



The Messenger

December 2024

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Neenah, Wisconsin



Hope in the Midst of Uncertainty

Last Wednesday, I was interviewed by the team behind the online website *Unbound: The Intersections of Faith and Justice*, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. In my interview, I focused on understanding Advent in times of uncertainty. One of the key passages I discussed was Isaiah 9:2. I would like to share a summary of my interview with the hope and prayer that it brings hope and comfort to your life.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

In times of uncertainty, it is easy to feel as though we are walking in darkness. Whether due to the weight of personal struggles, global unrest, or the unpredictable seasons of life, darkness can seem overwhelming. The people in Isaiah's time knew this all too well. They lived under the shadow of oppression, feeling lost and abandoned. Yet, Isaiah prophesied of a light that would shine into their darkness—a light that would bring hope, peace, and healing.

This prophecy was not just for the people of Isaiah's day; it speaks to us today, especially in this season of Advent. As we prepare for the coming of Christ, we are reminded that no matter how deep the darkness, the light of Christ shines brighter still. Jesus, the light of the world, entered into the messiness and uncertainty of human life to bring hope to all. His birth in Bethlehem marked the dawning of God's promise fulfilled—the promise that we are never alone in our struggles, and that light will always overcome darkness.

As we are in this season of Advent, we also anticipate that Jesus will intervene in our lives and allow His light to shine in the midst of our uncertainty. He is the One who guides us, comforting us in the darkness and leading us toward hope and peace. His light not only illuminates our path but also fills our hearts, transforming us and the world around us.

If you are facing uncertainty today, know that you are not walking alone. Christ, the light, is with you and your church is walking with you, too. As we wait in hope this Advent season, let us place our trust in the One who promises to guide us through the darkness. May we embrace the light of Christ, letting it fill our hearts with peace and lead us into a future full of hope.

Prayer:

God of light and hope, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, into our world to shine in the darkness. In this season of Advent, help us to remember that no matter how uncertain our circumstances may be, Your light is with us. Guide us through the darkness and fill us with the hope of Jesus' second coming. Amen.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras, Ph.D.



Last Sunday we got to celebrate Phyllis Ziemke's 95th birthday with her family during our fellowship hour. Phyllis and her husband, Walt, are charter members of St. Mark's. God's richest blessings to you, Phyllis! We appreciate all you do for us here at St. Mark's!



And Phyllis' daughter, Deb Martola, sent us the recipe so many of you requested, just in time for your Christmas cookie baking (although these are no-bake cookies!).

Moose Farts*

- (1) can sweetened condensed milk
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1 1/2 c coconut
- 1 1/2 c graham cracker crumbs (plus a little extra for rolling balls in)
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 1/2 c mini chocolate chips

Combine melted butter w/sweetened condensed milk & vanilla Add in the graham cracker crumbs, coconut & chocolate chips.

Chill at least an hour.

Use small melon or meat baller to create balls, and roll in additional graham cracker crumbs Put in covered shallow pan & chill. Best served cold.

*I doubled the recipe for my Moms' party.



Remember, on the first and third Sundays of each month, we offer an opportunity for healing prayers after communion. If you want a special prayer for any illness or condition you are currently experiencing, go to the lounge after taking communion and receive a special healing prayer from Jane Franz, a student of Healing Touch.

Moses Message

December is here! This is a very busy time of the year!! There are school Christmas programs, shopping, baking, decorating, putting up the tree and many other things to do. But we need to remember the "REASON FOR THE SEASON" is a very special baby that was born on Christmas day, "JESUS"!!!

To help celebrate His birth, come to church on Sunday, December 15 at 10:00 A.M. to see how the Sunday School and Confirmation students are celebrating the Savior's birth with "Christmas in the Kitchen".

Reminder to parents and students: Practice on Saturday, December 14th at 10:00 A.M. SHARP!!!

December 15th is the last day of Sunday School for 2024 and we will start again on January 12, 2025!! I wish everyone a very Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!!!

BIRTHDAYS

Josie Parker December 12th

Jesus December 25th

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL!!

