

October 2025



The Messenger



Rev. Niveen Sarra,
Pastor
Email:
pastorniveen@stmarksneenah.org
Phone: 510-355-4352

Jean Memken,
Administrator
Email:
office@stmarksneenah.org
Phone: 309-825-5326

Ginny Schieck,
Custodian

Laurie Olson,
Treasurer

Pat Westphal,
Financial Secretary



Sunday School 8:45 am
(September-May, every
other Sunday)

Adult Forum
Sundays 9:00 am

Worship
Sundays 10:00 am
(Holy Communion on 1st
and 3rd Sundays)

Bible Study
Thursdays 1:30 pm

St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 140 S. Green Bay Rd, Neenah, WI 54956
Phone: 920-725-2828
Website: stmarksneenah.org E-mail: office@stmarksneenah.org



Pastor's Message

This October, as we celebrate the Reformation, we also mark a milestone that is both deeply personal and historically transformative: the 500th anniversary of the marriage of former monk **Martin Luther** and former nun **Katharina von Bora**, which took place on June 13, 1525.

Their marriage did not begin as a typical love story. Katharina, a former Cistercian nun, was one of nine women who famously escaped their convent in barrels of smelly herring, literally smuggled out to freedom. Luther had helped arrange homes and marriages for several of these women, and at first, he had another suitor in mind for Katharina. But Katharina was determined and strong-willed. She rejected other proposals and made it clear that if she were to marry, it would be Martin. Luther eventually agreed, declaring, *"Well then, I will do it: I will play the devil and the world this trick; I will content my father, and marry Katharina."*¹

Their wedding was simple and private, attended by only a few witnesses. Because nuns and monks were expected to remain celibate, their union caused considerable uproar in the Church. Critics were scandalized, even claiming that a child born from the marriage of a former monk and nun would surely be the Antichrist.¹

Yet in quietly challenging centuries of clerical celibacy, their union **laid the foundation for a new vision of Protestant family life**, redefined Christian marriage, and shaped the understanding of the clergy's vocation. Their marriage humanized Luther, making him more relatable to ordinary believers, highlighted marriage as a sacred institution in the Reformation, inspired other reformers to marry, reshaped church practices, strengthened women's roles, and modeled a family life based on mutual respect and partnership.

The Wedding That Changed Christianity

Luther and Katharina,
500 Years On



June 13, 1525

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Pastor's Message

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In honor of this landmark anniversary, the **ELCA Wittenberg Center** is hosting a free three-part webinar series this fall: **Blessed to Be: Exploring Gender, Companionship, and Sexuality**. Each one-hour session takes place from 12–1 p.m. Central, and I plan to attend these sessions and look forward to the discussions.

- **Sept. 30 – Blessed to Be Bold: The Reformation, Power, and Women**
Dr. Mary Streufert explores the marriage of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora and its connection to theological reformation and evolving understandings of gender and power.
- **Oct. 1 – Blessed to Break the Mold: Marriage, Tradition, and Divine Disruption**
Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans and Rev. Dr. Themba Mkhabela reflect on how Luther's theology of marriage can inform contemporary conversations, including cultural perspectives from South Africa.
- **Oct. 2 – Blessed to Delight: Sexuality, Faith, and God's Good Creation**
Rev. Dr. Elaine Neuenfeldt and Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazarski explore sexuality and bodily autonomy as sacred gifts, rooted in Lutheran theology and reform.

This engaging series offers a wonderful opportunity to revisit **Lutheran theological anthropology**, affirm human dignity, and explore how the Reformation continues to shape our lives today.

You can register to participate from home at tinyurl.com/LutherWedding500, or join me at church to watch the webinars together in the lounge.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarra, Ph.D

Moses Message

Sunday School is off to a good start. We learned about the different Missions of the Month that St. Mark's supports, and we did our own mission work by collecting lip balm and gum to send to the military on our first day of Sunday School on Sunday, September 7 which was "God's Work, Our Hands." We had the blessing of the backpacks on September 21st.

The air is getting crisper and cooler, and the leaves are starting to fall. Yes, fall is just around the corner. Remember when you see all the pretty leaves, that is God work, coloring the world. Be sure to thank Him. Also, though it is at the end of the month - "HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!!"

BIRTHDAYS

Henley Biese October 2nd
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL!

With God's Blessings,
Gwen Hoehne





Once again, in August, we were very busy, with several new people signing up. We don't have much sitting room in the narthex from 8:30 am until about 9:30 am. Those who come each week know they have the best selection of desired items at the beginning. In August, we had 79 people shopping to feed 195 people. In September, there were 84 families visiting the pantry. With your help and the help of many others, we were able to give them what they need. As always, we are in need of paper toweling, tuna, and canned pasta meals. Thank you so much for all your help.—Karen Jordan

Don't forget! Food Pantry Sunday is always the first Sunday of every month! Please give what you can to support this ministry of our church.

