



The Messenger

February 2024

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Dear children of God gathered as St. Mark's Lutheran Church,

Grace and peace to you.

The convergence of Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day on February 14, 2024, creates a unique and meaningful intersection of two significant events for Christians. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a period of reflection, penance, and spiritual preparation leading up to Easter. Simultaneously, Valentine's Day traditionally celebrates love and affection.

This unique alignment allows us to link the solemnity of Ash Wednesday with the theme of Agape love (Divine Love)—selfless, unconditional, and beyond romantic feelings. Agape love goes beyond familial bonds, involving a choice to serve others selflessly. It is a clear sign of salvation, involving emotion and action, and is boundless and unconditional. As Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season of self-examination and spiritual growth, the focus on self-reflection aligns with cultivating Agape love, emphasizing compassion and goodwill toward others.

The coexistence of Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day encourages us to integrate our spiritual journey with expressions of love and kindness. The blend of reflection and love becomes a powerful reminder that love, in its purest form, is not limited to romantic relationships but extends to a broader, unconditional love of God for humanity. This convergence encourages us to deepen our spiritual bonds and practice Agape love by extending kindness, forgiveness, and compassion to our neighbor during this reflective time.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras, Ph.D.



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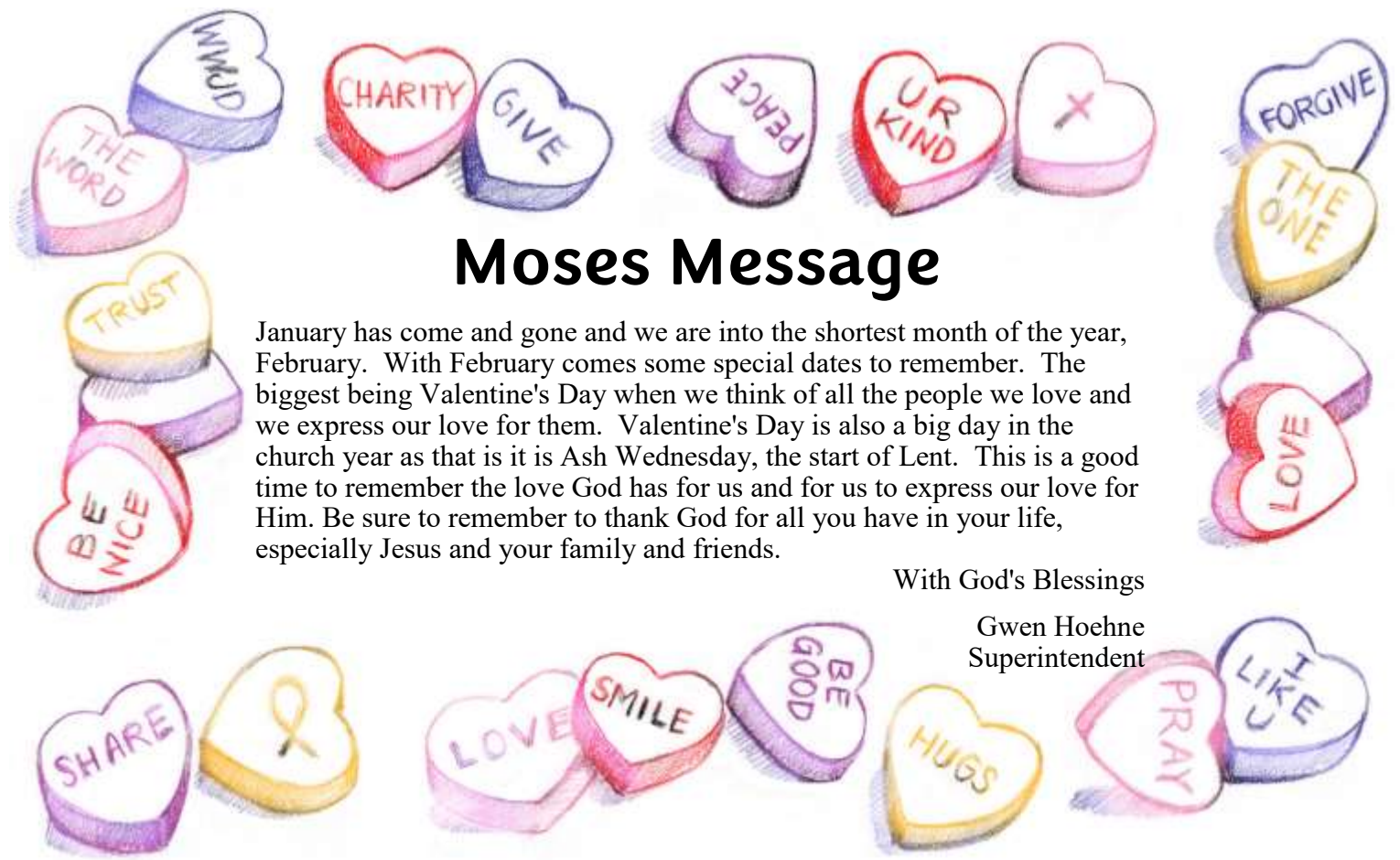
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Moses Message

