JANUARY	2	PRESCHOOL CLOSED CHURCH OFFICE HOURS: 9AM to Noon	3	3PM Holy Communion + Officer Installation
4	Office Installation (all) 8AM Holy Communion 9:30AM Education Hour 10:45AM Holy Communion 1:30pm Elders Meeting	5	Preschool Parent-Teacher Conferences 9:30 AM TOPS 11AM Line Dancing	6	PRESCHOOL RESUMES 9AM Preschool Chapel 10AM Women's Bible Study 12:30PM Staff Meeting 6PM Missions & Stewardship Boards	7	9AM Preschool Chapel 9:30AM Adult Bible Class 6PM Beginning Bell Choir 6PM Children's Choir 6:30PM Confirmation, Midweek, LYF 6:45PM Adult Choir	8	Circuit MEETINGS 8AM News & Notes Deadline 6:30PM 20s&30s&40s Bible Class	9	10am Ladies Guild	10	9AM Undecorating the Church from Christmas 9AM Church Game Day 3PM Holy Communion
11	8AM Holy Communion 9:30AM Adult Bible Class 10:45AM Holy Communion	12	9:30 AM TOPS 11AM Line Dancing 6pm Executive Board 6:30PM Handbells 7:30PM Council Meeting	13	9AM Preschool Chapel 9am Ladies Guild Quilting 10AM Women's Bible Study 12:30PM Staff Meeting 6PM Grace Guild 6:30PM Adult Bible Class	14	6:30AM Men's Breakfast & Bible Study 9AM Preschool Chapel 9:30AM Adult Bible Class 6PM Beginning Bell Choir 6PM Children's Choir 6:30PM Confirmation, Midweek, LYF 6:45PM Adult Choir	15	8AM News & Notes Deadline 10AM American Red Cross Blood Drive 6:30PM 20s&30s&40s Bible Class	16	Koinonia Deadline	17	3PM Holy Communion TECH (Jan 17-19)
18	8AM Holy Communion 9:30AM Education Hour 9:30AM Midweek Teacher Training (Sanctuary) 10:45AM Holy Communion	19	PRESCHOOL CLOSED <i>Koinonia</i> Mailing 9:30 AM TOPS 11AM Line Dancing	20	9AM Preschool Chapel 9am Ladies Guild Quilting 10AM Women's Bible Study 12:30PM Staff Meeting 6:30PM Bds of Ed & Youth	21	9AM Preschool Chapel 9:30AM Adult Bible Class 6PM Beginning Bell Choir 6PM Children's Choir 6:30PM Confirmation, Midweek, LYF 6:45PM Adult Choir	22	8AM News & Notes Deadline PS: Mom's Day PARTY (GYM) 6:30PM 20s&30s&40s Bible Class	23	Koinonia Production PS: Mom's Day PARTY (GYM)	24	3PM Holy Communion
25	8AM Holy Communion 9:30AM Education Hour 10:45AM Holy Communion	26	<i>Koinonia Mailing</i> 9:30 AM TOPS 11AM Line Dancing 6:30PM Handbells	27	8 AM News & Notes Deadline 9AM Ladies Guild Quilting 10AM Women's Bible Study 6:30PM Adult Bible Class	28	9AM Preschool Chapel 9:30AM Adult Bible Class 6PM Beginning Bell Choir 6PM Children's Choir 6:30PM Confirmation, Midweek, LYF 6:45PM Adult Choir	29	6:30PM 20s&30s&40s Bible Class	30		31	3PM Holy Communion
PRESCHOOL RECESS TIMES		9:30AM—9:50AM 1:30PM—1:50PM		9:10-9:30AM		11-11:20AM 1:30-1:50PM		9:10-9:30AM		9:30AM—9:50AM 1:30PM—1:50PM			

January Celebrations 2026

The Lord will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

Happy Birthday! ... and Many More!

