

February 2026



The Messenger



Rev. Niveen Sarras,
Pastor
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Jean Memken,
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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



Fasting: God's Ancient Gift for the Healing of Humanity



As we enter the season of Lent, the Church invites us to slow down and turn our hearts back to God. In these forty days, through prayer, repentance, and fasting, we walk with Christ into the wilderness so that we may be healed, renewed, and prepared to rejoice in the resurrection at Easter. I would like to explain the meaning of fasting according to Scripture.

Fasting by giving up a favorite food is a relatively modern practice that developed as a devotional substitute when full fasting became difficult. While it can still be meaningful when joined with prayer and repentance, it is not how fasting is defined in Scripture or practiced in the early Church.

Fasting is neither a later spiritual invention nor merely a discipline of religious communities. It is the oldest commandment given to humanity, rooted in God's original relationship with humankind. In the Garden of Eden, God granted Adam the freedom to enjoy creation's abundance, yet lovingly set a boundary: he was to refrain from eating from one specific tree (Genesis 2:16–17).

The forbidden tree was "good for food... a delight to the eyes... and desirable" (Genesis 3:6), yet Adam was called to abstain. Fasting, therefore, was humanity's first invitation to rise above bodily impulses and allow the spirit to lead. Had humanity passed this test, the soul would have triumphed over the flesh, opening the way to the tree of life. Instead, surrender to appetite led to spiritual collapse, and the body gained mastery over the soul. From that moment on, humanity struggled with sins of the flesh and learned what it meant to live "according to the flesh" rather than the Spirit (cf. Romans 8).

Into this broken story came Jesus Christ—not to abolish fasting, but to restore it to its redemptive purpose. Because the first fall came through eating, Christ began His victory through fasting. Before preaching, healing, or gathering disciples, He fasted. When tempted to turn stones into bread, He revealed a

Continued on page 2

Fasting: God's Ancient Gift

Continued from page 1

profound truth: “One shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Physical nourishment alone cannot sustain the soul. Through Christ, fasting becomes a path of restoration, reordering the human person by placing the spirit above the body. Hunger can be holy, and emptiness can become space for God.

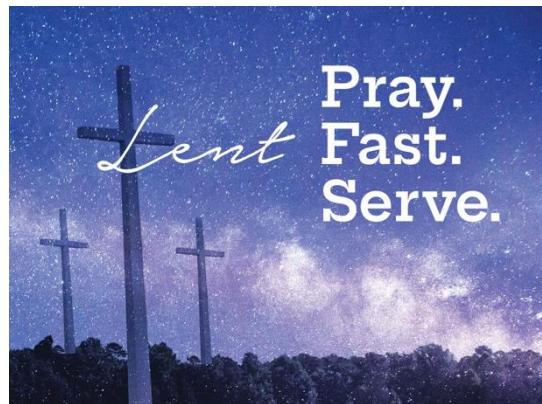
Biblical fasting involves abstaining from food altogether for a set period. The people of God refrained completely from eating until a specific hour, experiencing true hunger, and then broke their fast with simple, modest food. Fasting was a genuine bodily participation in prayer and repentance, not merely symbolic.

Throughout Scripture, fasting appears as a response to sorrow, repentance, intercession, and longing for God. King David humbled himself: “*I humbled my soul with fasting*” (Psalm 35:13). For him, fasting was inward surrender, not outward performance. The prophets followed the same path. Daniel fasted while seeking understanding and mercy for his people. Ezekiel fasted as part of his prophetic witness. Anna the prophetess spent her life in the temple, “*worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day*” (Luke 2:37), showing that fasting can be a lifelong posture of devotion, not merely a temporary discipline.

In the New Testament, fasting moves from preparation into mission. Jesus declared that after His departure, His disciples would fast (Matthew 9:15). They did, not out of obligation, but because fasting sharpened spiritual vision and attuned their hearts to the Holy Spirit. During a time of fasting and worship, the Spirit spoke clearly: “*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul*” (Acts 13:2). The Church’s first missionary movement was born not in strategy meetings, but in fasting and prayer.

Fasting also becomes the context for divine revelation. While Peter fasted, God opened his heart to the Gentiles (Acts 10). While Paul fasted, he endured hardship with spiritual strength and clarity (Acts 9:9; 2 Corinthians 6:5). Jesus Himself taught that some spiritual battles require more than words: “*This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting*” (Matthew 17:21). Fasting is not weakness—it is spiritual authority exercised through humility.