January has come and gone and we are into the shortest month of the year, February. With February comes some special dates to remember. The biggest being Valentine's Day when we think of all the people we love and we express our love for them. Valentine's Day is also a big day in the church year as that is it is Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent. This is a good time to remember the love God has for us and for us to express our love for Him. Be sure to remember to thank God for all you have in your life, especially Jesus and your family and friends.

With God's Blessings

Gwen Hoehne
Superintendent

Card Ministry Starting at St. Mark's

Our Connections Ministry Team is going to start a card ministry next month. Here is how it will work:

On the second Sunday of each month, a couple of "Thinking of You" cards will be on a table in the narthex. Please sign them and offer a greeting of your own if you like, and the Connections Team will be sure to get them mailed to our homebound members.

What a great way to let our members know that even if they are not in worship with us, we are still thinking of them.

If you would like to send a greeting on your own, there is a list of homebound members and their addresses on the shelf in the narthex, along with some cards if you want to use them.

Our Social Ministry team continues to send cards to members who have been ill or in the hospital. Thank you, all, for showing that we care!



*St. Marks
Cares*



The Food Pantry ebbs and flows. Sometimes very slow and sometimes we're swamped. We just do the best we can to anticipate what will happen on any given Wednesday. During the month of December we had 38 people come to get food for 94 family members. We do the best we can to fulfil their needs, We appreciate all your help and they are very appreciative with their goods. We are always in need of dish, laundry and bar soap, and peanut butter and jam. Thank you.—Karen Jordan

Celebrating Lent at St. Mark's—2024

Lent comes early this year. Ash Wednesday is just a little more than a week away on February 14th. Here are the plans for Lent at St. Mark's.



Lent Study 2024: ELCA World Hunger

Whether you opt for personal Lenten devotion or join a group study led by Dawn Jones on Sunday mornings, you are encouraged to engage in this Lenten season. The focal point is the exploration of people's encounters with God, drawing inspiration from the prophet Isaiah's reflections on God's unexpected and remarkable deeds. The theme, rooted in Isaiah 64:3, shifts the perception of these deeds from dramatic events to the everyday actions of Christian communities meeting the needs of neighbors amid shared struggles. As a season of journeying, Lent parallels the Hebrews' pursuit of the Promised Land, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and his march to the cross at Calvary. The journey, marked by both individual and collective pain, grief, hope, and trust, becomes an opportunity to reflect on encountering God in experiences of reconciliation, transfiguration, crucifixion, restoration, and resurrection.

Throughout this Lenten journey, stories from communities supported by ELCA World Hunger serve as guideposts, prompting deeper reflection on the baptismal covenant's call to strive for justice and peace in the face of rising hunger and entrenched post-pandemic poverty.

A copy of the study and a Lenten calendar will be available on a table in the fellowship hall.

Lenten Services Schedule

All the services at St. Mark's will commence at 6:30 pm

Lenten Theme—Busy: Reconnecting with an Unhurried God

This Lenten series encourages a shift in perspective from "giving up" during the season to "making room." It emphasizes the cost of busyness and the need to reconnect with an unhurried God. The theme highlights the importance of self-care to sustain the work of caring for others amidst the fast-paced and intense nature of modern life. The series invites individuals to engage in practices such as making room, clearing out, slowing down, and prioritizing to achieve holistic lives. Here is the schedule:

Worship Schedule

Wednesday, February 14, 2024, On Ash Wednesday, two services are scheduled. The first service will commence at **12:00 pm at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church**, where multiple pastors will lead the service and administer ashes. Subsequently, the second service will be held **at our church**, commencing at **6:30 pm**.

