

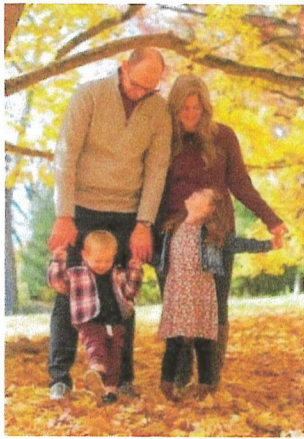
Happy 2025!

It is so hard to believe that January 2025 is here already! Time is ticking away and seems to be accelerating a wee bit faster each year. That's probably just the perspective of us old folks. We will both turn 65 this year but retirement for us is far off. At least that's what we hope. We do feel our age sometimes, especially in the cold months. One of us doesn't like to be cold, and the other thrives in the cold. We bet you can figure out which one likes which. 😊 We haven't found "retirement" from ministry in the Bible except when talking about the Levitical priests and their priestly duties. But we also know physical limitations can change things.

We have had four Awana missionaries retire recently which leaves some open territories in the United States. God is calling several new missionary couples and individuals to pursue the role, and we are excited to see where they end up serving. So, we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who must step away from the full-time duties of missionary work knowing that their service has made an impact. Time is an interesting thing God created for man's "benefit", and yet we are all slaves of the clock at times. Of course, we know all time is ticking toward Christ's return and time is running out.

Seven new Awana clubs are looking to start up in January. It is unusual for clubs to start in January but not impossible. Please pray we can help them get off to a great start. We love what we do! Our calendar is filled with new club training and club visits. We will also head to southern Arizona for the Journey Summit high school youth event in March. We enjoy seeing all the teens, their parents, and their leaders. It is a jam-packed few days and we appreciate being at Summit each year. We were delighted to be able to celebrate Christmas with our three oldest children. The Wisconsin crew: Joy, Tom, Julia (15), Emily (12), Sarah (9), and Andrew (6) joined us this year along with the Castle Rock crew: Jon, Kara, Liberty, (9) Mason, (6) Nolan (4), and Oliver (2), and part of the Chicago crew: Jenna! Yes, that's eight of our eleven grandchildren all together. It was a wonderful and crazy few days and a great time was had by all, especially us!





Chad, Jaella,  
Piper, and Strider

Karsten, Jillian,  
and Ella Mae



What's new with the rest of the Chicagoland crew?

Ella Mae Smith was born to our daughter Jillian and her husband Karsten on September 19<sup>th</sup>. She is the spitting image of her dad, a dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty and we are smitten once again. Joe was able to meet her for the first time during Thanksgiving week when we visited them in Chicago. They stayed home this year and enjoyed their first Christmas as a family of three.

We were blessed with being able to cook and serve Thanksgiving dinner to 18 students at Wheaton College with our daughter, Jaella, her husband Chad and their two children Piper (5) and Strider (2). What a great day of celebrating all there is to be thankful for! They also stayed home for Christmas, and we flew there on December 27<sup>th</sup> to babysit while Jaella and Chad fly to New York where he officiated for a wedding, and they celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Jill's Mom, Patricia Zepp, went home to heaven on January 16<sup>th</sup> after a very brief two hours of hospice care. She was ready and we rejoice that she is no longer in pain, breathing easily, and enjoying heaven with her Savior and Heavenly Father!

We look forward to what God is going to do this year to expand His church around the world. He's always working even when we don't see it. We are often contacted by folks interested in starting the Awana ministry in the church they attend. God is the one who does the calling when a church begins Awana. It's always through someone passionate about reaching children with the Gospel and engaging them in lifelong discipleship. What a great calling! Thank you for the part you have in reaching families for Christ! Hopefully we will see some of you in 2025.

In Christ alone,

Joe and Jill Cook

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