

December 2025



The Messenger



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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

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Dear Children of God Gathered as St. Mark's Lutheran Church,

Grace and Peace to you.

As we enter this holy season of Advent and prepare our hearts for Christmas, I have been reflecting on the many ways God provides for us day by day—gifts of hope, comfort, and unexpected grace. Jesus teaches us to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread"* (Matthew 6:11), and in this simple petition we remember that every moment, every breath, and every act of love comes from the God who walks with us.

One of the places where I first learned this truth was at Talitha Kumi German Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem. Advent and Christmas were seasons of profound beauty and unity. Our school—made up of both Muslims and Christians—came alive with lights, music, and prayer. German and local Palestinian Christian traditions blended together in a way that reminded us daily that God's gifts cross every culture and every border. Each morning during Advent, we gathered for devotions in the chapel. We lit candles, read Scripture, and sang hymns in German, Arabic, and English. As I think about those moments, I am reminded of the Psalmist's words: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Psalm 119:105). Those daily rituals prepared my heart for Christmas, teaching me to expect Christ with hope and to welcome Him with joy.

Like the children of St. Mark's today, we students played an important role in the celebrations. We decorated our classrooms, made handmade ornaments, and prepared a Christmas pageant filled with traditional carols and Palestinian melodies. At sixteen, I preached my first sermon during Advent—on the meaning of love from 1 Corinthians 13. Even then, I felt God planting seeds in me, much like the Spirit continues to plant seeds in our own children and youth as they acolyte, sing, read Scripture, serve meals, and bring their gifts to worship.



From
the
Pastor

(Continued on page 2)

From the Pastor

(Continued from page 1)

The teachers at Talitha Kumi guided us not only in traditions and music, but also in compassion and generosity. We collected donations for families in need and learned that Advent is not only a season of waiting—it is a season of giving, listening, and serving. I see that same spirit alive here at St. Mark's as so many of you give your time, your prayers, your resources, and your love to the ministries of this congregation.

Like today, my life in Palestine was marked by many hardships under military occupation, and my parents often could not afford Christmas gifts for my siblings and me. But each year, through the kindness of churches and international partners, every student received a gift. It was a simple reminder that even when the world feels heavy, God provides through the love of His people. The same spirit is alive in our community here—whether through quilting ministries, food pantry, service teams, or the quiet acts of care that never go unnoticed. Even during exam season, the school felt full of light—cookies baking, lanterns shining, children laughing, and hymns echoing in the chapel. Western and Eastern Christian traditions were honored, giving every family space to celebrate in their own way. This diversity was a living reminder that God's daily provision embraces all of us—our needs, our stories, and our cultures.

As I think back on those memories, I am filled with gratitude for the ways God is also at work here at St. Mark's. In our Advent worship, in our shared ministries, in the service of our children, and in our care for our neighbors, the light of Christ continues to shine. And as we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we trust that God will keep providing for us—materially, spiritually, and communally.

May this Advent season renew your hope, strengthen your faith, and remind you that Christ enters our world every day—through kindness, through justice, through community, and through love.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." — John 1:5

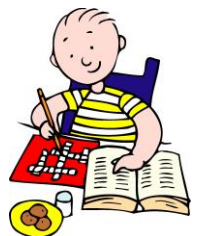
Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

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

Do You Like Crosswords?



If you like doing puzzles, Pastor Niveen has created something just for you. It's an Advent Crossword puzzle for you to tackle. There are copies of the puzzle in the narthex, or if you email the church office, we will send you your very own copy! Try it out and you might learn something about Advent you didn't know!



October was a very busy time at the Food Pantry. We had 109 families shopping to help feed 300 family members. October did have five Wednesdays, so that was a very busy time. You have been very generous with your donations, and, at the moment, we are well supplied with canned goods and paper products. If you would still like to help us, we would appreciate cash donations to help us purchase meat, dairy products, and produce. We shop every week, so we will have enough to feed all the families that come to the pantry. Thank you so much for your continued support.
— Karen Jordan

The Social Ministry Team will meet on December 8 at 1:00 p.m. at St. Mark's apartments next door to the church.