Wednesday, February 21, 2024, “**Matthew 11:28-30--The Right Tempo**” with Rev. Niveen Sarras

Wednesday, February 28, 2024, “**Psalm 23--Preparing a Table**” with Rev. Jon Strasman

Wednesday, March 6, 2024, “**Luke 12:29-34--Living Light**” with Dr. Jean Memken

Wednesday, March 13, 2024, “**Luke 10:38-42--Tuning In**” with Rev. Amy Engebose

Wednesday, March 20, 2024, “**Ecclesiastes 3:1-13-- A Time for Every Matter**” with Rev. Niveen Sarras

Thursday, March 28, 2024, Maundy Thursday. We will opt for an Agape Meal instead of a Seder meal. The Agape Meal, a simpler alternative to the Seder Meal, will feature the customary Holy Communion and the ritual washing of feet/hands during the service.

Friday, March 29, 2024, Ecumenical Good Friday at Our Savior at 12:00 pm and 6:30 pm at St. Mark's.

ST. MARK'S
CHURCH COUNCIL MINUTES
January 18, 2024

Present: Laurie Olson, Ryan Blank, Kim Wallmuller, Jenny Case, Dawn Jones, Pastor Niveen, and Pennie Linna
Excused: Jason Blank

Call to Order: Pennie called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

Devotions: Dawn Jones, February – Pastor Niveen

Approval of Minutes: Minutes from December 21, 2023. **MSC to accept the minutes Sherri Denney/Dawn Jones.**

Thank you notes: Thank you to Pat Westfall for delivering water to Pastor. Thank you to everyone who went out in the snow and cold to do the work of the church.

Financial Report: Laurie Olson

Highlights of the end of year financial report: We had high expenses for December (Synod benevolence payment, two Pastoral salaries hitting the accounting books in December to reflect a full 12 months of payments, software support payment, and three months of Pastoral auto expenses), which ends the year at (\$2,951.15). Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$172,936.28 which includes \$61,192.81 allocated to designated accounts and \$111,743.47 for current operating. Additionally, \$156,462.58 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,039.52 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$54,74.98 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. **MSC to accept Financials as reported by Sherri Denney/Kim Wallmuller.**

Pastor's Report ~ Submitted by Pastor Niveen Sarras

Beloved Church Council Members,

Grace and peace be with you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is my joy to share with you the highlights of our recent pastoral activities, guided by the grace of God.

On Sunday, December 24, 2023, I had the privilege of leading two sacred services. The morning service marked the fourth Sunday of Advent, a time of anticipation and reflection as we awaited the arrival of our Lord. Later that day, at 5:00 pm, we gathered for the Christmas Eve service, rejoicing in the birth of our Savior. In both services, we embraced the presence of God and celebrated the hope and joy found in Christ.

One of the essential aspects of pastoral care is visiting those who may be unable to join us physically. I am grateful to have been able to share the Holy Communion with our homebound and sick members, bringing the warmth of fellowship and the nourishment of the Eucharist to their homes.

The confirmation class has resumed, and currently, we are delving into the topic, "Seven Important Bible Teachings Every Lutheran Should Know." This journey of faith formation is a sacred endeavor as we seek to deepen our understanding of the foundational teachings that guide our Lutheran identity.

Additionally, I am humbled to be part of a four-part series on intersectionality, graciously sponsored by The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Beginning on January 7, 2024, this course promises to explore the intricate concept of intersectionality, fostering a deeper awareness of the diverse intersections that shape our lives and communities.

On Tuesday, January 16, 2024, I engaged in a series of significant meetings. The initial session involved discussions with ELCA pastors in Neenah, focusing on coordinating joint services for Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and planning Round Robin services during Lent. Subsequently, I convened with our music and worship ministry team in a dedicated session, where we delved into detailed conversations about the arrangements for Ash Wednesday and the forthcoming Lenten Services.

On Thursday, January 18, 2023, I had the privilege of attending a conference meeting for pastors at Christus Lutheran Church in Greenville during the Appleton conference. Together, we worshiped and gained insights into the unique celebration of Christmas in Japan, broadening our perspectives and deepening our unity as the body of Christ.