PS: If you would like to contribute to the bags we fill for the children, candy, small items, or chips or anything like that, have to the church by Thursday, December 12th. There are 30 gift bags. Thank you!!

With God's Blessings,
Gwen Hoehne, Superintendent



On December 1, we will offer a blessing for the the beautiful hats, scarves, and afghans made by some very generous people. In the coming weeks, we will see that they go to places that can make good use of these items.

On December 8 our service will include the blessing of lap robes, baby blankets, and twin size quilts made by the Wednesday Workshop Group. They have made over 200 blankets that will be given to places like C.O.T.S., Pillars, Father Carr's and Day by Day. All these items will be given to places to give warmth and comfort to those in need.



The Food Pantry has been very busy also. In October, we had 72 families getting food to help feed 235 family members. With all your help we have been able to supply many of their needs. Thank you. At this time we are in need of Hamburger Helper, canned pasta meals, spam and soup, but no creamed soup. Thanks for all your help.—Karen Jordan

Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters	Acolyte
December 1	Confirmand	Confirmand	Tom & Jane Frantz	Linda Anderson Nancy Maslow	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Furhmann	Braydin Messing
December 8	Confirmand	Confirmand	Wanda Webster Pat Westphal	Judy Fowler Ginny Schieck	Jane Arps Ellen LaMarche Emil Leppiaho Pat Westphal	Lily Anderson
December 15	Children's Christmas Program		Chuck Baumgartner Rosemary Cermak	Doug Hesser Jeff Tharp	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebstead Renie Sebstead	Leland Tharp
December 22	Confirmand	Confirmand	Joy Case Jenny Case	John & Laurie Olson	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Linda Anderson	Sophia Kersten
December 24 5:30 pm	Jean Memken	Bruce Grundman	The Blank Family	Pennie Linna Betty Linna		Braydin Messing
December 25 10:00 am	Bruce Grundman	Jonathan Rogers	Jean Memken			
December 29	Jeff Tharp	Jenny Case	Nancy Maslow Evie Peterson	Bruce Grundman Doug Sebstead	Dom Christofflis Dawn Jones Judie Hilliker	Lily Anderson

Communion Assistants:

December 1—Confirmands

December 15—Confirmands

December 24—Chuck Baumgartner, Phyllis Ziemke, Mary Jane Hartley, and Ginny Schieck

December 25—Ginny Schieck, Mary Jane Hartley, Jean Memken, and Bruce Grundman

Final Resting Lots Available



Many years ago, St. Mark's was gifted six lots at *Greenlawn Memorial Park*, 1451 Green Valley Road, Neenah. The Church Council has decided to offer these to our congregation, at no cost. Each lot has a value of approximately \$1,400. A lot can accommodate a full burial or multi cremation burials. The cost of the burial process is not included in the noted value. All costs associated with the burial is the responsibility of the recipient of the lot. Priority will be given to St. Mark's member first and then open to others, for any available lots. The lots will be assigned to the interested individual and will not be transferable.

What do I do, if interested in a lot? St. Mark's members can contact the church office and give name and phone number by January 31, 2025.

How will I know if I will receive a lot? After January 31, 2025, if there is interest from six or less, you will receive a lot assignment. If more than six are interested, six names will be "drawn out of a hat".

What if I'm interested in a lot and not a member of St. Mark's? The church will announce if lots are available after the January 31, 2025 deadline. At that time, non-members can contact the church office with their interest. Lots will then be assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Beginning Tuesday, December 3, 2024, the church office hours will be as follows:

Church Office Hours—Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays—9:00 am—12:30 pm

Pastor Niveen's hours will remain the same.

Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays—9:00 am—3:00 pm

Wednesdays— Writing the sermon from home

We appreciate your understanding and look forward to serving you. If you need assistance outside of these times, please feel free to contact us to make arrangements.



- Your 2025 Ministry Team Budget Requests and Annual Reports are due in the church office by January 1st.
- Watch for an upcoming memo from the Finance & Stewardship Team (placed in your church mailbox).