Stewardship Program 2026



Watch your mailbox the first week of October for your Stewardship Letter, 2026 Intent Card, and Ministry Gifts Form! Our stewardship journey begins October 5 and will carry us through to **Stewardship Sunday on November 9**, when we'll celebrate together with a joyful **Harvest Potluck**. After the potluck, stay for **Board Games**, sponsored by the **Connections Ministry Team**.

This year, we'll be focusing on *1 Corinthians 12:12–27*, where Paul reminds us that the church is like a body—many members, each with unique gifts, yet one in Christ. Together, we'll explore how God has blessed each of us with spiritual gifts, and how we can share them to strengthen our church family and care for one another. Come ready to discover, grow, and celebrate the gifts God has placed in you!

School for Seniors

Are you a senior who enjoys learning? Join in the **SCHOOL FOR SENIORS**, co-sponsored by the City of Neenah Committee on Aging and Lakeland University.

When: Friday, October 3, 2025, 8:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m.

Where: St. Mark's Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall, 140 S. Green Bay Road, Neenah

What: Thought-provoking presentations and discussion in an informal setting presented by community experts. There's something for everyone! Learn about home safety and maintenance, fitness for the body and brain, and community safety. Enjoy refreshments and an information fair featuring community resources.

Cost: Free of charge

RSVP: Seating is limited, please call City of Neenah at 920-886-6125 by Monday, September 29 for first priority.





Called to order: President Dawn Jones called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm.

Members Present: Dawn Jones, Jason Blank, Laurie Olson, JT Rose, Tom Frantz, Je Rehorst, Tammie Kersten, and Pastor Niveen.

Members Absent: Emily Christofilis

Devotions: Devotions by Joe Rehorst. Laurie Olson will do October.

Sharing Highs & Lows: Council members expressed the highs and lows they are experiencing in their lives.

MSC by Jason Blank/JT Rose to approve minutes of July 17, 2025

Thank You: Thank Pennie/Pat/Mary Jane for the handling of the vehicle under the carport & dealing with police/fire departments. Jason Blank will send them a thank you. There was a thank you in the newsletter; however, Pastor Niveen would like to thank the volunteers from St. Mark's who assisted at this summer's VBS.

Did You Know? Tammie has submitted a note regarding the SCRIP program for the October newsletter. Joe & Linda Rehorst will work on a note about the Community Christmas Dinner and Jason Blank will submit a message about the history of the Christmas tree, along with his family's recent tradition of decorating St. Mark's Christmas Tree. Pastor Niveen will do January.

Financial Reports: Total in checking account \$257,628.82 which includes \$30,802.67 for Building Fund (there is an additional \$5,042.43 in Thrivent Mutual Funds designated towards Building Fund), and \$156,347.89 in designated fund with the remaining \$101,280.93 for current expenses. Giving versus spending difference for August is -\$13,965.15. Year to date giving vs. spending difference is -\$5,723.07.

MSC by JT Rose/Tom Frantz to approve August's financial report.

Pastor's Report ~ Pastor Niveen Sarras

Grace and peace to you in Christ.

Over the past two months, August and September, I have been grateful for the opportunity to serve our congregation and community in many ways. I would like to share some highlights with you:

Pastoral Care

- I spent time visiting and offering care to our homebound members, helping them remain connected to the life of the church.

Continuing Education

- From August 3–5, I attended the Catholic Annual Biblical Conference online. This time of study and reflection deepened my knowledge and equipped me for teaching and preaching.



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Congregational and Community Engagement

- I participated in Vacation Bible School at Gloria Dei Church, where I helped lead activities with children.
- On August 31, I joined the ELCA Neenah joint worship service at Smith Park in Menasha. We had around 200 participants, and the loose offering supported *The Community Table*.
- On Wednesday, September 3, I offered a worship service for those who were unable to attend the joint service.

Worship Life

- Throughout the summer, we offered Wednesday evening worship services. However, attendance remained very low. In response, I prepared a survey—reviewed and approved by the Worship and Music Ministry Team—that will be distributed to the congregation on September 21. This will allow us to better understand needs and preferences for future worship opportunities.

Ministry Team Participation

- I attended the Social Ministry Team meeting, which gathers every second week of the month.
- I also participated in the Christian Education Ministry Team meeting, helping prepare for the Sunday School year. I will be teaching children's classes on several Sundays, as well as leading Sunday morning Bible Study.
- Dawn Jones and I will continue co-leading the Adult Forum and Bible Study.

Teaching and Wider Church Involvement

- Starting on Friday, September 19, I will also be teaching **Old Testament once a month at the Lay School of the East-Central Synod**. This is a wonderful opportunity for me to share my expertise with students across our synod and to strengthen connections between St. Mark's and the wider church.