As we journey together in faith, let us continue to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that our efforts may bear fruit for the glory of God and the well-being of our community. May the love of Christ be our constant companion, guiding and sustaining us in all endeavors.

In Christ's service,

Pastor Niveen

Ministry Team Reports:

Property Ministry Team—January 8, 2024 ~ Submitted by Jason Blank

Bruce Grundman
Phyllis Ziemke
Ginny Schieck
Jason Blank

1. We discussed parking lot snow removal as it relates to the area next to us and the St. Mark's apartments sharing some of the blacktop, they had some concern that we were going to plow their small chunk, we confirmed with them that we would continue doing so.
2. We set the 2024 budget.
3. The light that shines on the front steeple is now working again, Cummings Electric completed the work.
4. We will be contacting an electrician to get a quote on having a light added to the St. Marks sign that is now on the north side of the building illuminated.
5. There was a short discussion on our furnace maintenance and checking for proper operation.
We have decided that due to the high cost of replacement that for now we will be having a piece of stainless steel added on the lower face of the south hallway exit door to create a new sealing surface so cold air does not come in during the winter months.

Youth Ministry Team—Submitted by Sherri Denney

In attendance: Sherri Denney, Nancy Rose, Lily Anderson, JT Rose and Brayden Messing

Ideas discussed for the next 3 months: a lock-in, to be done in the same format as the one that was planned last autumn. Last one was cancelled due to lack of interest. We needed at least 2 people to sign up.

Which also brings us to another thing that was discussed at the meeting: it was agreed that it was a good idea to connect with the 3 other Neenah ELCA churches (Gloria Dei, St. Paul's, and Our Savior's). We did this at VBS and will for NYG. I received a call today from Patty Koplitz, in charge of the youth ministry at Our Savior's, and she was having a lock-in on 3/1/24. This would be the same hours as the last lock-in with early leave at midnight. Another one activity was what she called Spam Night. It was a night for the younger youth 2-5 to pizza and a movie, with older youth being leaders,

The reason for not having it in February is the Youth activities that can be found in the ELCA Newsletter.

We also discussed finances in the group and reimbursements,

Meeting will be the 2nd Sunday of the month at 9:20 am. Next meeting will be 2/11/24 @ 9:20. (Depending on the weather) This will give parents time to meet and Pastor Niveen to address any needs.

Christian Education Ministry Team—January 10, 2024 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

Present: Jenny Case, Joy Case, Pastor Niveen, and Gwen Hoehne

Opening: Pastor opened with prayer.



Pat Wenzel
Ellen LaMarche
Sarah L.
Doug Bedor
Mary & Ron Zalewski
Richie Sczerzen
Walt Ziemke
Paul Girod
Jordan
Sherri Denney's
neighbor, Kathy
and mom, Sara Forrest
Sherry Winter
Tom & Ellen Krempien
Donna Joachim
Pastor Niveen's brother,
Odeh Sarras

1. Christmas Program recap—Program went pretty well. We liked doing it in the church instead of the Fellowship Hall.
2. Lesson Changes—Will not Fruit of the Spirit, but Jonah, Moses, Easter and Jesus Calms the Sea for lessons for the rest of this session.
3. Lent—Hand out to students—Possible “Cross My Heart” for Ash Wednesday? Will not hand out “Cross My Heart.” We will look into what we want to give the students for the Lenten Season.
4. Palm Sunday—Processional?? Students will process in with the Palms on Palm Sunday. Pastor has requested that the students sing in church that day. Worked with Judy and found a songs called “Shout Hosanna.” A good peppy song! Will ask Erin, Nancy, Ginny, and Joy to help get the students ready to process in and to sing their song. I will not be here.
5. Easter—Easter Bags?? Will order the “Christ is Risen Alleluia” for the bags. We will fill bags for Easter to give to students and to give out after Easter service to kids.
6. First Communion—No Fifth Grader
7. Other Business—The students will be getting envelopes for the rest of this Sunday School year. We went over the Christian Education Ministry Committee Description and deleted one item (Number 5-A and added to Item 2-C to “If needed, hold in-service events for teachers in all areas of teaching.