Sponsored by the St. Mark's Youth Ministry Team

CHRISTMAS
caroling

At the Fox Cities Retirement Village
(Next to Church)

DEC 19 THURSDAY

Meet at church by 6:15 pm & we'll walk over together to sing & deliver cookies to our neighbors. All our children/youth are encouraged to participate. Youth in grades 3 & under must be accompanied by a parent/guardian.

Christmas is Coming!

Here are some important dates to get on your calendar as we get ready to welcome our newborn king!

Advent Theme for Sundays: “How Does a Weary World Rejoice?”



Midweek Advent Worship at St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Three weeks of advent services—Wednesdays, December 4, 11, and 18—at 6:30 pm

The liturgy is the Holden Evening Prayer.

The sermons will be based on the theme: Season's Greetings: Christmas Letters from Those Who Were There

On Wednesday, December 11, following the midweek Advent worship service, we are invited to join St. Paul volunteers in preparing community Christmas baskets.

Christmas Program: Sunday, December 15—“Christmas in the Kitchen”

Come and listen to our Sunday School and Confirmation children tell the Christmas story. Stick around afterwards for a special fellowship and the **Annual Basket Raffle** to benefit Bible Campers and ELCA Good Gifts.



Street of Bethlehem Experience

December 19-22

5:30—9:00 pm

Alliance Church, 2693 W. Grand Chute Blvd., Appleton



Step back in time to experience the ancient town of Bethlehem, immersing yourself in its sights, sounds, and smells. Wander through a bustling marketplace with live animals like camels and donkeys. This interactive event offers a unique, unforgettable way to celebrate the birth of Jesus, bringing history to life in a vibrant, engaging setting.

Pastor Niveen's current plan is to go on Friday, December 20, 2024. If you are interested in going in a group, let us meet at the church parking lot at 5:00 pm.



Christmas Eve—Candlelight Service—Tuesday, December 24—5:30 pm

Holy Communion will be served.

Special Music and lighting candles as we sing “Silent Night”

Christmas Day—Wednesday, December 25—10:00 am

Holy Communion will be served.

A joyful service with carol singing.

Fellowship will follow the service.



Worship with Us This Christmas!

**ST. MARK'S
CHURCH COUNCIL MINUTES
November 21, 2024**

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

Absent: none

Call to Order: Pennie called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm.

Devotions: Jason Blank. December Devotions: Jenny Case

Approval of the October 17, 2024 Council Minutes. MSC to approve the minutes by Kim Wallmuller/Emily Christofilis.

Thank You: Gwen for the Chili cook off donation of the supplies-Laurie, John Olson for the Fish Fry-Pastor. Evie Peterson for her years of service on Stewardship and Finance-Pastor.

Financial Reports: Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of October 2024. October's giving to current monthly expenses were \$13,724.50 giving and expenses were \$14,529.15. The difference was -\$804.65. Year to date (through end of October) giving was \$144,176.36 and expenses were \$140,702.33 with a difference (giving minus spending) of \$3,474.03. The parking lot fund has 46,088.22. We still need about \$14,000.00

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$229,364.23 which includes \$115,128.96 allocated to designated accounts and \$114,235.27 for current operating. Additionally, \$166,642.55 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,055.94 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$56,409.81 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. Increased designated account reflects parking lot replacement giving, including \$30,000 from Ellen LaMarche.

MSC to accept the Financial Report by Jason Blank/Dawn Jones.

Pastor's Report: Pastor shared highlights of the month. Everyone reviewed the notes. Pastor shared she is relieved to have some of her writing completed. We will have midweek Advent services at St Paul's **MSC to accept the Pastor's report By Pastor Niveen/Jason Blank.**

Ministry Team Reports:

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

Members present: Bruce Grundman, Jason Blank, Ginny Schieck, and Phyllis Ziemke

- We continue to plant flowers along the fence.
- We repaired a leaky downspout.
- The bench outside the back door has been repaired.
- Bruce is making a shadow box to display food pantry notifications.
- We are testing the furnaces in the Fellowship Hall to make sure they are all operating correctly.