Fasting is deeply communal as well as individual. Just as believers pray together “*with one accord*” (Acts 4:24), they also fast together. When the people of Israel faced danger during Queen Esther’s time, the nation fasted in unity, and God delivered them. The same pattern appears with Ezra, Nehemiah, Jehoshaphat, and the prophets: when the people fasted together, God acted.



Fasting calls for intention and discernment, and I encourage you to approach it thoughtfully and prayerfully. Set a clear and realistic time for your fast, and let that time be accompanied by prayer, meditation on Scripture, and sincere repentance of heart.

Remember, it is not the length of the fast that matters most, but the spirit in which it is offered. If you are new to fasting, long hours may feel overwhelming at first—and that is okay. I invite you to begin gently by committing a few hours to God, and then, as your strength and discipline grow, to extend that time little by little. Fasting helps train the will, discipline the body, and deepen our dependence on God rather than on comfort or habit.

Continued on page 3

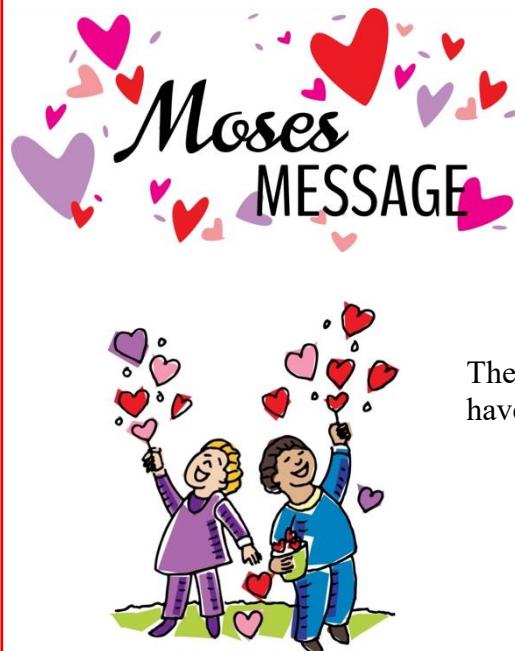
Fasting: God's Ancient Gift

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For those who have health concerns or must take medication, fasting should be adapted with wisdom and care. In such cases, fasting is not set aside but practiced in a way that is safe and faithful, within the limits of your body. For instance, you may want to fast after taking your medication.

Fasting is not merely a command but a gift from God, meant to heal, guide, and deepen our spiritual life. When practiced with intention, it strengthens prayer, sharpens the mind, lightens the body, and draws us closer to God. Fasting lies at the heart of Christian life—ancient, biblical, communal, and life-giving—offering a path to freedom, humility, and the restoration of our true calling in Christ. In this Lenten season, let us embrace fasting not as a burden, but as a sacred gift: a way to humble ourselves, to listen more attentively to God, and to prepare our hearts for the joy of Easter.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras



Well, the first month of the New Year is already over! We are into the month of February which has a special day for Love - Valentine's Day! This is a good time to remember that "*God so loved the world that he gave His only son to die for us and give us eternal life*" (John 3:16). Be thankful for the Love God has for you each day. The church is having a special Valentine's Dinner on Friday, February 13th. Hope your families can make it. It is a good time to have fellowship with church family and celebrate our love for God together.

The Sunday School will NOT be singing in church on February 8th. We have not practiced this song at all, so we will not sing that Sunday.

BIRTHDAYS

Miriam Clifford 2-19
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!

With God's Blessings,
Gwen Hoehne, Superintendent



The Food Pantry had somewhat lower numbers in December due to the fact that we were closed for a snow day as well as Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Even so, we had 39 families shopping to feed 101 members of their families. It was mostly our regular shoppers. We are in need of Hamburger Helper and saltine crackers, as well as cash donations. We buy meat, dairy, and produce every week, and as you know, the cost of everything has gone up quite a bit. We appreciate all your help. Thanks.

— Karen Jordan



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

Members Present: Dawn Jones, Jason Blank, Laurie Olson, Tara Dieck, Pastor Niveen, JT Rose, Tammie Kersten, and Tom Frantz

Members Absent: Joe Rehorst

Devotions: Devotions by Jason Blank. Pastor Niveen agreed to do February's devotions.

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

MSC by Tammie Kersten/JT Rose to approve minutes of December 18, 2025.

Thank Yous: Tammie will send a thank you Jean Memken for all her work preparing for Advent and Christmas.