Worship & Music Ministry Team—January 16, 2024 ~ Submitted by Judy Hellman

The Worship & Music Ministry Team met on Tuesday and helped plan out our Lenten Service Schedule, along with other business. A detailed report of their activities will be in the February packet. - JM

Finance & Stewardship Ministry Team—January 16, 2024 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

Members Present: Treasurer Laurie Olson, Pennie Linna, Financial Secretary Pat Westphal, and Mary Jane Hartley
 Members Absent: Pastor Niveen, Fern Fuhmann and Evie Peterson

Opened with a Prayer.

Reviewed current account balances through end of December 2023 (year end). December’s giving to current monthly expenses was \$21,450.13 and expenses were \$22,135.92. The difference was -\$685.79. It was noted that the Synod benevolence quarterly commitment was paid in December, along with the financial software support bill. Additionally, two months of Pastoral salary/benefits hit the month of December’s accounting books (to reflect accurately the twelves of salary/benefits). These three expenses were noted as the increase in expenses for the month of December. 2023 ended with a deficit of (\$2,951.15); 2023 spending was \$176,368.99 and giving towards monthly expenses was \$173,417.84.

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$172,936.28 which includes \$61,192.81 allocated to designated accounts and \$111,743.47 for current operating. Additionally, \$156,462.58 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,039.52 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$54,74.98 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

Audits for the 2021 & 2022 years were completed on December 31, 2023. The following audit findings and notes for future audits:

- Reference invoice number, if available, on checks.
- The Audit Team will pull twelve checks for review (one per/month) for future audits.
- On the revenue (income) side, the Audit Team will review one deposit per/quarter.
- January 31 – August 31, 2022, check numbers vs. Quickbooks numbers were not consistent, due to receiving duplicate check numbers. However, a system to manage the numbers was developed by the Treasurer and Audit Team found those all to be in order.

Gift cards purchased through RaiseRight (SCRIP) by Ministry Teams should be processed as a journal entry or transfer in the accounting system and not through the check writing system.

The 2023 audit will be arranged in the first quarter of 2024.

The team reviewed the proposed 2024 budget, which will be presented to the church council on January 18 and then reviewed by the congregation on January 28 and voted on at the February 4 annual meeting.

It was noted that Pastor’s health insurance numbers are a bit confusing on what the online calculator estimates and the actual for 2023. Laurie has a call into the synod for assistance and clarification.

Pat Westphal and Laurie Olson are working on reports for the annual meeting packet. Laurie will put together a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the finances (2023 & proposed 2024) for the budget review and annual meetings.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer at 7:20 pm.

MSC to approve Ministry Team Reports Kim Wallmuller/Ryan Blank.

Unfinished Business:

Live Steaming update: We have a new laptop and WIFI extender for the sacristy. (Thank you to Jonathan for your help with this). Laurie has asked our computer support person for some areas to start trouble shooting the Facebook Live Stream. We met in February to continue working on the use of the camera in the sanctuary ceiling and streaming software on laptop in sacristy.

National Youth Gathering Update: They will be doing a soup fundraiser starting soon. Soup after fellowship and soup purchase "to go." The three people going on the trip will be helping with the soup fundraiser, along with Christian Ed Ministry Team.

New Business Items:

Approve the 2024 Budget.

Laurie explained there was a miscalculation at the synod level for Pastor's health care/benefits. The synod has arranged with Portico, for us to be compensated for the amounts 2024. (Without this mistake we would be on track for 2023 budget). It was noted that insurance was an increased budget item in 2024, along with Pastoral compensation.

MSC to send the budget to the congregation for the annual meeting Sherri Denney/Kim Wallmueller.

Approve Missions of the Month Ballot: Pennie reviewed the ballot. **MSC to approve the ballot Dawn Jones/Ryan Blank.** Sherri and Pastor Niveen agreed to be ballot counters at the annual meeting.

Review the format for the January 28 Budget meeting and February 4 Annual Meeting (& Potluck):

We will need volunteers to hand out budget proposal and ballots. Laurie will share a power point on the budget.

February 4: Pennie will run the meeting; Dawn will be taking minutes. We will need someone to run the microphone to speakers, all hands will be needed to help with the meal. We will need a head count of voting members. Pennie will be preparing and showing a review of the year through pictures/music at the annual meeting.

Thank you, Sherri Denney, for serving on the council for the past 3 years.

MSC to adjourn at 7:45 and end with the Lord's Prayer Kim Wallmuller/Sherri Denney.

