



The Messenger

April 2024

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Resurrection's Impact: Understanding Life, Suffering, and Pain

Easter is a sacred time when we rejoice in Christ's victory over death, sin, and Satan. It celebrates life prevailing over death, hope conquering despair, and light dispelling darkness. This glorious event shapes our understanding of life's trials, sickness, and suffering.

The resurrection holds profound significance for us who are grappling with struggles. It serves as a beacon of hope, even in the bleakest moments. Christ's resurrection teaches us that amidst our trials, there exists the potential for transformation and new beginnings. It assures us that our current difficulties need not determine our future, instilling a sense of assurance for brighter days ahead.

Belief in resurrection offers spiritual solace and empowerment. It confirms the presence of God in our lives, which provides comfort and guidance during times of turmoil. Furthermore, the resurrection narrative invites us to confront challenges with courage and resilience knowing that we are not alone in fighting our challenges.

The resurrection teaches us that our Lord is not confined by death, and as long as Christ lives, we can face uncertainty with hope and courage, knowing that the Lord stands by our side, offering guidance and support every step of the way.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras



Moses Message

Happy Spring!!! Thank you, Sunday School students, for doing an excellent job on Palm Sunday. You waved those palms really well and did an excellent job singing your song. I am very proud of you. We only have three more times to meet for Sunday School with the last day being May 5th. We will be busy those 3 times finishing up the year. On April 21st, we will be doing something special. It will be lots of fun!!! We are starting to plan for Vacation Bible School which will be at St. Paul's this year in August. Watch for more information to come out about it. Enjoy your Spring break from school and see you on April 7th.

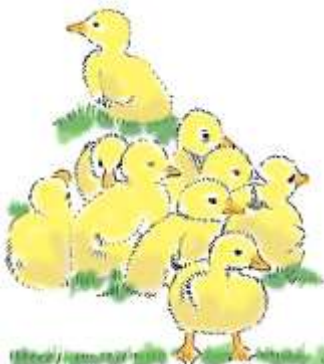
BIRTHDAYS

Avery Hill 4-15 Tyler Joachim 4-27

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL!!!

With God's Blessings,

Gwen Hoehne
Superintendent





The Food Pantry numbers vary every week, but are still quite low. We have a hard time trying to estimate how many will be in on any one week. It's hard to predict, especially with milk and fresh fruit but we do the best we can. In February we had 48 families shopping for 138 people. We are making a difference in many lives. and are very appreciative of all your generosity. We can always use peanut butter, jam, Spam, and sweetened cereal. Thank you.

—Karen Jordan

Food Pantry Receives Grant

We were informed last week that our Food Pantry received a \$4,000 grant from the Lindalee MacDonald Family Foundation to support childhood hunger initiatives in the Neenah and Menasha areas. These funds can be used to purchase food from Feeding America. What a blessing!



A Note of Thanks!

The St. Mark's Church Council wishes to thank all who assisted with Lent this year. That includes: the Worship and Music Ministry Team, the Confirmation Students for assisting Pastor Niveen with Sunday Worship Services and the Agape Meal on Maundy Thursday, the meal providers/workers for the midweek services, Judy Hellman for volunteering her piano skills, Pastor Niveen, our guest Pastors and Jean Memken for leading us with the *Busy: Reconnecting with an Unhurried God* Lenten series, midweek ushers, for all who have been attending (both in-person and online), those who provided our Lenten and Easter decorations in the sanctuary, narthex, and Fellowship Hall, all who donated Easter altar flowers, Jean for all the extra office work, and Ginny for keeping God's house clean and tidy throughout the forty-day season of penitence and preparation.

PEACE

Laurie Olson

To Those Who Bring Small Children to Church: (A Facebook Post from one of our members)

There you are at church. Your baby or toddler is restless. Perhaps even a little boisterous. You try to silence them, and nothing. You try to pacify them with food or toys, and nothing. Eventually, you resort to the last thing you want to do: you pick them up, and before a watching audience, you make the march out of the church. All the while, you're a little embarrassed, maybe a little frustrated, too. You might even think to yourself, "There's no point in coming to church. I get nothing out of it because I have to constantly care for my kid." I want you – mothers and/or fathers – to know just how encouraging you are to so many. The elderly woman who often feels alone beams with a smile at the sign of you wrestling with your little one. She's been there before. She knows how hard it can be, but she smiles because to hear that brings back precious memories. Seeing young parents and their small children brightens her day; she may have just received bad news about her health but seeing the vitality of young ones removes – if but for a moment – her fears. The older man who always seems to be grouchy notices you, too. He's always talking about how children in this day have no respect or sense of goodness. But he sees you – a young family, in church every week. Like clockwork, he can depend on the sight of you and your young family. You give him hope that maybe the Church isn't doomed after all, because there are still young parents who love God enough to bring their restless children to church.