Upcoming Sermon Series

- With the consultation and approval of the Worship and Music Ministry Team, I prepared a stewardship-focused sermon series titled **"One Body, Many Parts: Serving Together at St. Mark's"** (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). This series will guide us in reflecting on our call to serve together as one body in Christ.

Book Study for Church Council

- I would like to call your attention to our upcoming Church Council book study on **Wednesday, October 8, 2025, at 5:30 PM**. We will be reading *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*.

In closing, I give thanks to God for the many opportunities to serve, teach, and walk with you all in ministry. May we continue to seek the Spirit's guidance as we live as one body with many parts, united in Christ's love.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras

MSC by JT Rose/Joe Rehorst to approve Pastor's report.

Reminder was given to council members of our October 8th at 5:30 pm book study.

Ministry Team Reports:

Christian Education Ministry Team—September 4, 2025 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

PRESENT: Jenny Case, Joy Case, Dawn Jones, Pastor Niveen, and Gwen Hoehne
Pastor Niveen opened with a prayer.

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- 1) SEPTEMBER 7, 2025 – Start of Sunday School – Letter was sent to the families to tell them about the start of Sunday School on September 7, 2025 at 8:45 AM. We will be talking about the different missions that St. Mark's supports and about the missions we are doing on "God's Work, Our Hands" Sunday. They will color sheets for Color a Smile project. Refreshments will be served.
- 2) GOD'S WORK, OUR HANDS – We will talk about the Missions St. Mark's supports and tell them a little about each one. Color sheets for Color a Smile.
- 3) SCHEDULE FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL YEAR – A schedule for the year was given to Pastor, Dawn and Jenny. This is the schedule Jenny and Gwen set up for lessons for Sunday School. This also included the music schedule. The parents will get a copy on Sunday.
- 4) ACOLYTES - We are discussing who is available to light the candles. We have one sixth grader, two 5th graders, and two 3rd graders. We talked to the parents of these children about lighting the candles and they had no problem with them doing it. We will train them. A problem is that they can acolyte only on the Sundays we have Sunday School because they are with the other parent on the Sundays we don't have Sunday School. We asked them about reading the Psalms and they were all a little hesitant. We might have to let them light the candles a few times before doing the reading so they are more comfortable being in front of the congregation. We considered asking the confirmed kids if they would be a Junior assistant and help out with the lighting of the candles. Maybe asking congregational members could sign up to light the candles or have the Altar guild do it. Some ideas given, nothing written in stone.
- 5) OTHER BUSINESS - Pastor is checking with the other churches about Avery Hill attending their Confirmation class as we only have her for Confirmation this year.

Talked about ordering Advent booklets for the Sunday School students. Will talk to Pastor if she is ordering anything so we put the orders together.

Gwen gave Pastor a Christmas program to look at to see if it would be OK to do on December 14th.

Next meeting has not been set.

Property Ministry Team—September 8, 2025 ~ Submitted by Jason Blank

Members Present: Bruce Grundman, Phyllis Ziemke, Joe Rehorst, John Olson, Ginny Schieck, and Jason Blank

- We are discussing who we need to have come and give us a quote to have the carport repaired after it was struck by a camper.
- Modern Sheet Metal is finishing up the air conditioning unit in the sanctuary.
- We continue to monitor the installation of the blacktop. Our contractor is aware of the lateness and continues to ask us to be patient.
- We have gotten two applications of fertilizer and weed killer put down for the year.
- All of the LED lights have arrived. Joe estimates it will take a couple of months to complete their installation.



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Social Ministry Team—Monday, September 8, 2025 ~ Submitted by Karen Jordan

Chairperson: Karen Jordan

Present: Jane Arps, Pat Thompson, Pastor Niveen, and Gwen Hoehne

Gwen opened with devotions.

- 1) Pastor asked Karen to send get well or thinking of you cards to Tearneka Joachim, Linda Anderson, and Jean Memken. Karen already sent one to Jean and will send to the other two.
- 2) Karen is trying to get all the address for our college students. If anyone knows of a college person from our church, please let Karen Jordan know.
- 3) The Food Pantry is doing well. And Helping Hands is also doing well.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—July 21, 2025 ~ Submitted by Judy Hellman

The Worship and Music Ministry Team met on Monday, July 21st. Members present were Betty Linna, Pat Westphal, Jenny & Joy Case, Mary Ellen Tracey, Mary Jane Hartley, Ardys Seelow, Pastor Niveen and July Hellman.

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

Pastor Niveen outlined several upcoming services. On August 31st, there will be a joint ELCA service at Smith Park in Menasha at 9:30 am. St. Mark's is responsible for communion supplies.

September 7th is "God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday. Twenty-five beds will be made in Oshkosh. Each church will provide workers and \$1,250.00 for this project. The money for this project will be funded from Scrip. We will also be doing some small projects at our church.

September 14th is new member Sunday.

August 10th is a hymn-sing and an informal service with the theme of the service being topics from the news.