Moses Message



I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving!! We are now entering the season of Advent. This is the time we prepare for the birth of Jesus. We start lighting the candles of Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy and end by lighting the Christmas candle on Christmas Eve. The Sunday School is going to present their Christmas program on Sunday, December 14th during regular church. So come on December 14th and watch the program "Sing a Song of Christmas"!! Help us to herald the birth of Jesus with song.



There will be a Christmas program practice on Saturday, December 13th at 10:00 am, and ALL CHILDREN SHOULD BE THERE!!! We will be having a little Christmas party after the practice that will include a craft and lunch. If parents and siblings would like to join us at 11:30 am that day you can enjoy the lunch with the children. You are welcome to come!!!

There will be NO SUNDAY SCHOOL after December 14th until January 11, 2026.

**CELEBRATE
JESUS'
BIRTHDAY!**



The Christian Education Ministry Team would like to thank the congregation for your support through the year. We also want to wish everyone a . . .

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

BIRTHDAYS

Josie Parker	12-20
Jesus	12-25

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL!!



ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
PARENTS/GUARDIAN NIGHT OUT!
 Do some Christmas Shopping or just enjoy a night out, while we entertain the kids!

MOVIE Night

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19
 MOVIE, PIZZA, POPCORN,
 DRINKS, & GAMES
 Ages 3 & up
 Church Theatre Room

Registration forms in the narthex!

Producers:
 Youth & Christian Ed Ministry Teams

**TIME:
 5-8 PM**

Remembering Walt Ziemke

Pictured below are Cheryl and Phyllis Ziemke, holding a funeral cloth that the Ziemke family donated to St. Mark's in memory of Cheryl's father and Phyllis' husband, Walt Ziemke. Thank you, Phyllis and family, for this beautiful donation!





Call to order: President Dawn Jones called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

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

Devotions: Devotions by Tammie Kersten.

Dawn informed the council that Emily Christofilis has stepped down from her council position. The council wishes to thank Emily for her contributions to the council in the past few months. Dawn has contacted the runner-up, Tara Dieck, from council elections during February's annual meeting. As of meeting time, she had not heard back from Tara. **MSC by Tom Frantz/Tammie Kersten, pending Tara Dieck's acceptance, to approve Tara to fill the vacant position till the February 2026 annual meeting.**

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

MSC by JT Rose/Jason Blank to approve minutes of October 16, 2025.

Thank Yous: Tammie will send thank you notes to the St. Mark's women who assisted the Synod WELCA group with their Biennial conference, that was held at St. Mark's on November 8th: Pat Westphal, Gwen Hoehne, Lois Hill, Jean Memken, and Mary Jane Hartley.

Did You Know? Jason Blank has turned in his message for December and Pastor Niveen will prepare something for January. Tammie will do February on Endowment – they are revising the information and this will be a great opportunity to highlight the endowment program and encourage ministry teams/individuals to apply for funding.

Financial Reports: Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of October 2025. October's giving to current monthly expenses was \$14,381.16 and expenses of \$12,898.16. The difference was \$1,483.00. Year-to-date: Spending=\$147,003.35 and Giving=\$148,788.48 with a net of \$1,785.13. It was noted that many have given additional this past month, to assist with our recent monthly shortfall – thank you!



Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$248,073.13 which includes \$148,308.79 allocated to designated accounts and \$99,764.34 for current operating. Additionally, \$173,675.05 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,048.42 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$58,191.38 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

MSC by Jason Blank/Joe Rehorst to approve October's financial report.

Pastor's Report ~ Pastor Niveen Sarras

"The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever" (Psalm 138:8).

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we continue to walk in this season of gratitude and anticipation, I give thanks for the many ways God is moving in our congregation. God's Spirit is quietly and powerfully shaping our ministry, forming new leaders, opening fresh opportunities for learning, and grounding our service in love, compassion, and justice.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Sunday School and Formation

One of the most joyful places where God's transforming work is visible is in our Sunday School. As we move into January 2026, we will begin a leadership transition within our program. I will take on teaching the older children, focusing on Scripture, discipleship, and spiritual formation, and I will continue to teach Sunday School until we have another volunteer in place. Jenny Case will do crafts and activities, allowing children to experience the biblical story with their hands, hearts, and imagination. The Christian Education Ministry Team fully supports this plan, and I am grateful for a shared commitment to nurturing the faith of our children.

I also worked closely with Sherri Denney by providing updated acolyte guidelines. These will support a new group of children who are eager to serve as acolytes.