Bring your children to church! If we don't hear crying, the church is dying. As hard as it might be for you as a parent who's half-asleep, keep on doing what you're doing. You are an encouragement, and you're starting off your children's lives as you should.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Finance & Stewardship
Ministry Team Presents:

Stewards Of God's Creation

In creation, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth and all that is in it. God is the owner; we are stewards. Creation is our first stewardship. Here are opportunities to learn more and participate in activities to steward and care for the earth, so as to sustain it for future generations.

Throughout the Month of April:

- 1 MONDAY, APRIL 15 from 1-3 PM in Fellowship Hall: "National Parks Adventure" documentary followed by a recycling video & interactive games (BINGO). Join the Connections Ministry Team for this spectacular national parks video through ultimate off-trail adventures into our nation's wilderness. Narrated by Robert Redford. Snacks and drinks provided.
- 2 Sundays in April: Adult Bible Study: Biblical Weather Series followed by a Climate Series by Pat Westphal.
- 3 Sunday, April 21 at 9:00 AM: in Fellowship Hall: Join the Sunday School and Adult Bible Study groups for this multi-generational Planting Seeds Project. Open to all adults and children/youth. Supplies provided.
- 4 OPENING IN APRIL: Seed Library. A library with a variety of vegetable and herb packets will be available for free to grow your garden, save or share with others or our FOOD PANTRY. Watch for the display in the Fellowship Hall.
- 5 Equal Exchange Store (Fair Trade Products) Grand Opening: Selling of coffee, tea, chocolate, and olive oil
- 6 April 21: Earth Day Worship & Tree Planting



Psalm 24:1
The earth is the
Lord's, and
everything in it,
the world, and
all who live in it;



Synod Offering Conference on Church Leadership

All pastors and lay people are invited to the Siebert Foundation's *Inspired to Thrive* Conference on Tuesday, May 14th (8:30am-4:00pm) in Milwaukee. This year's theme is Lutheran Vitality, with speakers on topics such as Fresh Expressions, mental health, financial vitality, lay leadership development, and church revitalization. This learning opportunity comes with no cost to you! However, you must register to attend. You can register for this event at: <https://www.siebertfoundation.org/2024-inspired-to-thrive>. Let the church office know if you plan to attend.

Here is the conference schedule:

8:15-9:00 am	Breakfast and Morning Networking
9:00-9:15 am	Welcome and Introduction
9:15-10:45 am	Keynote Address by Dr. Eliseo Mejia
10:30-10:45 am	Siebert Announcement!
10:45-11:00 am	Break
11:00 am-12:15 pm	Concurrent Breakout sessions
12:15-1:20 pm	Lunch and Roundtable Discussions
1:20-1:30 pm	Break
1:30-2:45 pm	Panel Discussion
2:45-3:00 pm	Closing Remarks
3:00-4:00 pm	Reception



How Much to you Know About Recycling?

To kick off our April Stewardship Emphasis on Ecology, here's a little quiz about recycling. Answers on page 11.

1. True or false: You can recycle prescription medicine plastic containers.
2. True or false: You can recycle pet food bags.
3. True or false: Do NOT crush aluminum cans before you recycle them.



Need a laugh? Linwood House Sponsoring a Program on Laughter as well as Programs on Health and Banking

"Let's Laugh More"
Monday, April 1 at 2:00 pm

Presented by our Wellness Coordinator Yon Abel and our very own in-house humorist Don Coyle. Laughter sometimes really is the best medicine. Laughter can trigger healthy emotional and physical changes in the body. A good sense of humor can lighten our mental burdens and help us connect to others. With such healing power, laughing is a great way to overcome your problems. The best part is that laughter is free!

"Making the Most of Your Doctor's Appointment"
Thursday, April 18 at 2:00 pm

It's easy to feel rushed at a doctor's appointment or unsure of the information and instructions you're given. With a little preparation you can become your own health advocate as our Wellness Coordinator, Yon Abel teaches us how to get the most out of our doctor's visits.