Worship and Music Ministry Team 1—October 21, 2024 ~ Submitted by Judy Helman

1. Members attending were: Pat Westphal, Joy Case, Jenny Case, Ardys Seelow, Betty Linna, Mary Ellen Tracey, Mary Jane Hartley, Pastor Niveen and Judy Hellman
2. Devotions: October—Betty Linna, November—Pat Westphal



3. Pastor Niveen's Presentation:

- Reformation Sunday—Pastor Barb will preach. People should wear red.
- November 3—Memorial Service for Pastor Chuck and All Saints service. The Bishop will preach. The prelude and postlude will be played by Father Joe Mattern.
- November 10—Veterans Day service. Treble Singers and others will sing the service songs for each branch of the armed forces.
- November 24—Christ the King Sunday
- November 27—Combined Thanksgiving Eve Service at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Eight Neenah churches will participate and there will be a combined choir.

4. Our theme for the upcoming basket raffle is “Wine & Chocolate.”

5. Our next meeting – November 18th at 10:30 am.

6. Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Worship and Music Ministry Team 2—November 18, 2024 ~

Submitted by Judy Helman

The worship and music ministry team met on Monday, November 18th. Attending were Mary Jane Hartley, Mary Ellen Tracey, Joy and Jenny Case, Ardys Seelow, Pat Westphal, Pastor Niveen and Judy Hellman.

Devotions were given by Pat Westphal. Jenny Case volunteered for devotions in December.

Pastor Niveen presented ideas for Advent and Christmas services. The theme for Advent is “How Does A Weary World Rejoice?” A point to emphasis is “to give hope in the midst of darkness.” This theme is for all of December and thru the first week of January.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church has invited us to attend their midweek Advent services on Dec. 4, 11, and 18 at 6:30 pm. The liturgy is the Holden Evening Prayer and the sermon will be based on” Christmas Letters from Those Who Were There.”

Our Christmas Eve service will be at 5:30 pm with communion and candle lighting during the singing of “Silent Night.”

On Christmas Day, the service will be at 10:00 am. There will be communion and lots of carol singing. Light refreshments will follow the service.

The church will be decorated for Christmas on Saturday, November 30th at 9:30 am. The youth group will be asked to remove fall decorations from the tables in the Fellowship Hall and replace them with Christmas decorations. The Blank family will decorate the big Christmas tree by the altar. The nativity scenes and wreaths will be put up by the rest of the helpers.

Poinsettias for Christmas can be brought to church between Dec. 16 – 21. These plants will be put on the alter area at 10:00 am on December 21st.

Our next meeting will be on December 16th at 10:30 A.M.

Social Ministry Team—November 18, 2024 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

Chairperson: Karen Jordan

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

Pat Thompson opened with devotions.

- 1) Discussed who might need a turkey and gift cards for Thanksgiving.
- 2) Karen ordered scrip for November.



Ellen LaMarche
Sarah L.
Richie Sczerzen
Walt Ziemke
Doug Bedor
Odeh Sarras
Mary & Ron Zalewski
Jordan
Bob Ulrich
Pat Wenzel

- 3) December 1st display hats and blankets in church.
- 4) December 8th the Wednesday Group will display some of their blankets in church.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, December 16, 2024 at 6:30 P.M.

Racial Equity Ministry Team—November 12, 2024 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Emily Christofilis

Barb opened the meeting with a devotion. Pat will provide a devotion for the next meeting.

Reviewed the Justice in Crisis: Movie and Panel Discussion that was held on Tuesday, October 8 sponsored by ESTHER. Members of the Racial Equity Team attended, instead of having their October meeting.

Discussed book study for next year: Bethlehem Besieged, by Mitri Raheb. Study will be a one-day class on Saturday, February 15 from 10:00 am—Noon with coffee time from 9:30—10:00 am. Pastor Niveen will lead the study. Information will be sent to the synod and Appleton Conference by Pastor Niveen, and Barb will contact Lydia Circle for their interest and announcements will be posted in St. Mark's newsletters, Facebook and bulletins.

The Lemon Tree by Sandy Totan will be the fall 2025 Book Study. Details will be discussed at a future meeting.