Did You Know? Jean Memken-February. Dawn will do March with a history of the Movie Room, including a picture. It was suggested to ask Donna to consider writing something for October or November on the Basket Raffle.

Financial Reports: Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of December 2025. December's giving to current monthly expenses was \$19,154.78 and expenses of \$33,182.29. The difference was -\$14,027.51. This monthly deficit was due to receiving/paying three invoices from the synod for Pastor Niveen's salary/benefits.

Year-to-date: Spending=\$186,721.59 and Giving=\$184,012.14 with a net of -\$2,709.45. Laurie said that these end-of-year numbers do not include all the giving to missions and other needs outside of St. Mark's. Those numbers will be prepared for the annual meeting.

Total Associated Bank checking has a balance of \$240,434.41 which includes \$146,747.46 allocated to designated accounts and \$93,686.95 for current operating. Additionally, \$175,308.72 in the Thrivent money market and \$1,057.56 in Thrivent TIPS account and \$58,647.98 in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. Laurie noted that the Stewardship & Finance Team agreed to roll over the ELCA Mission Investment Fund for another three years at a fixed 4.2%. Stewardship & Finance Team will discuss, at their February meeting, changing some of the Thrivent Mutual Funds dollars into something a bit more aggressive, yet still on the conservative side.

MSC by Jason Blank/Tom Frantz to approve December's financial report.

Ministry Team Reports:

Pastor's Report ~ Pastor Niveen Sarras

I am grateful to report that our Advent season, along with Christmas Eve and Christmas Day worship services, were filled with joy, meaningful worship, and good participation. These services were a blessing to our congregation and a faithful conclusion to the 2025 year.



Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

Following Christmas, I took four days of vacation for rest, prayer, reading, and renewal. This time of Sabbath allowed me to return refreshed and better prepared for the upcoming ministries and worship services.

On Sunday, December 28, I did not attend worship in person; however, I prepared the bulletin and liturgy for the service. The service focused on offering praise and thanksgiving to God for the past year and reflection on entering a new year. Jean Memken faithfully led worship and preached, guiding the congregation into the beginning of the new calendar year of 2026.

At the start of the new year, I met with the Neenah Menasha Ministerial Association. Together, we planned a joint ecumenical peace worship service, scheduled for February 1, 2026, at Our Savior's Lutheran Church.

I met with the Racial Equity, Social Ministry, Finance, and Stewardship Ministry Teams and joined in serving at the Community Table, living out our shared commitment to compassion, outreach, and service within the wider community.

On January 11, I began teaching Sunday School. I am praying for and encouraging the development of leaders who are willing to continue this ministry in the future. I would like to remind the council that my teaching role in Sunday School is temporary. Additionally, I attended a Youth Ministry Team meeting where we discussed several upcoming projects, particularly the Valentine's event. This event is designed to engage our youth and help raise support for their participation in camp.

Throughout December and the beginning of January, I accompanied and provided pastoral care to members who underwent surgeries, remaining available for prayer, visits, and support.

I give thanks to God for the life of our congregation and for the opportunity to serve alongside faithful leaders and members.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr. Niveen Ibrahim Sarras

MSC by Tara Dieck/JT Rose to approve Pastor's report.

Ministry Team Reports:

Christian Education Ministry Team

No meeting this month.

Property Ministry Team—Monday, January 5, 2026 ~ Submitted by Jason Blank

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

- The lighting update project should be completed within the next couple of weeks.
- A new snowblower has been purchased and will be shipped directly to Joe Rehorst, who will assemble it and get it to church.
- We will be getting the carport repaired where it was struck a couple of months ago by a camper.
- We discussed the 2026 budget for our Ministry team and submitted it for approval.

*Please be
Praying for...*

Ellen LaMarche
Sarah Lamb
Richie Sczerzen
Traci
Mary Ellen Tracey

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

Social Ministry Team—Monday, January 12, 2026 ~ Submitted by Pastor Niveen Sarras

Present: Karen Jordan, Pat Thompson, Phyllis Ziemke, Jane Arps

Absent: Gwen Hoehne

Karen submitted her written annual report. The team shared gratitude that preparations for caring for our students are complete, including the provision of gift cards for our college students as a tangible expression of support and encouragement.

The team will follow up with Gwen to discern whether there are additional students who will be graduating this year, alongside Eric Blank, so that all may be recognized and celebrated.

In a spirit of joy and thanksgiving, the Social Ministry Team will host a coffee hour on **May 24** to honor graduating students and to celebrate their achievements within the life of the congregation.