"Banking for Seniors"
Lunch And Learn
Thursday, April 25 at 11:30 am

Join staff members from Nicolet National Bank for this educational lunch. Learn ways to stay safe and avoid scams when taking care of your banking and financial needs. To attend "Banking for Seniors" please RSVP to our Resource Advocate Jean George at Resource.FVLHomes@gmail.com

Linwood Community is a faith based independent living community for persons 62 and over. We serve persons wishing to partake in community living and maintain independence without the work of home maintenance.





ST. MARK'S
 CHURCH COUNCIL MINUTES
 March 21, 2024



Members Present: Pennie Linna, Jason Blank, Dawn Jones, Laurie Olson, Ryan Blank, Kim Wallmuller, Emily Gauthier, and Pastor Niveen

Members Absent: Jenny Case, Jason Blank, and Ryan Blank

Call to Order: Pennie Linna called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Devotions: Emily Gauthier led the devotion. April Devotions—Jenny Case

Presentation on Photo Directory:

Guest: Kathrine Peters from Universal Church Directories. New to this area. In business for over 60 years. In house printing. A variety of styles were shared to preview. They offer an app with photo, contact information, bible, notifications, and messaging. Digital copy to keep up to date and edit as needed. The highlight of all products is photos.

No charge program: 50-60% is typical. Credits for number showing up.

If 50% show up=9credits. Credits can be used for options. No sitting fee. Buy photos if you like. There are a variety of options for use of credits. 16/page, free cover, back, and roster.

Cost of pictures: e.g. 8X10 \$25, No obligations to purchase.

Committee of 3-4, call and notify members and schedule time to come in . Each family will get 1 free 8 X 10 and copy of the directory. Photographer is scheduled 6-8 weeks after contract is signed.

All supplies are shared, sign-up. Anyone can invite others to come in for photos.

Hostess to be on site to greet members on photo day. A church our size will have 2 booking days.

The directory can be updated with new members on the app.

References-they have not had any clients in Wisconsin. References available.

Council discussed the opportunity for a Photo Directory at this time to update our records. Items discussed included: emergency contacts, update addresses, phone numbers, do this without putting a burden on Jean, need for a strong committee. need to learn current system is capacity. The council has agreed to look at this more closely. Set a date for May 7th at 6:30 pm. We will announce to congregation for anyone interested in assisting to attend this meeting. Pastor Niveen will email Katherine with our plans.

Approval of the February 15th Council Minutes. MSC to approve the minutes Pastor Niveen/Dawn Jones.

Thank You's: Thank you to Lenten Meal soup and dessert makers.

Financial Reports: Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of February 2024. February's giving to current monthly expenses was \$13,686 and expenses were \$15,189.43. The difference was -\$1,503.43. Year to date (end of February) giving was \$26,279.85 and expenses were \$23,338.45 with a difference (giving minus spending) of \$2,941.40.

**OUR CHURCH'S
 FINANCIAL
 HEALTH**

**For the month of
 February 2024**

**Given: \$13,636.00
 Spent: \$15,189.43**

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$175,541.16 which includes \$61,282.57 allocated to designated accounts and \$114,258.59 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.

Laurie is working on updating the recording of our investments. We are currently under budget for this time on year. **MSC to accept the Financial Report Dawn Jones/Kim Wallmuller.**



Pastor's Report ~ *Pastor Niveen Sarras*

Dear Members of the Church Council,

I am writing to express my gratitude for the opportunity to serve as your pastor and to provide you with an update on recent ministry activities. Over the past several weeks, I have been deeply engaged in various aspects of ministry, and it is my pleasure to share with you how I have encountered Christ in our congregation and beyond.

One of the highlights of my ministry has been participating in the Mid-week Lenten Round Robin Services and preaching at St. Paul Lutheran Church and Our Savior Lutheran Church. These experiences have allowed me to witness the diversity of God's people and to celebrate the unity we share in Christ.

In preparation for the Lenten season, I had the privilege of meeting twice with the worship and music ministry team on February 19 and March 18. Together, we diligently prepared for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter, seeking to create meaningful worship experiences that would draw our congregation closer to God.

I have also continued to work closely with the confirmation class, guiding them as they lead Sunday worship services. It has been a joy to witness their growth in faith and their willingness to serve the church.

On a more solemn note, I officiated the committal of Lily Mae Dieck on March 10, providing spiritual care and support to her family during their time of grief. I also visited Lily's mother, Abby Rieckmann, at the hospital several times, offering prayers and encouragement to her and her family.