The Egg Roll class was a success. A Spring Roll class will be planned around the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. Instructor, Kristi, will dress in traditional Vietnamese dress and talk about her experience coming to the United States. Dawn will check on the date of either February 1 or 8.

Next meeting will be December 8 at 6:30 pm. Items for discussion will include follow up with fall programming and Racial Equity statement to hang about the book cart.

Organized a basket for the raffle.

Adjourned at 7:30 pm with the Lord's Prayer.

Next meeting will be January 14th.

Connections Ministry Team—October 28, 2024 ~ Submitted by Mary Jane Hartley

Attended: Jane Arps, Betty Linna, Sharyn Gawlick, Judy Hellman, Mary Jane Hartley, Sandy Mathenia, and Linda Anderson

Things we helped with in October:

- Fellowship
- Sent cards to those we do not see in church
- Craft Fair

The Craft Fair was a huge success.

Craft Sale Earnings

Booth Rental	\$1,000.00
Food Sale	260.00
Bake Sale	<u>546.00</u>
Total	\$1,806.00

We would like to thank our Church Family who helped in many ways.

Our Connection Ministry Team has decided to give:

- \$550 from bake sale to the Church Parking lot fund
- \$500 to Neenah Animal Shelter
- \$500 to Good Gifts
- \$500 to Reach Counseling

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Celebrating the Joy of Faith

Through Love and Service

MEETINGS

save the dates

Sunday, January 26—Budget Meeting
Sunday February 2—Annual Congregational Meeting and Potluck

Things to talk about in November:

Would like to get our Fair Exchange coffee sales started again once a month

A Movie Day in the winter months

Talk about Christmas dinner at St. Paul's

Information of any events during November and December that is happening in the community

Giving tree and decorating for Christmas

Our next meeting will be November 25th.

Christian Education Ministry Team—October 31, 2024 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

Present: Jenny Case & Gwen Hoehne

- 1) Discussed the Christmas Program and assigned parts to the students.
- 2) Discussed the Basket for the Basket Raffle.

Finance & Stewardship Ministry Team—November 19, 2024 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Pastor Niveen

Opened with a Prayer by Pat.

Reviewed current account balances through end of October 2024. October's giving to current monthly expenses were \$13,724.50 and expenses were \$14,529.15. The difference was -\$804.65. Year to date (through end of October) giving was \$144,176.36 and expenses were \$140,702.33 with a difference (giving minus spending) of \$3,474.03.

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Laurie announced that Evie Peterson has asked to be removed from the Stewardship and Finance Ministry Team. We thank Evie for her many years of service on this team.

It was reported that the official documents arrived from Greenlawn Cemetery. A discussion on how to move forward took place. The team suggested that the council offer each of the plots to interested individuals at no cost. It is important to inform those interested that the expenses for the actual burial are their responsibility. St. Mark's is only offering the lot. Laurie noted that the procedure will need to be finalized by the council.

Talked about sending a special thank you to all those giving to the parking lot fund. Laurie agreed to make photo cards and Fern and Pat will send the cards.

A memo will go out to the ministry teams on December 1 asking them to review their 2024 budget and turn in their 2025 budget requests by January 1. The letter also will ask the teams to prepare and turn in their annual reports by the January 1 date.

As of November 19, 50 Intent Cards and 49 Ministry Gifts forms have been turned in. Pat will begin to enter those in the Church Windows giving system soon. Laurie asked that we remind those that plan on changing their giving amount to go to VANCO and make the changes. If they do not feel comfortable doing so, they should contact the office for assistance. Pat will ask Jean to put a note in bulletins and newsletters.

The 2025 Giving Envelopes have been in for some time. We will work on getting those boxes labeled and available for pick up by mid-December.

It was discussed that we should get a note in the newsletter regarding anyone who has a Mission of the Month agency in mind for consideration, to submit by January 1 to the office. The council traditionally votes on that ballot at their January meeting.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Next regular meeting is 17 at 6:30 pm.

MSC to accept Ministry team reports by Laurie Olson/Emily Christofilis.