Worship, Music, and the Advent Season

I met with the Worship and Music Ministry Team as we planned our Advent midweek services and Sunday worship. Together, we discerned the times for our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. Please see my detailed Worship and Music Ministry Team report for specifics. It is a blessing to prepare these holy days with such a dedicated and prayerful group.

As our worship planning unfolds, I am simultaneously working with volunteers and local clergy to prepare for the community Christmas dinner on Saturday, December 13, 2025, at St. Paul. This shared effort reflects the spirit of fellowship and service that we seek to embody throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons.

In this same spirit of preparation, our Christian Education Ministry Team is actively organizing the children's Christmas program, which will take place on December 14.

Committee Work and Ministry Partnerships

I continue to meet with several committees including Stewardship, Finance, and the Racial Equity Ministry Team. The conversations and planning within the Racial Equity Team have been especially moving. We reviewed upcoming book selections and discussed how these resources will help us deepen our understanding of racial justice. We also concluded our stewardship season on November 9 with a joyful congregational potluck. It was a time of celebration and gratitude for the generosity of our community.

Writing, Teaching, and Wider Church Engagement

My article on Isaiah 2 has been submitted and published, and I thank God for the opportunity to share theological reflection with a wider audience. I also participated in the Women of the ELCA biannual meeting, where I led worship and presided over Holy Communion. God's Spirit was truly present in this gathering of faithful women. Additionally, I attended the clergy meeting at Zion Lutheran Church in Appleton. We learned from Molly Smiltneek, JD (Asylum Attorney and Afghan Asylum Legal Coordinator), about how congregations can respond with compassion and advocacy when a community member is detained by immigration services. This was an important and sobering conversation that will help guide our pastoral care and response in difficult situations.

Ecumenical and Community Ministry

I want to remind the council that we will have an ecumenical worship service on Wednesday, November 26, at 6:30 pm at the United Church of Christ. This service is a beautiful witness to our unity in Christ. Further information can be found in my Worship and Music report.

Finally, on December 11, 2025, I will present a virtual lecture for the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice titled "*Jesus Was a Palestinian Jew.*" You are all warmly invited to attend.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

In all these things, I see the steady work of God—guiding our steps, shaping our ministries, and calling us deeper into service and love. Thank you for your partnership in the gospel, your leadership, and your commitment to the mission of Christ.

Synod Partnership: ECSW–Western Diocese Accompaniment Fund

Our synod is inviting congregations and individuals to support the newly created **ECSW–WD Accompaniment Fund**, established to help sustain the synod’s partnership with the Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. This fund will cover travel expenses for an upcoming synod delegation to South Africa (December 8–23, 2025) and help build a foundation for future sabbatical exchange opportunities between leaders in both regions. A generous matching gift has been offered, and congregations are encouraged to participate through offerings, designated church gifts, or personal donations. This is a meaningful way for us to walk with our global partners in faith and ministry.

May God continue to strengthen us for the work ahead.

In Christ’s peace,

Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras

MSC by JT Rose/Tom Frantz to approve Pastor’s report.

Ministry Team Reports:

Christian Education Ministry Team—November 3, 2025 – *Submitted by Jean Memken*

Present: Gwen Hoehne, Chair, Pastor Niveen, Dawn Jones, Jenny Case, Joy Case, and Jean Memken

Pastor Niveen led the opening prayer.

Planning for Advent

The children will be practicing for the Christmas Program during Advent.

The acolytes will be helping Pastor with the worship service during Advent. Gwen has spoken with all the parents/grandparents of the acolytes, and acolyte training started last Sunday with them learning to light the altar candles. Gwen distributed the acolyte schedule. The acolytes will participate in the worship services every other Sunday starting November 30.

Dawn reported that Laurie Olson had a suggestion about the acolytes. She thought it would be helpful to put together a list of acolyte duties that could be given to the acolytes and their families. She also mentioned that these duties might change given special needs for special services, and the acolytes should be made aware of that.

Pastor Niveen said the ELCA has a document about acolyte duties that she will retrieve and modify to fit the duties of acolytes at St. Mark’s. Gwen said she would give copies to the acolytes and also mail copies to their parents/guardians so they know the expectations for their children.