In addition to these pastoral duties, I have been actively involved in our church's outreach efforts. I attended the social ministry team meeting on March 11 to discuss Easter monetary gifts for those in need, and on March 12, I had the privilege of serving food at the community table, where we provided 91 meals.

On March 13, we had the privilege of hosting the Synod staff for an all-day meeting in our Mary Room. They toured our building and learned about the various ministries we carry out here at St. Mark's. They seemed very happy to learn about all that our congregation is doing to serve our Lord here in Neenah.

Furthermore, I participated in the Appleton Conference meeting on March 14 to discuss Lent and Easter preparations. On March 15, I led a virtual devotion for our synod candidacy committee and officiated Marilyn Streck's funeral, offering comfort and hope to her grieving family and friends.

Despite the busyness of preparing for Holy Week and Easter, I made it a priority to visit several homebound members, providing them with spiritual care and reassurance of God's love and presence in their lives.

I must express my deep appreciation to Jean Memken, who has worked tirelessly alongside me in preparing for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Her dedication and support have been invaluable to me, and I am grateful for her partnership in ministry.

As we look forward to Easter Sunday, I am thrilled to share that we will have the joyous occasion of Leighton and Serenity Joachim's baptism, doubling our celebration of Christ's resurrection and the new life we have in him.

In conclusion, I am profoundly grateful for the ways in which I have encountered Christ in my ministry and in the lives of the people I have had the privilege to pastor. It is my prayer that we may continue to grow together in faith, hope, and love as we journey forward in our shared mission as a church.

“Grace be with you all” (1 Timothy 6:21).

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras

MSC to accept the Pastor's Report Emily Gauthier/Kim Wallmuller.



Pat Wenzel
Ellen LaMarche
Sarah L.
Richie Sczerzen
Walt Ziemke
Paul Girod
Doug Bedor
Jordan
Kathy
Sara Forrest
Sherry Winter
Donna Joachim
Odeh Sarras
Christian Dieck & Abby
Rieckmann
Jeri Travis' sister,
Jean Burgess

Ministry Team Reports: the reports were all reviewed.

Property Ministry Team—March 4, 2024 ~ Submitted by Jason Blank

Present: Jason Blank, Phyllis Ziemke, John Olson, Ginny Schieck, Bruce Grundman, and Jeff Tharp

- We received a reimbursement check from the city of Neenah for overcharged stormwater tax.
- We need to look at getting quotes for getting the parking lot repaved.
- The wooden sign that was installed this summer now has a light above it, showing off its beauty.
- The center furnace in the Fellowship hall might need to be repaired, service has been called.
- The garbage disposer in the Mary Room is being replaced.
- We are taking the lawn mowers in for annual service.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—February 18, 2024 ~ Submitted by Judy Hellman

The Worship and Music Ministry Team met on Monday, February 18th. Members attending were Pat Westphal, Mary Jane Hartley, Betty Linna, Joy and Jenny Case, Mary Ellen Tracey, Pastor Niveen and Judy Hellman. Devotions were given by Jenny Case. Mary Jane Hartley volunteered for devotions in March.

Pastor Niveen explained the services for Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday, we will have an Agape meal with Communion, and the washing of feet/hands. The meal will consist of soup, salad, fruit, and sweet breads. On Good Friday at 12:00, there will be an ecumenical service at Our Savior's Lutheran Church. At 6:30 pm, we will have a service at St. Mark's.

We also discussed the license to show videos at our church. This license gives us the right to show videos as part of our worship services, Sunday School, Confirmation classes, and by any ministry team. We agreed to purchase this license.

Palms have been ordered for Palm Sunday from Pick'n Save. There will be a sign-up sheet for those who wish to donate flowers for Easter. Flowers should be brought to church between March 27-29.

All meals for the mid-week Lenten services have been ordered. A thank you card will be sent to those who prepared the meals.

Our next meeting will be Monday, March 18th at 10:30 am.

We closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—March 18, 2024 ~ Submitted by Judy Hellman

The Worship and Music ministry team met on Monday, March 18th. Members attending were Pat Westphal, Mary Jane Hartley, Jenny and Joy Case, Betty Linna, Ardys Seelow, Judy Hellman, Mary Ellen Tracey, and Pastor Niveen.

Devotions were given by Mary Jane Hartley. Mary Ellen Tracey volunteered for devotions in April.