Unfinished Business:

Communication Audit: We are waiting for signs.

Church Directory: It will be going to the printer early next week. First proof should come back early December. Photos will be handed out in the next week.

Parking Lot: We are on track with fundraising for Spring.

Greenlawn Cemetery lots. We have received official documentation for the six lots we own. The council recommends offering the lots to members initially. We will post the available lots in the newsletter for December and January for St. Marks members with a deadline of January 31, 2025. If there are still lots available, after the January 31 deadline, we will open it up to others. Laurie will develop information for the newsletter and note that lots are available at no cost and recipients are responsible for the burial expenses.

New Business Items:

Chili Cook-Off raised \$1,696 with \$424 going to each of the four participating churches. A discussion took place on where the funds should go. It was decided the money will be directed to the parking lot fund. **MSC by Kim Wallmuller/Emily Christofilis.**

Inactive members: Stewardship and Finance sent letters to inactive members in August. 21 people did not respond to the initial letter. Therefore, based on our constitution, a letter will be sent notifying them that they will be removed from the membership list and they are welcome back at any time. A motion was made to remove the inactive members. **MSC by Kim Wallmuller/Jason Blank.**

2024 Budget: Ministry teams will be notified they need to have their 2025 budgets and annual reports submitted by January 1, 2025.

2025 Annual Meeting: Council selected Sunday, February 2, 2025, with the budget review meeting the week before on January 26, 2025.

Office hours change: Per a request by our Office Administrator, Jean Memken, the church office hours will be changed to 9:00 AM-12:30 PM effective December 1, 2025. The days the office will be open will remain the same: Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. **MSC by Pastor/Ryan**

Pastor shared she will be leading a trip to Greece and Turkey in October. **MSC to approve Pastor Niveen sharing and advertising within St Mark's Ryan/Dawn.**

Adjourn: MSC to adjourn and share the Lord's Prayer at 7:35 by Emily Christofilis/Jenny Case.

Next meeting: December 19, 2024 at 6:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dawn Jones, Council Secretary

New Food Pantry Message Board

Next time you come in the front doors of St. Mark's, check out the beautiful message board that member Bruce Grundman made for our Food Pantry. Now the Food Pantry volunteers have a designated place to post announcements to our Food Pantry clients in a neat and professional looking way. Thank you Bruce, for the wonderful addition to our church building, and thank you Food Pantry Volunteers for all the good work you do in serving our Lord through the Food Pantry.



St. Mark's Racial Equity Team presents...
Led by: Rev Niveen Ibrahim Sarras, PhD

Book Study

Bethlehem Besieged

by Mitri Raheb

The former pastor of Christmas Church, a Palestinian Lutheran congregation and current president of Dar al-Kalima University, Mitri Raheb's book presents a powerful collection of compelling personal stories of desperation and hope in the midst of lethal conflict, bringing the Palestinian/Israeli conflict up close and personal.

All are Welcome!

Celebrating the Joy of Faith through Love & Service

Saturday, February 15, 2025
Coffee/Tea: 9:30 AM
Book Study: 10:00 AM - Noon

FREE: Books provided to all participants. Sign up at church or by calling or emailing the office by February 5. office@stmarksneenah.org or 920-725-2828

Anyone Up for Camping?

Registration for Crossways Summer Camp starts on Sunday December 1. There is a schedule on the table in the corner of the Fellowship Hall. Check out the date and locations and then get your registration in so you have your spot(s) reserved. This might make a nice Christmas gift, too. Check it out!



CROSSWAYS
CAMPING MINISTRIES

Church Staff Members Attend Seminar

On November 21, Pastor Niveen, Pat Westphal, Laurie Olson and myself (pictured below) made our way down to Milwaukee to attend a seminar on Church Worker burnout. It was an enlightening morning with Amanda Sattler, a non-profit worker who actually suffered from burnout to the point that it has threatened her physical health and left her with chronic conditions she must live with daily. She explained what burnout actually is, and why it should be considered a medical condition and not just something people need to cope with on their own. She also highlighted the work of a couple of noted researchers in the area of employee burnout and explained what they discovered through their studies and the implications for employers and employees. The thing that struck me the most was who actually was more likely to suffer from employee burnout. Dr. Sattler reported that people in helping professions, primarily non-profits organizations (like churches), were much more likely to experience worker burnout than those employed in other fields. In addition, those who are most passionate about the work they are doing are more likely to burnout than those who are not as committed to their profession. As I think of myself and those who attended this workshop with me, we all fall into those two categories - working for a church and being highly committed to our work. So it was good we were able to attend this session and consider how we can avoid becoming burned out on the job.