Christmas Program

The Christmas Program will be December 14 in the church followed by the Basket Raffle in the Fellowship Hall. Gwen distributed the Christmas Program. Speakers have all been assigned. Judy Hellman will examine the music to make sure it would be appropriate for the children’s age and skill level. There are many familiar carols included in the program. The children will sing “Go Tell It on the Mountain” during the program, along with many other songs and carols.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Gwen mentioned she needed a large (toddler size) doll and a baby doll for the program. Dawn said she could get a therapy doll from where she worked for the large doll and Pastor Niveen volunteered to bring a baby doll. Gwen also mentioned she would speak with Bruce Grundman about setting up the platform in the sanctuary for the program.

The children will not have to memorize parts. Rather than having them use the pulpit for their speaking roles, there will be three stools and microphones set up for them to use. They will have music stands in front of them with the scrip for them to read from.

It was decided that the program would be at the beginning of the service. There will be the Call to Worship, the Lighting of the Advent Candles (with a song), and then the Christmas Program. Pastor Niveen will create the rest of the order of worship, but will not include a sermon since the children will be giving the message that morning.

Sunday School Curriculum

Gwen shared a scratch off Advent Calendar that she thought we could give the children. We could give one calendar per family on November 30 during Sunday School.

Pastor has been thinking of ways to help the Sunday School students make the transition from Sunday School to Confirmation. They need to have a firm biblical foundation and be introduced to scriptural curricula if they are to succeed in Confirmation classes. Pastor suggested she could co-teach the upper grades class with Jenny to assure the needed curricula is covered. Jenny will not be able to teach Sunday School in February, so Pastor will fill in for her then, and will continue to co-teach with her until the end of the school year. Gwen mentioned that they must have two adults with each class at minimum for safety reasons, so having Pastor co-teach would fulfill this requirement.

Dawn mentioned that some parents had come to her as Council President expressing concern about the example the Sunday School teachers were setting for the students. She mentioned that all Sunday School teachers should:

1. Be a model for the students.
2. Be respectful of the Sunday School Superintendent and other people.
- And 3. Sit in church on Sunday mornings and participate in the worship service.

Gwen reported on first communion training. She has talked to Pennie Linna about starting this class. Students attending will be Hunter, Tyler, Vayda, and Avery.

Gwen gave a description of the various websites she uses to develop Sunday School curriculum for our children. One she has found especially useful is called Danielle's Place. She prefers using these sites rather than ordering workbooks for each student which can be very costly.

There was a discussion about Sunday School curriculum. Jean asked if there was a framework in place that would identify what learning should take place at each grade level. Pastor mentioned she develops a syllabus for the confirmation class, so the students and their parents know exactly what the learning expectations are. She volunteered to develop something similar for the Sunday School classes.

Gwen suggested moving the older children's class into the Confirmation Room since it is not needed for Confirmation this year.

Safety Concerns

Pat Wesphal and Pennie Linna expressed concern about having the children on our Facebook site when they do the Christmas Program. They fear someone will be able to capture an image of them and use it for nefarious

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

purposes. Gwen showed us the form we use to get permission to use the children's picture in church publications and websites for promotional purposes. Members will investigate this problem further and report at the next meeting.

Members were asked to bring cookies or bars on the 14th for Fellowship Time.

The meeting ended at 7:30 pm with the Lord's Prayer.

Property Ministry Team—November 3, 2025 ~ Submitted by Jason Blank

Members Present: Bruce Grundman, Phyllis Ziemke, Jason Blank, and Joe Rehorst

- Joe Rehorst continues to install and modify the light bulb replacement throughout the entire church.
- The parking lot resurfacing is underway and should be completed soon.
- We have contacted a new snow removal service, as our previous company no longer offers this service.
- The boilers (heaters) have been turned on for the winter.

Social Ministry Team—Sunday, November 16 ~ Submitted by Gwen Hoehne

Present: Karen Jordan, Phyllis Ziemke, Pat Thompson, Gwen Hoehne

- 1) Discussed who will receive gift cards for Thanksgiving.
- 2) Discussed and decided on what to do for a basket for the raffle.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—November 17, 2025 ~ Submitted by Pastor Niveen

1. Christ the King Sunday – November 23

Our Christ the King Sunday service will take place on **Sunday, November 23rd**.

- **Worship Leader:** Pennie Linna will lead the service.
- **Organist:** Nancy Krause will serve as substitute organist in place of Judy Hellman.

2. Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service – Wednesday, November 26

We will join with our ecumenical partners for the annual **Thanksgiving Service on Wednesday, November 26th at 6:30 p.m.**, hosted by the **United Church of Christ**.

- **Preacher:** Pastor Niveen
- **Hospitality:** The hosting congregation will provide the coffee hour.
- **Choir:** Everyone is warmly encouraged to participate in the rehearsal at **5:45 p.m.**, immediately before the service.

3. Beginning of Advent – November 30

The season of Advent begins on **Sunday, November 30th**.

This year, **our Acolytes will participate more frequently**, assisting in leadership roles throughout the season. Their involvement is both formative and an important contribution to our worship life.

4. Christmas Program and Raffles – Sunday, December 14

Our annual **Christmas Program**, along with the raffles, will take place on **Sunday, December 14th**. Further details will be coordinated with the Christian Education Ministry Team and shared as they develop.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)


5. Fourth Sunday of Advent / Blue Christmas – December 21


The **fourth Advent service** falls on **Sunday, December 21st**, and will be shaped as a **Blue Christmas Service**, honoring the tradition of holding this observance on the longest night of the year.

This service provides sacred space for those experiencing grief, hardship, or stress during the Advent season.

6. Midweek Advent Services - St. Mark's and St. Paul will hold three midweek Advent worship services on the following dates:

 **Wednesday, December 3**

 **Wednesday, December 10**

 **Wednesday, December 17**

Time: 11:15 a.m. (morning only)

Location: St. Mark's Sanctuary.

Fellowship: Soup and Dessert after worship.

or

Time: 6:30 pm (Evening only)

Location: St. Paul's Chapel.

On December 10, following the evening service at St. Paul, people are invited to stay to help fill the gift bags for the Community Christmas Dinner.

7. Christmas Eve Service – Wednesday, December 24 at 5:00 p.m. with Holy Communion and Christmas Carols. No Fellowship.

8. Christmas Day: Thursday, December 25, At 10:00 am with Holy Communion and Christmas Carols. Fellowship to follow.

The ministry team has decided to decorate the church for Christmas on Saturday, November 29th, at 10:00 am. Everyone is encouraged to participate in this event.

Youth Ministry Team—November 16, 2025

The Youth Ministry team had to be cancelled this month.

Connections Ministry Team—October 27, 2025 ~ Submitted by Mary Jane Hartley

Our bingo was a success. We had 30 attend. What a wonderful gift we received. Joe Rehorst gave us a Halloween candy dish that he made. Thank you Joe, it was wonderful. We had a special bingo round for it, and Fern Fuhrmann who was so pleased to win it.

We had a special meeting on Sunday, October 19th, before the Craft Fair, and talked about things to get ready for the Fair.

Sloppy Joes are the best. Thank you to Judy Hellman and Linda Anderson for taking time to make them. Yum.

We had baked goods for breakfast. Jean Memken and her daughter, Sarah Rogers, made the best coffee cake, sweet rolls, and muffins. That coffee cake was delicious. Thank you.

Jenny Case and Joy made all the posters for the fair. Thank you.

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Thank you, Joe and Sandy Deckers, for giving up a day every year, to mark the table set up for our Craft Sale.

Property, Youth Group, and many others who came and set up and were there for clean-up. Thank you all for all your hard work. Many hands make small work fun.

Our Youth Group had soup to sell and will use funds for the bible camper events.

This craft sale earned the following amount for the Connections Ministry to share with agencies who help those in need in our community. At our next meeting, we will vote on ones to support this year. A breakdown of the profit is as follows:

1. Bake Sale:	\$ 586.00
2. Food:	\$ 373.00
3. Vendor (22)	<u>\$ 710.00</u>
Total:	\$1,669.00

Our food cost: \$ 172.04

Bless our many hands that helped make our Craft Fair a success. A special thank you to Sandy Mathenia for leading this effort. Thank you all!

We will do Fellowship on November 9, 2025. Also selling coffee items. ELCA women's event is November 8, 2025, and we plan to have a booth selling fair trade items.

Racial Equity Ministry Team – October 21, 2025 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Members Absent: Barb Girod

Pastor Niveen opened the meeting with a prayer.