Pastor Niveen outlined the services for Holy Week, which starts the evening of Palm Sunday. The Agape meal will be on Maundy Thursday at 6:30 pm. The meal will be served in three courses. First course will be soup and salad. The second course will be fruit, cheese, and sweet breads. The final course will be the communion bread and wine. The washing of feet/hands will also be part of this service.

The Good Friday service will also be at 6:30 pm. It will consist of a theater reading, veneration of the cross, and the "Seven Last Words Of Jesus" on the cross.

Easter Sunday service will be at 10:00 am. There will be a procession of the Alleluia box, baptism of the Joachim twins, and Holy Communion. Special music will be provided by the Treble Singers.

Mary Ellen Tracey presented the idea of making a contact file for each member in case of an emergency. This will be discussed further in April.

We closed the meeting with the Lord's Prayer.

Christian Education Ministry Team~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

The Christian Education Ministry Team did not meet last month.

Some members will be attending a Planning Meeting for VBS at St Paul Lutheran Church on April 16th.

Social Ministry Team—March 11, 2024 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

Chairman: Karen Jordan

Present: Jane Arps, Phyllis Ziemke, Pat Thompson, Kim Wallmuller, Pastor Niveen, and Gwen Hoehne

Pat Thompson opened with devotions. Pastor Niveen lead us in prayer

- 1) Pastor asked if we could remind the congregation about bringing donations of the first Sunday of the month for the Food Pantry.
- 2) Discussed about giving Gift Cards for Easter. Also, we have a few hams to give to some people that need them.
- 3) Talked about sending cards out - Karen sends to people who are hospitalized. Also on Easter and Christmas to the homebound.

NEXT MEETING APRIL 8, 2024 AT 6:30 pm.

Racial Equity Ministry Team—March 5, 2024 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

Members Present: Pastor Barb, Pat Westphal, Dawn Jones, Mary Jane Hartley, and Laurie Olson

Members Absent: Pastor Niveen and Emily Gauthier

Pastor Barb opened with prayer.

Laurie noted we need to consider the hanging of St. Mark's Land Acknowledgement Statement in a prominent location within the church. A discussion followed on other ideas of where the statement or portions of the statement can be posted. Those ideas included: website, in bulletins and newsletters, on the TV monitor in narthex, on outdoor digital sign, signatures on emails, etc. We will review the statement on our own and come prepared to our April meeting to discuss and finalize scaled down wording, that can be placed on/in the locations noted above.

Pastor Barb brought to the team's attention that the 1st Sunday in May (May 5th) is *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman Day*. Ideas to bring this to the attention of our congregation included placing a note in the bulletins and newsletters, including in May 5th's Prayers of Intercession and on Facebook.

Pastor Barb reviewed her attendance at the *European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice*, conference in Minneapolis, which has been officially changed to *ELCA of White Lutherans for Racial Justice* moving forward. This association involves European descent members of the ELCA and partners of other ethnicities in being a visible and active anti-racist witness for a multicultural church. She noted that they went to the George Floyd Square, listened to personal testimonies on police violence and held discussion on what can be done, including connecting with other synods. We will discuss, at a future meeting, how we can share these resources, that Pastor Barb obtained, with other congregations.

A new book will be added to the Racial Equity Library called *The Stolen Wealth of Slavery* by David Montero. Laurie will order the book and get it cataloged into the cart system.

May 19 (NAKBA): The team discussed logistics of the handing out of the hearts. One idea was to read names of children who have died in Gaza as people come forward to receive a heart. A prayer to be read in the Prayers of Intercession. Pastor Barb will speak with Pastor Niveen on worship service details.

Additionally, the team will be putting together a presentation, during fellowship, on the wall. Pat and Laurie will work on a PowerPoint program for the team's review. It was suggested to use information and graphics from the book *Against the Wall*. Dawn and Mary Jane will work with the Social Ministry Team on fellowship food, since we will also be acknowledging our graduates on May 19.

Pastor Barb talked about getting a table at Synod Assembly, which could be sponsored/presented by the St Mark's Racial Equity Team. Discussed ideas on what would be on/at the table. Will discuss further at our April meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm. Next meeting is Tuesday, April 2 at 6:30 pm.

Connections Ministry Team—March 25, 2024 ~ Submitted by Mary Jane Hartley

Attending: Betty Linna, Sharyn Gawlick, Sandy Mathenia, Jane Arps, Ellen LaMarche, Joy Case, Jenny Case, Mary Jane Hartley, and Linda Anderson.