This seminar was put on by the Siebert Lutheran Foundation, and I was so glad they invited us to attend. There were many other church workers there as well as people who worked for non-profit organizations. It was free of charge and they included an electronic copy of the presentation notes and visuals the speaker prepared for the session, as well as a very nice lunch afterwards. In all, it was a wonderful day of personal growth and awareness of how to be a more effective worker for our Lord and for the members of St. Mark's.—*Jean Memken*



The Greatest Gift of All

If you are like me, you have probably started thinking about Christmas gifts. My e-mail mailbox is full of messages from various retail outlets, urging me to buy early and take advantage of “Pre-Black Friday” sales. My regular mailbox is stuffed with catalogs pressing me to buy everything from A to Z. You can wander through stores and see some of the most amazing items for sale during the holiday season: A set of Bluey dinnerware (Who is Bluey and why is he on everything from dinnerware to backpacks to Crocs?!), an eye massager, a blanket that looks like a tortilla wrap, and the list goes on. Whether we like it or not, Christmas has become a season of buying.

I’m sure all of you can remember a special gift that someone presented to you at Christmas or some other time. I will never forget the Christmas I got a doll that my grandparents gave me. My grandmother took the remnants of the fabric my mother had used to make my dresses, and fashioned it into dresses for the doll. It was like having a mini me with a magnificent wardrobe! I also remember the look on my kids’ faces on Christmas morning when they opened the present they had been longing for all year, and there it was in front of them. Some gifts become treasures that last a lifetime.

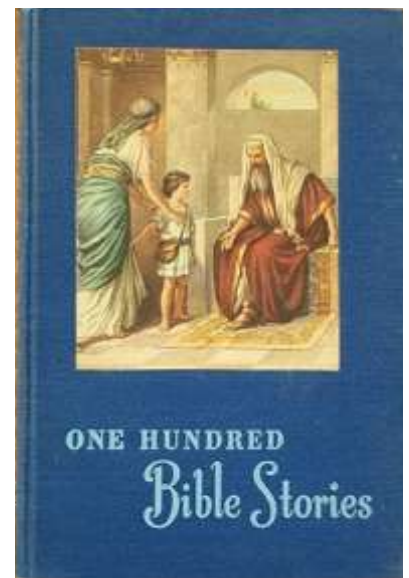
Once such gift I received was a little book entitled “*One Hundred Bible Stories*.” It was published by Concordia Publishing House in 1950, and my parents gave it to my brother and me when we were about 5 and 3 years old, respectively. At the time, it didn’t seem like a very big present, but I grew to love that book. When my brother turned 6 and went to school and learned to print, he went through a possessive faze and proceeded to write his name in every book we shared. I was only four, so didn’t know how to write anything except my name in capital letters, but I immediately took a pencil and scrawled my name in that book just to make sure he knew it was mine as well.

What made the book so special? At that age, I couldn’t read, but on every other page, there was a picture. And what pictures they were- beautiful artwork depicting all the great Bible stories. I had just started Sunday School, and so was just learning about Jesus and all the stories in the Bible. And here was a book that had pictures of the people I was learning about! In my simple 4-year-old mind, I was amazed that I could learn about Noah and then go home, open the book, and see what he actually looked like, along with Moses, John the Baptist, and all the rest. I poured over that book and those pictures many times, and the book became very worn from my use of it. The “stories” were just portions of the Bible (King James Version), which I couldn’t read, but I didn’t have to. I knew those stories just from the pictures they had included in the book.