Respectfully submitted,
Dawn Jones, Secretary

The Hills are Alive ...

St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, 473 7th St. in Menasha is presenting "The Sound of Music" on the following dates:

Friday, March 1—7:00 pm
Saturday, March 2—7:00 pm
Sunday, March 3—2:00 pm
Friday, March 8—7:00 pm
Saturday, March 9—7:00 pm
Sunday, March 10—2:00 pm

Free Will Offering



- This is my 9th show!!
- Freewill offering benefits 2 charities/St. Timothy's!
- I suggest arriving early for best seats!
- Hope you come and enjoy the show!!

Sincerely,
Jenny Case



Our Mission of the Month for February's is **ELCA World Hunger**, tackling global hunger through emergency aid, sustainable development, community-based agriculture, and policy advocacy.

More than 820 million people - that's about 11 percent of people in our world today - are hungry.



As members of the ELCA, we are called to respond. We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work.

Working with and through local congregation, in the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Lutheran churches overseas and other partners, **ELCA World Hunger** is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need. From health clinics to microloans, water wells to animal husbandry, community meals to advocacy, your gifts to ELCA

World Hunger make it possible for the ELCA to respond, supporting sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty. It empowers communities through partnerships, reflecting a Christian commitment to social justice and compassion. If you are interested in donating to this worthwhile mission, please check the "Mission of the Month" column on your giving envelope or your electronic giving app.



Some Good Programs at Linwood House

Linwood House at 425 N. Linwood Avenue in Appleton is offering a couple of programs this month you might be interested in attending.

Keeping Your Mind Sharp—Thursday, February 15 at 2:00 pm
Learn ways you can keep your mind sharp as you age!

Funeral Preplanning—Thursday, February 29 at 2:00 pm
Learn the basics of funeral pre-planning so your wishes will be carried out and your family won't be burdened.

Linwood House will hold the following worship services in Linwood Commons:

- Ash Wednesday, February 14
- Maundy Thursday, March 28
- Good Friday, March 29

Services are at 10:30 am. Pastor Barb Girod will preside.



Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters	Acolyte
February 4	Pat Westphal	Emily Gauthier	Joe & Linda Rehorst Samantha Rose	Joy Case Jenny Case	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Fuhrmann	Sophia Kersten
February 11	Sherri Denney	Domi Christofilis	John & Laurie Olson	LaVerne Arndt Rose Cermak	Jane Arps Ellen LaMarche Emil Leppiaho Pat Westphal	J. T. Rose
February 14 Ash Wednesday			Wanda Webster Pat Westphal	Ginny Schieck Judy Fowler		Usher
February 18	Confirmand	Confirmand	The Blank Family	Doug Hesser Tom Wenzel	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebestead Renie Sebestead	Lily Anderson
February 21 Lenten Service				Betty Linna Pennie Linna		Usher
February 25	Confirmand	Confirmand	Nancy Maslow Evie Peterson	Emil Leppiaho Phyllis Ziemke	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Judy Olson Linda Anderson	Leland Tharp
February 28 Lenten Service				John & Laurie Olson		Usher

Communion Assistants:

February 4—Gwen Hoehne, Pennie Linna, Dom Christofilis, Emily Gauthier, and Ginny Schieck

January 21—Confirmands

Altar Guild: Gwen Hoehne and Linda Anderson

Anyone for BINGO?

The Connections Ministry Team is hosting an afternoon of BINGO here at St. Mark's in our Fellowship Hall, starting at 1:00 pm.

Snacks will be provided.

Lots of prizes for the winners!

All are welcome. Come and invite your friends for a fun afternoon of fellowship here at St. Mark's!





Here's an invitation from our Friends at other Neenah ELCA Churches:

Two Opportunities to get out and play some games:

Monday, February 5 at Our Savior's
1:00-2:30 pm

Retirees and Friends are meeting.

Tuesday, February 13 at Gloria Dei
1:00 –2:30 pm

Fun, Friends, and Fellowship! This is a new group that is starting up this month. Bring along a game you'd like to play or come and have fun learning a new game. Everyone is welcome so come, bring a friend, your spouse, or anyone who'd like to get out for a fun afternoon.. Treats will be served.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

140 S. Green Bay Road

Neenah, WI 54956