Things we did in February:

- We sponsored a Bingo afternoon on February 19, 2024 and had over 25 attend. Any thought about this?
- We had a Name Tag Sunday, on February 18, 2024.
- All Fellowship Hours for February were covered.
- Sent our ideas our Ministry Time and Committee Booklet to the Church Council.

New Business:

- Neenah Newspaper in the Worship Directory for one year cost of \$250.00.
- Cards for People We Do Not See Very Often” were signed.
- Decided to send cards to three people on the homebound list each month. They will be available in the narthex on Sunday morning for members to sign and write a greeting.

This is a copy of the insert that we put in the cards:

*Though you are not with us in person, you are in our hearts
and prayers.*

*Your presence is missed,
but your faith strengthens our
community from afar.*

*May Gods love surround you,
and may we soon gather
together again in fellowship.*

With love in Christ,

St. Mark's Church Family

- FELLOWSHIP sign up for April just need one date to cover. Donut Holes are a hit.
- Coffee and candy program ideas?
- Earth Day: movie, craft, Bingo, Word Game, and discussion about recycle in the valley—April 15, 2024 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Thank you all who helped with clean up after Lenten soup suppers on Wednesday and also after Sunday fellowship.

Remember we meet the 4th Monday of the month at 1:00 pm.

Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team—March 19, 2024 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Pastor Niveen

Opened with a Prayer.

Reviewed current account balances through end of February 2024. February's giving to current monthly expenses was \$13,686 and expenses were \$15,189.43. The difference was -\$1,503.43. Year to date (end of February) giving was \$26,279.85 and expenses were \$23,338.45 with a difference (giving minus spending) of \$2,941.40.

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$175,541.16 which includes \$61,282.57 allocated to designated accounts and \$114,258.59 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.

It was reported that the new sanctuary sound system mixer was installed last week, to replace the loaner mixer we have been using since last November. Additionally, a new lavalier mic was purchased for Pastor Niveen and the live streaming system (use of camera in the sanctuary ceiling) is now functioning. Laurie noted that we have \$2,477.21 in a designated account for the mixer expense, which may not be enough. An invoice will be coming in for the mixer, lavalier mic and the time our AV guy spent troubleshooting the live streaming issues. The Stewardship & Finance Team is asking the council to appropriate funds for these upcoming invoices. A final number will not be known until the invoice(s) come in.

The Team was informed of a \$7,395.75 refund from the City of Neenah, for overpayment of storm water and transportation fees. This overpayment was due to the city overcharging us. Their records of our hard surface square footage and linear frontage footage were incorrect for the past twenty years. The Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team is recommending that these funds be allocated to the Technology and Building Fund designated accounts. The amount for the technology account be determined once the invoices are received for the above-mentioned expense with the remainder going into the Building Fund.

Laurie reminded the team that back in the Fall we discussed, as part of our Stewardship program, to do a “Stewards of God’s Creation” in April to correspond with Earth Day. Pat and Laurie met last week to put together a plan for discussion. The Team reviewed the below and thought everything looked great. This information will go into the newsletter, upcoming bulletins and on Facebook.

MONDAY, APRIL 15 from 1-3 PM in Fellowship Hall: "National Parks Adventure" documentary followed by a recycling video & BINGO. Join the Connections Ministry Team for this spectacular national parks video through ultimate off-trail adventures into our nation's wilderness. Narrated by Robert Redford. Snacks and drinks provided.

Sundays in April: Adult Bible Study: Biblical Weather Series followed by a Climate Series by Pat Westphal. Sunday, April 20 at 9:00 AM: in Fellowship Hall: Join the Sunday School and Adult Bible Study groups for this multi-generational Planting Seeds Project. Open to all adults and children/youth. supplies provided.

OPENING IN APRIL: Seed Library. A library with a variety of vegetable and herb packets will be available for free to grow your garden, save or share. Watch for the display in the Fellowship Hall.

Equal Exchange Store (Fair Trade Products) Grand Opening: Selling of coffee, tea, chocolate, and olive oil.

April 21: Earth Day Worship & Tree Planting.

We will also be noting all the things St. Mark’s currently does to be good stewards.

Closed with the Lord’s Prayer at 7:30 pm.

MSC to accept Ministry team reports Dawn Jones/Pastor Niveen.