After my parents passed away and I was cleaning out their home, I found the book among many of the books my mother had kept (she was an English teacher and a great reader). I was overjoyed to think she had kept it for so many years. Now it was my children’s turn to pore over those pictures. Sadly, when our family moved to Missouri, the book was mistakenly donated to our local library book sale, so it was gone for good, or so I thought. I discovered you really can find anything on the Internet, and I found a copy of that book, and promptly bought it. And even though it has someone else’s name written in the front where I had once scrawled mine, I still think of it as a great treasure.

Although “*One Hundred Bible Stories*” didn’t have the pizzazz of a lot of other Christmas gifts I have received over the years, it was essentially my first Bible – God’s Word put into my hands at the tender age of three. I didn’t realize it then, but now many Christmases later, I know that book was probably the *greatest gift* my parents ever gave me, and it led to my life with Christ, a gift that “keeps on giving” as the old ad slogan used to say.

As you prepare for Christmas, I hope you enjoy the shopping and the gift giving (and receiving!). But even more, I hope you remember a gift given to all of us long ago in a stable in Bethlehem. I hope you read the wonderful account of Jesus’ birth written in Luke and think about the gift of God’s Word, which keeps Christ close in our hearts each time we open a Bible. And I pray you have a Christmas full of memories of the truly greatest gift of all – Our Savior Jesus, come to earth to be the light in this dark world. Christmas Blessings to All! – *Jean Memken*





ELCA GOOD GIFTS

ELCA Good Gifts



Our Mission of the Month for December is ELCA Good Gifts. As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we believe that God is calling us into the world – together. And with generous, loving hands, we can make a difference. ELCA Good Gifts use donations to purchase much needed livestock for farmers, tuition payments for seminary students, safe water systems, microloans for small businesses, school supplies and computers, seeds and seedlings, bibles, healthcare and vaccinations, and housing for those in need. There’s a copy of the Good Gifts catalog in the narthex if you want to see all the ways this organization reaches out to help “our neighbors.” around the world.



Please consider donating to this much needed agency by marking “Mission of the Month on your giving envelope or your VANCO account.

St. Mark's Annual
BASKET RAFFLE

DRAWING DATE: DECEMBER 15
After Children's Christmas Program

**Proceeds Benefit Our Camper Fund
& ELCA Good Gifts**

Tickets on Sale
Beginning Nov. 17
Sunday Mornings
& in Church Office
\$1.00 ea. or
\$5.00 for 6

**Ministry Teams and Individuals:
Please consider donating a
themed basket.**



Get Ready to Roll

The group that learned how to make egg rolls in October as part of our Racial Equity Ministry Team’s efforts to make us all more aware of our world had a terrific (and delicious) time—so much so that the Racial Equity Ministry is sponsoring an encore—on February 8th from 9:00 am—12:00 noon. This time, Instructor Kristy Lee will demonstrate how to make Spring Rolls, along with sharing traditions from her experiences as a Vietnamese native. Come and learn about another culture in a fun and scrumptious way. Be looking for a sign-up sheet in the narthex after the holidays.



Who’s ready for Asian Cooking round two? Above are participants in the Egg Roll Workshop earlier this year.

New Advent 2024 Adult Forum starting December 1

We are excited to announce that Dawn Jones will lead a 4-week Adult Forum starting on **Sunday, December 1, at 9:00 am**. The forum will focus on the **Advent 2024—Pilgrimage in Palestine**.



As the Gospels recount, innkeepers told Mary and Joseph there was no room for them or their expected child. God's self-revelation through a baby whose mother made room for him in the humblest of accommodation, a manger, invites Christians today to ask ourselves; who does not have room in the empire? How did Jesus make room for all, and how can we do the same?

During this Advents season, join ELCA Sumud and ELCA Young Adults as we explore our responsibility to examine power, empire, and occupation through the lens of the fourth annual Advent Pilgrimage in Palestine. Throughout December, young adults from the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) will offer reflections and educational insights about the story of Christmas and the Holy Land.

We invite you to participate in this meaningful exploration of faith, justice, and peace. A copy of the devotion will be available to you.



St. Mark's Lutheran Church

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