As a continued ministry of connection and care, the team will send Valentine's Day cards to students as a sign of love, encouragement, and remembrance from their church community.

The team also reflected on our homebound members, prayerfully considering meaningful and compassionate ways to serve them and to remain present with them through ongoing care and support. The Team reviewed homebound and student names and discussed a plan to contact them, such as sending cards.

Worship and Music Ministry Team—January 19, 2026

The Worship and Music Ministry Team will meet next week on January 19.

Youth Ministry Team—January 11, 2026 ~ Submitted by Laurie Olson

Members Present: Laurie Olson, Nancy Rose, Sherri Denney, Ginny Schieck, JT Rose, and Pastor Niveen.

Members Absent: Joe Rose, Jeff Tharp, and Jenny Case

Prayer: Opened with a prayer by Sherri Denney.

Business for Consideration

Review of Events:

- **Movie Night – December 19.** Nancy, JT, Laurie, Sherri, and Ginny, who attended the event, thought it went well and agreed that we would offer it again later this year. We also discussed doing Christmas caroling.

Bible Camper -Fundraiser Events:

- **Valentine's Day Dinner – Friday, February 13th.**

Posters, tickets, and invitations are complete. Information has been placed in the January newsletter and in our Sunday bulletins and on Facebook. The Sunday School children colored the invitation covers.

Team members took the remaining invitations home to color and will bring them back next Sunday so the children can hand them out to members attending worship.

We will begin selling tickets before and after worship next Sunday. Nancy and JT will sell tickets on the 17th.

The menu will include spaghetti and meatballs with Alfredo and red sauces, bread, and salad. We will ask a few members to provide desserts. Ginny and Sherri will purchase the food supplies and coordinate the desserts, using the \$250 Thrivent Action Team grant for groceries. Pastor Niveen will make the bread. Appetizers will include cheese and crackers and fruit.

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6

Decorations from the last Valentine's Day dinner are stored in the basement; the team will review the decorations after the meeting. Laurie will coordinate the photo booth supplies and buttons.

Ginny has a friend who is available to provide entertainment; she is a singer. We agreed to pay her \$150. A few door prizes will be purchased. Ticket stubs with attendee names will be collected and winners will be drawn (approximately 10 prizes, such as Valentine candy).

We will ask youth to assist with serving. Youth who assist will not be required to pay the \$10 cost.

Other Items:

Youth Library: Sherri had given Pastor Niveen a few books that have been banned in the schools. A discussion followed on whether to make some of these books available at St. Mark's, in the form of a Youth Library. It was decided that if the youth and their parents are interested in any of these books, then they can check them out at the public library.

Upcoming Events:

- **Synod Snow Tubing -Kewaunee Winter Park, January 17 at 10 am.** Team decided, because of the timing, not to advertise this event to our youth.
- **Synod Gathering – Journey with Jesus (with Dave Scherer [AGAPE]), February 20-22.** Pastor Niveen will gather more information and get an email out to families to participate. Youth Activities fund is available to assist with the costs to attend.
- **Synod Bowling – April 5.** We'll get information out in early February.
- **St. Mark's Bowling Event:** Ginny will check with Thunder Bowling in Neenah for the possibility of doing an event on Saturday, January 31.
- Laurie will check with **Linwood Place** on some of our youth/adults going to their facility for a BINGO afternoon in March (avoid March 1, if possible).

Next meeting: Sunday, February 8 at 11:15 AM.

Connections Ministry Team

The Connections Team met at the church on Saturday, January 10, to take down the Christmas decorations.

Racial Equity Ministry Team—January 6, 2026 ~ Submitted by Pat Westphal

Present: Mary Jane Hartley, Dawn Jones, Pastor Niveen Sarras, and Pat Westphal

Absent: Barb Girod, Laurie Olson

The meeting began with a short prayer by Pat Westphal.

The annual report for 2025 was approved as edited and will be provided to Jean for the annual packet.

After a short discussion, it was agreed to again request \$300 as a 2026 budget amount. Although less than that was spent during 2025, with book studies and guest presentations we felt this was a reasonable sum to submit.

We selected *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson for our next book study to be held on Wednesday, May 6th from 6-8 pm in the Lounge. Although the book was written in 2014, it is thought to provide a good discussion about the topic of inequitable treatment for inmates as Stevenson encounters conspiracy, political machination, and legal barriers. It is a true story. We will again let other parishes, friends, and friends-of-friends know about the study.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Pastor has talked with her friend, Kertika, (still not sure of the spelling) from Indonesia. She is not available until April 12th. It is planned to ask her to provide music for the church service and provide some information on her life experience as a Buddhist converted to Lutheran and life in Indonesia, where her family still lives. This date is the Sunday after Easter. Pastor will confirm with Kertika.