A prayer box shaped like a church will be purchased. This is a donation by Chuck Baumgartner.

Plans were finalized for our Sundae bar for Fellowship on July 27th.

We closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—August 18, 2025 ~ Submitted by Judy Hellman

The worship and Music Ministry Team met on Monday, August 18th. Members present were Joy and Jenny Case, Mary Jane Hartley, Mary Ellen Tracey, Betty Linna, Pat Westphal, Pastor Niveen and Judy Hellman.

Devotions were given by Jenny Case. Mary Jane Hartley will do devotions in September.

The ELCA Neenah churches will have a joint service at Smith Park in Menasha on Sunday, August 31st at 9:30 am. St. Mark's responsibility is to provide the Holy Communion elements.

"God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday is September 7, 2025. The service project is to partner with the ELCA Neenah Churches at the Sleep In Heavenly Peace warehouse to build bunk beds for children in need. There will

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also be other fun activities at church for the rest of the congregation. Pastor Niveen's family will be serving lunch at church on that day.

Regarding midweek worship services, there is concern about lack of interest and poor attendance. It was suggested to do a survey on September 21st about these concerns.

A Blessing of the Animals service will be on Sunday, September 28th. The congregation may bring pictures of their pets. Children may bring their stuffed animals.

Our next meeting will be on September 15 at 10:00 am.

We closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Youth Ministry Team—August 17, 2025 ~ *Submitted by Laurie Olson*

Members Present: Laurie Olson, Nancy Rose, Jeff Tharp, Sherri Denney, Jenny Case, and Ginny Schieck

Members Absent: JT Rose, Pastor Niveen, and Joe Rose

Prayer: Sherri Denney

Business for Consideration

Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center in South Dakota Update:

A presentation is being planned for September 14 during fellowship hour. Youth Ministry Team will make itself available, as needed.

Go-Karting at Badger Sports in Appleton on July 26- those who attended thought it was a fun event – hot, but fun. Seventeen participated.

Mural on wall in Fellowship Hall:

A draft design, prepared by Sophia Kersten, was approved by the Church Council. We will ask Pastor Niveen to send an email to Sophia for a final design and two dates she would be available to have the design projected on the wall & establish a paint color list. From there we can set up painting dates and announce those dates to other youth who would be interested in assisting with the painting.

Synod Youth Ministry Calendar of Events:

- Corn Maze Palooza at Porter's Patch, Bonduel will be October 4.
- Feeding America, Appleton service project in October – no additional information is available.
- For Youth Workers (Youth Ministry Team members) there are some opportunities:
- On August 21-23 at Imago Dei Village, Clintonville there is a Youth Worker Retreat – no one is available to attend.
- Youth Worker Dinner on October 23 at Our Savior's Lutheran, Neenah. Laurie and Sherri were interested at this time – & Jenny is a maybe.

God's Work Our Hands Sunday – September 7.

Talked about the teaming up with the other Neenah ELCA churches for a Sleep in Heavenly Peace bunk bed build on the morning of Sept. 7. Still waiting for more details on this. Pennie is putting together some after worship activities in the fellowship hall. Jenny was asked to talk about including a message in the Sunday School correspondence, if a mailing is being planned.

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Bible Camper Fund:

Discussed ideas for raising money:

- Carwash – do this in the Spring.
- Soupster – Nancy and Linda Rehorst are planning a soup sale -will have a table at the St. Mark's craft sale. They will also get preorders from St. Mark's members. Laurie will take this fundraiser to the council, for their approval.
- Valentine Spaghetti Dinner: Plan to do this on Friday, Feb. 13. Discuss at our upcoming meetings. Get council approval for this event.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Next meeting: Sunday, September 14 at 11:15 AM.

Connections Ministry Team—July 28, 2025 ~ *Submitted by Tom Frantz*

Meeting opened with prayer.

Fair Trade Coffee Exchange Sales: \$53 deposited in hospitality account. Order placed for coffee and chocolate to replenish our supplies. We can use assistance staffing sales. Contact Mary Jane about dates. Reminder that the Fair Trade Exchange will be selling items at the ELCA Women's Gathering this fall.

Fellowship Hour after Sunday Service: We are always looking for assistance from the congregation. Help can be contributing bakery or snack items or by assisting with set-up/hosting. Please note: you don't necessarily have to do both food and host. You can do one of those things or both. We have a sign-up sheet showing available dates. Contact Mary Jane.

Bingo: Continues on the third Monday of every month beginning at 1:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. Assistance is welcome for set up beginning at noon on Bingo days. Prizes such as word books, socks, small gifts, cookie mixes, puzzles, or inexpensive items available at Dollar Tree are welcome. Small treats to share are also welcome.