Basket Raffle Ideas

It was decided to go with a “*Sunday Morning Brunch*” theme. Pastor will make granola, Laurie will purchase Equal Exchange Coffee, Dawn will purchase Great Harvest items, Mary Jane will find a nice Tea Towel, Pat will make sweet bread, and Barb can provide whatever her little heart decides. 😊

Lemon Tree Book study: The team thanked Pat for all her work on facilitating the study. It was well attended. Also, thank you to those who provided the tasty food which was wonderfully presented.

Discussed having other cultural programs, like those by Kristi Lee’s on Vietnamese egg & spring roll making, with a presentation and/or performance. Pastor Niveen knows an individual who is musically talented and may perform and/or present. Looking at the weekend of February 7/8, 2026.

Next book study will be the book “*See Me, Believe Me*” by Yolanda Denson-Byers. The date of Wednesday, May 6th has been set. Time: 6-8 PM.

Adjourned @ 7:10 PM with the Lord’s Prayer.

Next meeting will be November 11, 2025.

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team—November 18, 2025 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

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

Others Present: Jean Memken, Endowment Ministry Team Chairperson and Chris Schumacher, Thrivent Financial Advisor

Opened with a Prayer.

Chris Schumacher reviewed the St. Mark's Endowment Fund and the church's mutual fund investments, along with updating of the corporate paperwork. Chris gave suggestions on possible options to generate more interest/gains yet still be conservative with the St. Mark's investments. Jean will review the endowment suggestions and the Finance and Stewardship Team will discuss options at the December meeting. Laurie will gather more information on our ELCA Mission Investment funds, which comes due in January 2026.

Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of October 2025. October's giving to current monthly expenses was \$14,381.16 and expenses of \$12,898.16. The difference was \$1,483.00.

Year-to-date: Spending=\$147,003.35 and Giving=\$148,788.48 with a net of \$1,785.13. It was noted that many have given additional this past month, to assist with our recent monthly shortfall – thank you!

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$248,073.13 which includes \$148,308.79 allocated to designated accounts and \$99,764.34 for current operating. Additionally, \$173,675.05 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,048.42 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$58,191.38 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

We will keep the box for collecting intent cards and ministry gift forms in the narthex for a few more weeks, to catch those who haven't yet returned their forms. We will ask Jean to develop a list of those interested in ministry work and have it available for council's December meeting. Pat will begin entering the 2026 intent cards into Church Windows (our membership/giving software).

Laurie will be preparing a memo to the ministry teams, along with their team's 2025 financial reports, requesting they review 2025 and give budget request for 2025. Teams should also be preparing their final reports. Again, teams will be asked to think outside the box and not just do what has always been done.

Pat will be organizing the 2026 giving envelopes and have available for members to pick up by late December.

We will ask Jean to put a note in the December newsletter for members to submit ideas for 2026 Missions of the Month. They should submit their ideas for consideration by January 9th.

Closed at 7:30 PM with the Lord's Prayer.

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

Endowment Ministry Team—November 16, 2025 ~ Submitted by Jean Memken

The Endowment Ministry Team (Jean Memken, Nancy Maslow, and Tammie Kersten) met on Sunday, November 16, 2025, before worship. We received a request from Zion Lutheran Church in Appleton to help support their special Advent Services. This is something we have supported in the past, and we decided we would continue to support it this year. Zion has recently called a new pastor and we are happy to help their congregation as they transition to a new shepherd.

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

We also discussed the use of the Endowment funds and how we can get more of our members to think about how they could use the funds in the future. The Endowment Ministry Team is charged to use the interest generated by the fund each year, and we have not used very much of the fund at all this year. While we were meeting, Nancy Maslow spoke to Linda Rehorst about supporting the Community Christmas dinner, as we agreed that it would be something that the Endowment Fund could support. Linda subsequently submitted an application asking for \$500. This year, they are anticipating even more people attending the dinner, so the money will be used to purchase extra food to accommodate more attendees.

Tammie suggested publicizing the use of the Endowment Fund more in church publications. It was decided Jean would try to include a small article in the newsletter each month, letting people know how the Endowment funds are being used, and encouraging others to take advantage of the fund.

Meeting adjourned at 9:55 am.

Additional Meeting notes:

Property: Jason thanked Joe Rehorst for the additional volunteer hours on the lighting update.