Unfinished Business:

Live Streaming Update: Laurie shared the sanctuary camera system is up and running with closed caption functioning. The new mixer was installed and a new lavalier mic has been purchased for Pastor Niveen.

National Youth Gathering Update: All trip expenses have been paid, except trip food funds. Youth Gathering Account has \$2,185.64 current balance.

New Business Items:

Church Directory: (see above notes)

May 11 Junk in the Trunk. We will participate in the trunk rummage sale. \$25 per site. Neenah pool parking lot. **MSC to approve participation Laurie Olson/Emily Gauthier.** It was noted that the Property Team will assist with gathering items for the sale. No personal items will be accepted for the sale – all items will come from the church. Proceeds from the sale have not yet been determined.

City of Neenah Utilities Overpayment Refund: We received a letter and a check from the City of Neenah Utilities. We were overcharged for Stormwater & Transportation Assessment Replacement fees and the city issued an unexpected refund of \$7,395.75. Finance and Stewardship has recommended putting money toward technology and the balance be put in the building fund to go toward the parking lot. **MSC to follow the recommendation from Finance and Stewardship to put the money toward technology and parking lot Dawn Jones/Emily Gauthier.** (Amount towards Technology will be determined when the invoices for the above noted items are received and a balance is determined, since there is \$2,477.21 available for mixer in a designated account.)

Food Pantry: Pastor shared that the food pantry has been awarded a \$4,000.00 grant from The Lindalee MacDonald Family Foundation. The money is set up as a credit at Feeding America.

Adjourn: MSC to adjourn and share the Lord’s Prayer at 8:10 Kim Wallmueller/Laurie Olson.

Next meeting : April 18th, 2024 at 6:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dawn Jones, Secretary





Most of you already know the good work our Food Pantry does for the Neenah community and surrounding communities in the Fox Valley. Every Wednesday morning from 9:00-11:00, the Food Pantry distributes food and other groceries to those in need to stop at that time. But that is not the extent of the work our Food Pantry volunteers do! Almost every Monday, one of the Food Pantry volunteers is at the church to meet the Feeding America truck and accept an order from them. On Tuesday, one or two of the volunteers grocery shop for needed items and perishables like fresh fruit and vegetables. All the food has to be unloaded and put away. On Wednesday morning, not only do our volunteers load up grocery bags for those who stop by, but a couple of volunteers take orders from recipients. Then, there is the paperwork and administrative aspects. Each week orders must be submitted and at the end of each month, statistics must be reported to Feeding America. In all, it is a lot of work, and we are blessed with faithful servants who carry out this ministry every week, in good weather and bad! Please consider a donation to our Food Pantry through "Mission of the Month." Or bring some food, or cleaning and paper products to church on Food Pantry Sunday, the first Sunday of each month!



ESTHER to Present a Program on Immigrants and Their Stories

Journey of Dreams: Stories of Immigration & Hope

April 11th

Lawrence University

Wriston Art Center

613 E College Ave, Appleton

6:00 - 8:00pm Join local community members as they share personal stories about their culture, experiences about coming to America, building a new home, and making new connections.

Jenny Says Thanks

Thank you to the 21-plus St. Mark's friends who attended St. Timothy Lutheran Church Players production of *The Sound of Music*. Your support of us is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Jenny Case



Photo of Tony Claus, Vocal Director, and Jenny Case

Recycling Quiz Answers

1. IT DEPENDS. You can only recycle prescription medicine containers if they are 3 inches or taller. All smaller bottles go in the trash.
2. FALSE. Pet food bags are a composite material and cannot be recycled. Put them in the trash.
3. TRUE. Recycling machines often confuse a crushed aluminum can with wadded up paper. Do not crush soda and beer cans!

Want to know more!
Check out the activities our Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team have planned for April on page 3. Be a good steward of God's creation!



Who are the Arab Christians?

By Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras

April marks the observance of National Arab American Heritage Month, a time dedicated to honoring the vibrant culture and invaluable contributions made by Arab Americans to the United States. For this reason, Rev. Sarras wrote this article.

The West often assumes that Arab Christians were converted from Islam to Christianity by Western missionaries. However, Arab Christians have always existed in the Middle East and enjoyed significant influence in the Arabian Peninsula. It is helpful to discuss Arab Christians by identifying the geography of the Arabian Peninsula.