Worship in the Park is Sunday, 8/31 at 9:30 am. St. Mark's will join the other Neenah ELCA churches, Gloria Dei, Our Savior, and St. Paul's in worship. This year it will be held at Smith Park in Menasha. St. Mark's is providing communion. Pastor Niveen will be making bread.

The activity bags available to children to use during worship service were refilled.

"The Lemon Tree" is the book selected for the book study on October 4. Several copies are currently available and circulating among members. After reading it you can pass it on to someone else. Racial Equity group is the book study sponsor.

The Craft Fair is coming up Saturday, October 25. Set-up will be Thursday, October 23. There are still a number of tables available to vendors. There was general discussion about the bake sale, food, and snack items available to be sold day of the event. There was discussion about the church youth group's request to sell soup to raise money for some to attend the next bible camp at Pine Lake. It was decided to invite representatives from the youth group to attend our next meeting on 8/25 to address our questions. Additional details about the Craft Fair will be discussed at future meetings.

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Next meeting: Monday 8/25 beginning at 1:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall.

Meeting adjourned after praying the Lord's Prayer.

Racial Equity Ministry Team – August 26, 2025 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Dawn Jones

Barb opened the meeting with a prayer.

Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center Trip

Presentation will be on Sunday, September 14 during Fellowship Hour. We will make ourselves available to assist, as requested.

Discussed the **Lemon Tree book study**: The study will be Saturday, October 4 from 10 – noon with a coffee time from 930 – 10:00 AM. There are approximately eight signed up. A limited number of books are available in the church office. Barb is still interested in purchasing watermelon bracelets/pins to hand out to book study attendees. We will make Lemon Squares for a snack. Pastor Niveen will put together an announcement for the synod newsletter and churches in our conference. Barb will get information to her Oshkosh contacts. We will ask Dawn to email ESTHER with Lemon Tree book study information.

Discussed having other cultural programs, like those by Kristi Lee's on Vietnamese (egg & spring roll making).

Neenah Intertribal Pow Wow is coming up – Saturday, September 13 at Shattuck Park, Neenah. Announce on Facebook.

Adjourned at 7:30 PM.

Next meeting will be September 9 at 6:30 PM

Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team—August 19, 2025 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Jason Blank & Pastor Niveen

Opened with a Prayer.

Reviewed current account balances through end of July 2025. July's giving to current monthly expenses was \$14,748.03 and expenses of \$9,320.96. The difference was \$5,427.07. Laurie noted that we received the invoices for Pastor's May, June & July salary/benefits which is \$8,000+ each. Next month will reflect those invoices being paid.

Year-to-date: Spending=\$90,387.79 and Giving=\$98,629.38 with a net of \$8,242.09.

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$251,750.12 which includes \$136,696.06 allocated to designated accounts and \$115,054.06 for current operating. Additionally, \$171,911.13 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,045.15 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$57,298.52 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

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Pat will be attending a virtual Church Windows (our membership software company) workshop on in-kind donations on August 20th.

A draft St. Mark's Lutheran Church Donation & Gift Policy (see below) was reviewed by the team. The policy presented covers purpose, types of gifts accepted, acceptance of the gifts, use of gifts, naming plates, acknowledgement & documentation, confidentiality, ethnical stewardship, and how often the policy should be reviewed. The team will send the draft to the Church Council for their approval.

Discussed this year's stewardship drive. As noted in last month's minutes, the council asked that we concentrate on identifying and connecting passions with ministry. Various spiritual gifts inventories were reviewed. Team was asked to review further the inventory relating to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27-each of us in a part of the body of Christ and has an important role to play in keeping the body healthy. Looking at stewardship beginning October 5 and ending on November 9th. Pat will confirm dates with Pastor Niveen. We will work on putting our ideas together in a program format at our September meeting and, if need be, have a second meeting in September to finish up.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Next regular meeting is September 16, 2025, at 6:30 PM.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church Donation & Gift Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for the acceptance, acknowledgment, use, and management of donations and gifts to St. Mark's Lutheran Church in support of our mission and ministries.

1. Types of Gifts Accepted

2. St. Mark's welcomes the following types of gifts:

- **Monetary Gifts:** Cash, checks, electronic donations, online giving, and recurring gifts.
- **Designated Gifts:** Contributions directed toward specific ministries, programs, or funds (e.g., Building Fund, Mission of the Month).
- **Undesignated Gifts:** Contributions to be used at the church's discretion in accordance with ministry priorities.
- **In-Kind Gifts:** Tangible property such as furniture, equipment, or supplies may be accepted based on current needs.
- **Planned Gifts:** Bequests, charitable trusts, life insurance policies, and other legacy gifts.

3. Acceptance of Gifts

- All donations are subject to review and approval by the Church Council or will send the donation review to the appropriate staff or ministry team.
- Gifts that come with restrictions, conditions, or require long-term commitments must be approved by the Church Council.
- The church reserves the right to decline gifts that are inconsistent with its mission, impractical to manage, or create liability.