Worship/Music: Pastor Niveen mentioned she was busy with Advent/Christmas planning with the Worship & Music Team. Discussed looking at options for contemporary music. It was decided that representatives from the council will approach the worship/music team in establishing an ad hoc team to work on scheduling contemporary/upbeat music with a core representation from the worship/music team.

Christian Education: Pastor Niveen will be teaching Sunday School, after the first of the year.

MSC by Tammie Kersten/JT Rose to accept ministry team reports.

Old Business:

- **Parking Lot:** Finishing next week.
- **Lighting update:** Finishing next couple weeks.
- **Computer update:** meeting with our consultant on December 1 and will then order smart board tv's.

New Business:

- **Set Budget and Congregational Meeting Dates:** Council has set the Budget Review Meeting for Sunday, January 25 and the Annual Congregational Meeting and Potluck for February 1st. Both meetings will begin after worship.
- **Accompaniment Fund Report:** Dawn informed council that the ECSW is inviting congregations and individuals to support the newly created ECSW-WD Accompaniment Fund, established to help sustain the synod's partnership with the Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa. She also reviewed St. Mark's trip to South Africa in 2017. The plan was to host our partners in 2020, but this was cancelled, due to COVID-19. There is currently \$6,406.35 in the Partnership Fund, designated for supporting hosting our South African friends. A discussion followed.

MSC by Tammie Kersten/Tom Frantz to support this request with \$2,400 from the Partnership Fund.

MSC by Tom Frantz/Tammie Kersten to adjourn in the regular meeting and convene to Executive Session for the purpose of discussing confidential issues.

MSC by JT Rose/Tom Frantz to adjourn.

Next meeting will be December 18, 2025 at 6:30 PM.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

*Please be
Praying for...*

Ellen LaMarche
Sarah L.
Richie Sczerzen
Gary Kostrzak
Judy Hellman
Traci



This month's Mission of the Month is our own St. Mark's Youth Ministry Program. Our young people continue to take a more active role in the life of our church, Our Sunday School program is active, too!

Your gifts will support outreach and programs that are geared



to our youth, helping to strengthen their faith and letting them know they are an important part of our St. Mark's family.

Some of the activities your donations will fund include community projects, national youth gathering travel, and mission trips, as well as fellowship activities for our youth here at St. Mark's. If you are interested in supporting our youth, please mark your giving envelope as a "Mission of the Month" donation or donate electronically through the VANCO giving program.



The Blank Family Christmas Tradition by Jenny and Jason Blank

Our family has volunteered to decorate the church Christmas tree for the last seven years. It has now become part of our family's annual holiday tradition to get together on the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving and decorate the St. Mark's Christmas tree. It is a joy and honor to participate in such a meaningful aspect of the holiday season. Like many Lutheran churches, St. Mark's uses simple, yet beautiful, white and gold Chrismon ornaments to decorate our tree. The word Chrismon is a combination of the words Christ and monogram (meaning symbol) and the ornaments typically depict common Christian symbols. The white and gold colors symbolize the purity and majesty of Christ. The evergreen tree itself represents eternal life through Jesus Christ. Decorating our St. Mark's Christmas tree with beautiful, white and gold Chrismon ornaments reminds us all of the light and hope of Christ and helps us to feel connected to the true meaning of Christmas. Thank you, St. Mark's, for letting our family prepare our church tree to get our worship space ready for the beginning of the Advent season.



Here's a collection of pictures of the Blank family decorating our Christmas tree throughout the years.

Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters
December 3 Mid-Week Advent	If you can help out as an usher or communion assistant, call the church office.				
December 7	Pennie Linna	Jeff Tharp	Bruce Grundman Judie Hilliker	Joy Case Jenny Case	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Fuhrmann Lorrie Wood
December 10 Mid-Week Advent	If you can help out as an usher or communion assistant, call the church office.				
December 14	Bruce Grundman	Jenny Case	Joe & Linda Rehorst Samantha Rose	John & Laurie Olson Shaun Johnson	Pat Westphal Jason Blank Jenny Blank
December 17 Mid-Week Advent	If you can help out as an usher or communion assistant, call the church office.				
December 21 Blue Christmas	J.T. Rose	Jane Frantz	Linda Anderson Nancy Maslow	Bruce Grundman Doug Hesser	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebestead Renie Sebestead
December 24 Christmas Eve	Sherri Denney	Pat Westphal	Doug & Renie Sebestead	Ginny Schieck Judy Gowler	
December 25 Christmas Day	Jean Memken	Bruce Grundman	Nancy Rose Pat Westphal	Mary Jane Hartley Pennie Linna	
December 28	Jeff Tharp	Dom Christofilis	Pat Thompson Phyllis Ziemke	Sherri Denney Chuck Baumgartner	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Linda Anderson