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1: Gracie Niemeyer, Bev Smith,
Michael Wade | McNiff, Diane Palombi, Wayne
Wiese | Vesper |
| 3: Lisa Byers | 12: Alexa Berjer, Ellie Berjer, Owen
Berjer, Peggy Gallagher, Laura
Gimbel, Lizzie Johansmann,
Esther Legoute, Dorothy
Morrison (95) | 21: Karen Gaglio, Shelby Morgan,
Tracey Schuler, Sandra Semler |
| 4: Loretta Essmyer, Judith Kirby | 13: Aurora Edison | 22: Luciano Chinnici, Michelle
Dunajcik, David Sutliff |
| 5: Karen Belter, Don Grzina | 14: Maverick Bartlett, Iris Hackbarth | 23: Carla Addison, Jaidyn Benson,
Aiden Claxton, Tidus Willis |
| 6: Earl Dietz | 15: Dixie Booth, David Darst | 24: Elaine Howard |
| 7: Marilyn Benassi, Anna Koepke,
Karin Nieman, Randy Sagez,
Lacey Sumski, Mark Ziolk | 16: Cooper Dunajcik, Barbara
Parson | 25: Greg Bonney, Justin Haffer |
| 8: Diane Gade, Laurie Heizmann,
Denise Lackey | 17: Susan Bollinger, Chris Gaglio | 26: Jim Boyd, Camden Danchus,
Terry Hardy, Debra Korte |
| 9: Lovisa Davison | 18: Dylan Crider, Don Otto, Michael | 27: Cheryl Landgraf, Robert
Piazza, Carla Wiese |
| 10: Levi Bowers, Christian Eaton | | 29: Paula Hein, Nancy Plesia |
| 11: Madalyn Bartlett, Bentley | | |

Baptism Anniversaries: God's Blessings to you!

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1: Rachel Bauer, Carolyn
Bertram, Jerry Bradley, Paul
Helvey, Liane Higgins, Valerie
Schnefke, Charles
Wardenburg, Ernestine Wilson | 12: Aleeah Ray | 22: Diana Snyder |
| 2: Lydia Smith | 14: Greg Emerick, Jared Klootwyk,
Justin Klootwyk | 23: Jacob Drilling, Chase
Markham, Alyssa Parks |
| 3: Laura Irvin | 16: Doris Coots | 24: Alli Smith |
| 8: Terry Amos | 17: Julie Northrup | 25: Eric Polashek |
| 11: Eve Dafler, Emma Rheinecker | 18: Anna DeMent | 27: Susan Haywood |
| | 19: Shirley Amos | 29: Aiden Claxton, Laura Gimbel |
| | 20: Don Otto, Sarah Schnoor,
Mark Ziolk | 31: Riley May |

Wedding Anniversaries!

- 3: Vickie & Quinton Glasstetter (11)
- 4: Sal & Barbara Benigno (57)
- 4: Mike & Dawn Kahler (51)
- 8: Mark & Darlene Drilling (43)
- 11: Bill & Pam Beck (48)
- 19: Paul & Jennifer Goris (19)
- 25: Carl & Kay Hardman (57)
- 25: John & Linda Jackson (62)
- 27: Ron & Linda Kettler (58)
- 29: Don & Bridget Grzina (56)
- 30: Bev & Charles Smith (10)

AMERICAN RED CROSS BLOOD DRIVE at Holy Cross on
Thursday, January 15, from 10AM to 3PM in the gym.

Visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter: HolyCrossLC to



UNDECORATE

the church

**January 10,
2026**

(NEW DATE)

9AM

Bring the family!

Installation of Officers will be held for the Church
leadership on Jan. 3-4 at all services. This will include
current and newly elected officers, board members,
elders as well as officers of auxiliary groups such as
Altar Guild, Ladies Guild, and Grace Guild.

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
8945 Veterans Memorial Parkway
O'Fallon, MO 63366
Address Service Requested

STAMP

JANUARY 2026



Put Address Label Here

Holy Cross Lutheran Church: 1960 ~ 2025

Holy Cross Lutheran Church & Preschool

8945 Veterans Memorial Pkwy
O'Fallon, MO 63366
(636) 272-4505
www.hcross.com
secretary@hcross.com

Rev. Andrew J. Gimbel
Rev. Jason P. Kohm
Pastoral Team

Charity Smith
Director Christian Education

David Gilson
Director of Music

Dani Richardson
Preschool Director

Joyce Niewald
Church Secretary

GROW YOUR FAITH THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Preschool (weekdays) for 3s & 4s. Extended Care available.

Sunday School for ages 3 through High School —Sundays, 9:30AM
and **Little Lambs** (under 3s with a parent)

Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class: 9:30AM in the GYM

BASICS: For those who want to join the Lutheran Church
New Member Orientation(formerly Transfer for Lutherans)
Call the office for next dates.

Women's Bible Study: Tuesdays at 10AM, RMS 1&2

Adult Bible Class: 2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 6:30PM, RMS 1&2

Men's Breakfast & Bible Study: January 14, 6:30AM

Adult Bible Class: Wednesdays at 9:30 AM, GYM

Confirmation (grades 6-8); MidWeek Classes (grades PreK-5)
— see Wednesday night schedule

High School Wednesdays, *see calendar*

20s & 30s Bible Study: Thursdays, 6:30PM, Rm 1&2