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4. Use of Gifts

- Designated gifts will be used for the specified purpose whenever possible. If that purpose is no longer viable, the Church Council may redirect funds in a manner as close as possible to the donor's original intent.
- Undesignated gifts will be allocated at the discretion of church leadership in alignment with ministry priorities.

5. Naming Plates

- Donors may request a nameplate in recognition of a significant gift or in-kind donation (e.g., furniture, equipment, memorial items).
- The cost of the nameplate and installation must be covered by the donor.
- Nameplate wording and placement must be approved by the Church Council to ensure consistency with the values, tone, and aesthetics of the church.
- The church reserves the right to remove or relocate nameplates in the future if needed due to renovations, repurposing of space, or other church decisions.

6. Acknowledgment & Documentation

- Donors will receive a written acknowledgment for all contributions in accordance with IRS guidelines.
- The church will not assign monetary value to non-cash or in-kind gifts for tax purposes but will acknowledge the nature of the gift received.
- Donors are encouraged to consult their tax advisors for charitable deduction eligibility.

7. Confidentiality

- All donor information will be kept confidential unless express permission is given for public recognition.

8. Ethical Stewardship

- The church is committed to transparency and faithful stewardship of all gifts. Financial reports will be made available to the congregation annually or upon request.

9. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically and updated as needed by the Church Council.

Approved by Church Council: [Date]

Next Review Date: [Date]

Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team—September 16, 2025 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

Members Present: Treasurer Laurie Olson, Mary Jane Hartley, Pennie Linna, Fern Furhmann, Jason Blank, Pastor Niveen, and Financial Secretary Pat Westphal

Opened with a Prayer by Pastor Niveen.

Reviewed current account balances through end of August 2025. August's giving to current monthly expenses was \$14,263.77 and expenses of \$28,228.92. The difference was -\$13,965.15. Laurie noted that we finally

received the invoice for Pastor's May, June & July salary/benefits which was \$24,049.79. Laurie commented that this was anticipated.

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Year-to-date: Spending=\$118,616.22 and Giving=\$112,893.15 with a net of -\$5,723.07.

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$257,648.82 which includes \$156,367.89 allocated to designated accounts and \$101,280.93 for current operating. Additionally, \$171,911.13 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,048.42 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$57,298.52 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

Pat will be presenting the "big check" this coming Sunday for August Mission of the Month, Orphan Grain Train, in the amount of \$865.10. She will also inform the congregation of our current year-to-date shortfall and ask for those who are able to consider additional monetary giving.

Discussed this year's stewardship drive. As requested by the council, we will be concentrating on identifying and connecting passions with ministry. Reviewed the ELCA's version of a spiritual gifts inventory. A discussion took place on how to implement the assessment tool. It was decided to present the assessment on the third Sunday of our stewardship drive – October 19. This will be during Fellowship Hour. Laurie will work with Pastor on piecing out the tool, to make it less cumbersome. Pennie will provide door prizes. The team will finalize the assessment process at the October meeting. Pastor Niveen has prepared a sermon series on 1 Corinthians 12:12-27-each of us in a part of the body of Christ and has an important role to play in keeping the body healthy. Pastor will also revise the Stewardship Letter and Laurie will ensure that the Intent Card and Spiritual Gifts list are updated. We will plan to send letter, intent card & gifts form out the week of September 29. Discussed a bible study that is in the current GATHER magazine issue. Pastor will review and talk with Dawn Jones about using the study for the Sunday morning adult forum. A potluck will be planned for the November 9 Stewardship Sunday with a harvest meal theme. We will ask a couple members for temple talks, on their spiritual gifts, on October 12 & 26.

Closed at 7:45 PM with the Lord's Prayer.

Next regular meeting is October 14, 2025, at 6:30 PM.

Pastor Niveen noted that Worship & Music are asking, as part of blessing of the animals on September 28, asking members to bring donations items for the Neenah Animal Shelter.

It was also noted the Christian Ed has a Christmas program selected.

MSC by Jason Blank/Tammie Kersten to accept ministry team reports.

Old Business:

- **Communication Audit -website No Report**
- **Parking Lot:** Jason Blank said we have not yet been given a start date.