Communion Assistants:

December 7 – (At the rail) – Ginny Schieck, Pat Westphal, and Phyllis Ziemke

December 21 – (Intinction) – Pat Westphal, Phyllis Ziemke, and Linda Anderson

December 24 – (Continuous) – Chuck Baumgartner, Jean Memken, Doug Sebestead, Pat Westphal, and Sherri Denney

December 25 – (Intinction) – Jean Memken, Bruce Grundman, and Mary Jane Hartley

Altar Guild: Jean Memken



*A
Christmas
Prayer*

Dear Lord,

You have brought us to Christmastime once more. Help us not to get lost in the glitter and the glow, but to see the true glory of the birth of Your only begotten Son. Keep our hearts from clinging too tightly to parties, presents and decorations, and turn our eyes instead to Christ — who bears Your very image and brings us Your message of love and hope. In the glorious name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

PARKING LOT UPDATE

Over the past seven months, the following has taken place:

- We were initially informed that the parking lot would be completed in May/June.
- The timeline was repeatedly pushed back in two-week increments.
- The asphalt crew began work on October 30, grinding the lot and installing the base layer. The plan at that time was to complete the final layer of blacktop and striping during the week of November 17.
- The Property Ministry Team was later notified by the asphalt company that soft spots were discovered which need to be repaired before the final layer can go down.
- The construction company has advised that repairing these areas will require more time than the current weather conditions allow. Completing the top layer now would void our warranty.
- Therefore, the decision has been made to wait until **spring 2026** to finish the project.
- In the meantime, the asphalt company will install temporary asphalt ramps at the front and back entrances.
- Please continue to use caution when driving on the lot—the catch basin will remain marked with a cone throughout the winter.



Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to ensure the project is completed correctly and safely.

Mark Your Calendar!

November 30 – Beginning of Advent

Sundays, November 30, December 7, 14, 21) – Advent Bible Study:
“A Stable Lamp Is Lighted” – 9:00 a.m., Lounge

Wednesday, December 3, 10, 17 – Midweek Advent Service: “The Places of Christmas” – 11:15 a.m., Sanctuary - Evening worship service option available at Our Savior Lutheran Church – 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, December 13 – Ecumenical Healing Service – 10:30 a.m., St. Paul Lutheran Church

Saturday, December 13 – Christmas Community Dinner – 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., St. Paul Lutheran Church

Sunday, December 14 – Christmas Program & Raffles – After Worship

Friday, December 19, 2025 – Youth Movie Night – 5:00–8:00 p.m., Theater Room

Sunday, December 21 – Blue Christmas Service – 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, December 24 – Christmas Eve Service with Holy Communion – 5:00 p.m.
(No fellowship)

Thursday, December 25 – Christmas Day Service with Holy Communion – 10:00 a.m.
(Fellowship to follow)



Community Christmas Dinner Update!

Here are the latest needs for the Community Christmas Dinner.
Please call the church office if you can help!

We need 2 dozen more cookies and 2 more pies. Cookies need to be at St. Marks by Sunday December 9th or delivered to St. Paul's by Wednesday, December 10th. Fruit Pies need to be dropped off at St. Paul's between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm on Friday, December 12.



Volunteers needed on December 13

- 9:00 am – 1 volunteer
- 10:30 am – 2 volunteers
- 10:45 am – 2 volunteers needed to be wait staff
- 12:00 noon – 1 volunteer
- 12:30 pm – 2 or 3 volunteers

DRIVERS NEEDED – We need 6 drivers or teams of drivers to deliver meals to homebound residents in Neenah on December 13. You need to be at St. Paul Lutheran Church by 11:00 am to pick up the meals.

We need these volunteers identified by December 1.

Please volunteer for this important event in our community. You will have a great time and know that you are helping those in need in our community have a nice Christmas.

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