Arabia, known as Jazīrat Al-‘Arab (“Island of the Arabs”) in Arabic, extends beyond present-day Saudi Arabia. It encompasses the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by the Red Sea to the west, the Gulf of Aden to the south, the Arabian Sea to the southeast, and the Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf (also known as the Arabian Gulf) to the east.

Arabia was inhabited by nomadic Bedouins who engaged in hunting, mercenary work, and trade or raiding for survival. As noted in Acts 2:11, Arab merchants traveled to Palestine for business. Christian tribes such as the Ghassanids, Lakhmids, Banu Taghlip, Banu Tamim, and Nabataeans were spread throughout the peninsula, originating from Yemen and migrating to the Levant after the destruction of the Marib dam in the 6th century BCE. By the 5th century CE, most of these tribes had converted to Christianity. Although Arab Christians in the peninsula spoke and prayed in Arabic, their liturgical and confessional writings were in Syriac.

In 732 CE, Arab forces influenced by Islam conquered the Levant, previously part of the Byzantine Empire, with Greco-Roman culture. Muslims spread their Arabic language with each conquest. The Levant was predominantly inhabited by non-Arab Christians, possibly descendants of various ancient civilizations. Christian communities in the conquered territories spoke Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopian languages. Communities in Damascus and Baghdad were predominantly Arameans, using Aramaic for theology and liturgy, while those in Palestine, Jordan, and Sinai utilized Greek ecclesiastically but Aramaic/Syriac locally. Over time, Christians in the Levant and Egypt gradually became Arabized through the imposition of Arabic. The Melkite Church was the first to adopt Arabic for worship.

In the 8th century CE, Arabized Christian families in the Levant were drawn to Muslim power, leading to conversions to Islam. Christians held high positions and contributed to intellectual life under Muslim rule but faced pressure to convert. For Arab Christians who refused to convert, Muslims imposed a poll tax on them. So, they developed apologetics to defend their faith and translated texts into Arabic. After the Crusades, Muslims imposed harsh policies on Christians, prompting resentment. Arabization accelerated through translation efforts and Islamic influences.

(Continued on page 13)

Who are the Arab Christians?

(Continued from page 12)

The Ottoman Empire's invasion from 1516 to 1917 led to Turkification efforts in the Middle East, prompting Arab nationalism in response to cultural oppression. Arab Christians revived the Arabic language and culture as a response to the oppression but faced challenges in forming a unified Arab identity due to tribalism. Despite differing identities, Islam's influence remains strong among Arab Christians.

In sum, Arabized Christians in the conquered territories became Arabs by imposing the Arabic language on them. In other words, they are not Arabs by ethnic or race bound, but by the Arabic language.

Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in The Shadow of The Mosque* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 9.

Griffith, *The Church in The Shadow of The Mosque*, 8

Ibid., 49

Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 54



Words of Wisdom for April

"The cross is both the symbol of our salvation and the pattern of our lives." —Brennan Manning

"If you are ignorant of God's Word, you will always be ignorant of God's will." —Billy Graham

"Do something you really love in the most adventurous place you can and make sure it helps other people." —Diane Sawyer



Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters	Acolyte
April 7 Holy Humor Sunday	Sherri Denney	LaVerne Arndt	Pennie Linna Betty Linna	Linda Anderson Nancy Bricco	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Fuhrmann	Braydin Messing
April 14	Bruce Grundman	Jenny Case	Nancy Maslow Evie Peterson	The Blank Family	Jane Arps Ellen LaMarche Emil Leppiaho Pat Westphal	Sophia Kersten
April 21	Judy Hellman	Dom Christofilis	John & Laurie Olson	Joy Case Jenny Case	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebstead Renie Sebstead	J.T. Rose
April 28	Jean Memken	Tara Dieck	Joe & Linda Rehorst Samantha Rose	Sherri Denney Jeff Tharp	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Judy Olson Linda Anderson	Lily Anderson

Communion Assistants:

April 7—Chuck Baumbartner, Dom Christofilis, Sherri Denney, Emily Gauthier, and Sharyn Gawlick

April 21—Bruce Grundman, Mary Jane Hartley, and Judy Hellman

The Designs of Lent



We often think of Lent as a rather stark and dreary season of the church year, but this year at St. Mark's, we used design and decoration to help all to remember the reason for Lent—To meditate on our Lord's suffering and death, to repent of our sins for which Christ had to die, and to pray for forgiveness. Many thanks to all who "decorated" for Lent.



St. Mark's Lutheran Church

140 S. Green Bay Road

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