New Business:

- **Acceptance of Gift Policy/Procedures:** Council reviewed a donation & gift policy, submitted by the Finance & Stewardship Ministry Team. It was noted that this is a simple policy/procedure for the council and/or ministry teams to refer to when opportunities develop. Tom Frantz suggested that we add a note, under the *Acceptance of Gifts* category that states "The Church reserves the right to seek legal advice when and if necessary". **MSC by JT Rose/Tom Frantz to accept the Donation & Gift Policy with the amended note.**

*Please be
Praying for...*

Ellen LaMarche
Sarah L.
Richie Sczerzen
Gary Kostrzak
Phyllis Ziemke

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

- **Bible Camper Fundraisers:** Discussed the Soupster sales during the craft sale & pre-orders from the congregation and Valentine's Day Dinner on Feb. 13, 2026. Both of these fundraisers are through the Youth Ministry Team. **MSC by Jason Blank/Tammie Kersten to approve these fundraisers.**
- **Community Christmas Dinner:** Joe & Linda Rehorst attended the organizational meeting for this event. This is an annual event that St. Mark's has participated in for many years. This year's dinner will be Dec. 13. St. Mark's has been asked to provide: 15 Lap blankets (50" x 60"), 12 dz cookies, 6 pies, socks, and volunteer workers in the kitchen and deliver of meals. **MSC by J.T. Rose/Joe Rehorst to continue to support this event.**
- **Annual Basket Raffle: Proceeds to benefit the Bible Camper fund -held on December 14.** Tickets sales begin in November. **MSC by Joe Rehorst/Pastor Niveen to approve this fundraiser.**

Next meeting will be October 16th at 6:30 PM.

MSC by JT Rose/Tammie Kersten to adjourn.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

St. Mark's Lutheran

ECSW Youth Event

Porter's Patch
CORN MAZE
PALOOZA

Saturday, October 25th
Bonduel, WI
11 am - 1:30 pm

We will be joining other youth and leaders from across the synod, for a day of fall fun!

Meet at St. Mark's at 10:00 am. St. Mark's Youth Activities Fund will cover the \$13 entry fee that will give you access to the corn maze, activities, including building your own scarecrow and making a fall bouquet.

Parents/Guardians are encouraged to attend, but not necessary. If not able to attend with your youth, carpooling will be arranged. Age 10 & under must be accompanied by an adult caregiver.

Complete & turn in permission slip by October 20th or use this QR code. Forms available at church.

Linwood House Concert

On Sunday September 21st, the 3rd concert of the 2025 Summer Concert series was held at Linwood Park in Appleton. The group performing was Remington's Ride. They are a Wisconsin-based band of veteran musicians bringing the great sounds of Vintage Western Swing, roots, country, Americana, rockabilly, and honkytonk to a whole new generation of music fans.

There were 55 people in attendance. Joy and Jenny Case, Pat Thompson, and Pastor Barb Girod (who knows the female musician) were in attendance from St. Mark's. It was beautiful weather outside and an enjoyable afternoon of great music!

 – Jenny Case

ESTHER NEWS

Here are some ESTHER sponsored events you might be interested in attending:

HOPEFEST – October 1, 2025, 6-8:30 pm

1st Congregational Church, Appleton

This is an evening dedicated to honoring mental health, building community, and spreading hope. It is a rare opportunity hear first-hand about the experiences of those navigating a mental health condition

6:00 pm – FREE Dinner

7:15-8:15 pm – Presentation

Call 920-733-7393 by September 29 to register.

TOSS FOR JUSTICE – A Cornhole Tournament for Equity, Belonging, and Change

Saturday, October 11 at 3:00 pm

First Congregational UCC, 724 E South River St., Appleton

This friendly fundraiser will blend fun, laughter, and community spirit with the serious work of justice that we are all called to do together. Would you like to represent



St. Mark's at this event? You can sign up as a team (2 people) or solo. If you are interested, let the church office know.

Bingo AND Board Games

Our next BINGO session will be on October 20th at 1:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. Come for fun, food and prizes for the winners! **Last BINGO until February 2026!**

There will be a board game afternoon after the Stewardship Sunday potluck on November 9th. Look for more info on Facebook and in the Sunday bulletin!

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Youth Ministry Team

Bible Camper Fundraiser Soupster

32 oz. or 16 oz. containers (for easy freezing) of five different soups can be pre-ordered for pick up on October 26.

Pre-order taken Sundays Sept. 28, Oct. 5, 12 & 19.
Soup options include:
Chili, Cheesy Broccoli, Chicken Noodle, Chicken Dumpling, & Cheesy Potato [\$ 7 ea. for 32 oz. & \$4 ea. for 16 oz.]

Soups will also be available for purchase at the St. Mark's Craft Fair on Oct. 25.



Fallin' Into Fall Craft and Vendor Show

Saturday, October 25th, 2025

9:00 am – 2:00 pm

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

140 S. Green Bay Road

Neenah, WI 54956

Hot Food and Drinks - Breakfast and Lunch!

Over 20 Vendors!

Get started on your Christmas Shopping!!!!

Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters
October 5	Pennie Linna	Sherri Denney	LaVerne Arndt Wanda Webster	Linda Anderson Nancy Maslow	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Fuhrmann Lorrie Wood
October 12	Jean Memken	Tara Dieck	Chuck Baumgartner Sherri Denney	Bruce Grundman Doug Hesser	Pat Westphal Jason Blank Jenny Blank
October 19	Pat Westphal	LaVerne Arndt	Nancy Bricco Karen Jordan	J.T. Rose Jeff Tharp	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebestead Renie Sebestead
October 26 Reformation Sunday	Emily Christofilis	Tom Frantz	Joy Case Jenny Case	Nancy Bricco Rosemary Cermak	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Linda Anderson

Communion Assistants:

October 5 – (At the rail) – Linda Anderson, Dom and Emily Christofilis

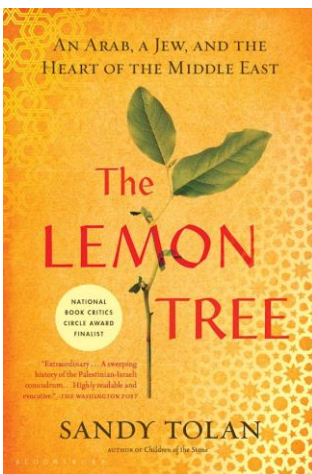
October 19 – (Intinction) – Sherri Denney, Bruce Grundman, and Judy Hellman

Altar Guild: Gwen Hoehne and Linda Anderson



St. Mark's Lutheran Church Book Study: *The Lemon Tree*

St. Mark's Lutheran Church warmly invites you to a book study on *The Lemon Tree*. This compelling true story follows two women—one Palestinian and one Israeli—whose lives are intertwined through a single house in Israel/Palestine, offering a moving reflection on memory, loss, and reconciliation.



This event is free to attend, and a limited number of book copies will be available on a first-come, first-served basis at St. Mark's. You may also purchase a copy or borrow one from the library.

Date & Time: Saturday, October 4th, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Fellowship is from 9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Location: St. Mark's Lutheran Church
140 S. Green Bay Road, Neenah, WI 54956

All are welcome to join in this meaningful discussion. Come for learning, reflection, and community! – *Pastor Niveen*



Lutheran Social Services

The Mission of the Month for October is Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS). Committed to the growth of others, LSS is united by the shared belief in the infinite worth of every individual. LSS builds programs as unique as the people they serve. LSS professionals believe they are living their best lives when they empower individuals, families, and communities to find healing through courage and a path to sharing their God-given gifts with the world. Specifically, LSS provides services that help children and families (Care, Counseling, Foster Care, Adoption, Skill Building); Mental Health and Substance Abuse Disorders (Counseling, Resource Centers, Residential Programs, Skill Building, Substance Use Assessments) and Housing (Financial Counseling, Rapid Rehousing, Rental Assistance, Refugee Resettlement, Skill Building, Youth Residential, Veteran's Housing Services). To give to this extremely valuable ministry in our community, denote "Mission of the Month" on your offering envelope or Vanco contribution.



St. Mark's has been participating in gift card fundraising since before 2014, when I took over the program from LuAnn G. and Becky S. We began with Great Lakes SCRIP, which transitioned into RaiseRight a few years ago.

Here's how it works: you purchase gift cards at face value—meaning you get the full amount to spend—and a percentage of your purchase goes back to St. Mark's. Whether you're shopping online, dining out, buying groceries, or filling up on gas, every purchase makes a difference. Brands donate a portion of the sale (up to 20%, with an average of 6% and 5% for local dining) directly to St. Mark's.

Over the years, funds raised through this program have supported many projects at St. Mark's, including the Christmas Light Show, new furniture, carpeting, and AED training to name a few.

It's easy to support! Simply buy gift cards and St. Mark's receives a rebate—no extra cost to you.

Orders (for physical cards only) are placed the second Sunday of each month and delivered on the third Sunday.

To order or learn more, contact Tammie Kersten at 920-205-5858 or tamarakersten@att.net. You can also check out RaiseRight's website to see the offerings: [Gift Card Fundraising \(Scrip\) for Organizations | RaiseRight](https://www.raiseright.com/) (<https://www.raiseright.com/>).



RaiseRight

Simply the right way to fundraise

A Time to Serve

Our Synod is sponsoring a Youth Service Event at Feeding America Appleton on Saturday, October 4, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. This is a wonderful opportunity to serve our community and help address hunger in our area. All ages are invited to participate, but youth are especially encouraged to come out and help

Event Details:

- Location: 2911 West Evergreen Drive, Appleton, WI 54913
- Who Can Attend: Anyone 12 years and older
- Project Activities: Volunteers will help with sorting, packaging, labeling, or cleaning tasks. This could include packaging shelf-stable food boxes, labeling canned goods, sorting meat products, boxing fresh produce for shelters, or packing bulk products into family-friendly portions.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, serving 35 counties from Milwaukee and Appleton, supports our local food pantry.

If you are interested in joining me for this meaningful service event, please contact St. Mark's for more information and to register. Registration closes September 30, 2025. More details will be provided after signing up.— *Pastor Niveen*



St. Mark's Lutheran Church
140 S. Green Bay Road
Neenah, WI 54956