Jane Frantz has procured the rights to show *Where Olive Trees Weep*, a 1 hour 40 minute film on Palestine, with discussion questions. We are going to check with Jane regarding her schedule. It was thought that Saturday, February 7th, would be a good day for the film in the theater room. The suggestion is to show the film at 10:00 am and follow the film and discussion with a light lunch at 1:00 pm. Soup, bread, and salad sounds like a winning menu.

We agreed to look for a book from a Hispanic culture for an October book study. Keep your eyes open, please.

Finally, we decided that we need a social team event. We will meet for supper at 5:00 pm this Friday at Little Siam (Thai food) in downtown Neenah. Let's have a fun time together. See you then.

We closed with the Lord's Prayer at 7:20 pm. The next meeting will be on February 10 at 6:30 pm unless we need one on the February 3rd to prepare for the Saturday film. STAY TUNED.

Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team—January 13, 2026 ~ 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

Opened with a Prayer by Pastor Niveen.

Laurie reviewed current account balances through end of December 2025. December's giving to current monthly expenses was \$19,154.78 and expenses of \$33,182.29. The difference was -\$14,027.51. This difference was due to receiving and paying three months of Pastoral salary/benefits to the synod in the month of December.

Year-to-date: Spending=\$186,721.59 and Giving=\$184,012.14 with a net of -\$2,709.45. This is end of the year balance of current spending.

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It was noted that the team met on Sunday, January 4 to discuss the Mission Investment Fund. The 3-year term was up. It was decided to rollover the funds for another three years at 4.1%.

Discussed briefly the need to stay on top of incoming giving – we have started the year with low giving the first two weeks of January. Pat noted that pledges are down significantly, but it was noted by Pennie that we did not focus on pledges, during our Stewardship Drive – it was spiritual gifts. Pastor Niveen remarked that many do not pledge, including herself.

Laurie and Pat have been working on compiling the end-of-year finances and reports.

The Finance Team reviewed the proposed 2026 budget, including benevolences. The team has recommended to the church council to maintain 2025 benevolence budget numbers.

Continued on page 9

Continued from page 8

Laurie recommended the discussion on the Thrivent Mutual Funds be on the February meeting agenda. Laurie needs to contact our Thrivent representative to get more information on the moving of funds for more of a return.

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

Next regular meeting is February 17, 2026, at 6:30 pm.

Endowment Ministry Team

No meeting this month.

MSC by Jason Blank/JT Rose to approve the Ministry Team Reports.

Unfinished Business:

Music Ad Hoc: A meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 18, after worship.

Lighting Update: Joe hopes to finish in February.

Computer Upgrade Updates: Laurie continues to work with the security company to resolve the updates for the programmable back door – once that is solved, the new computers can be set up.

New Business:

- **Benevolences:** Council discussed our budgeted benevolences and decided to maintain 2025 giving amounts.
- **Approve 2026 Budget:** Laurie reviewed the budget amounts provided by the Ministry Teams and staff. **MSC by Jason Blank/Tammie Kersten to approve the 2026 Budget as presented for final consideration at the February 1, 2026, Annual Congregational Meeting.**
- **Approve 2026 Mission of the Month Ballot:** Council reviewed last year's agencies and the new agencies presented by congregation members. **MSC by Tammie Kersten/JT Rose to approve the provided list with the removal of Bunk Beds for Guatemala, Food for The Poor, and Produce Good Fruits and add Water to Thrive, LAMP, and the Multicultural Coalition, Inc. Also, instead of voting for one from each category, members can vote for three.**
- **Review formats & assignments for Budget & Annual Meeting:** Jason will purchase meat & buns. Tom and JT will help with kitchen work. Dawn will ask Pat Westphal and Mary Jane Hartley to count ballots. Dawn noted that Pennie agreed to do a 5-minute video/photo review of 2025. Tammie will assist with doing the minutes.

MSC by JT Rose/Tom Frantz to adjourn. At 7:55 PM

Next meeting will be February 19, 2026, at 6:30 PM.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

It's B-A-A-A-C-C-K-K-K-K! Bingo starts on March 16!



The wait is almost over! BINGO at St. Mark's will return on March 16th at 1:00 in the afternoon. As always, there will be plenty of snacks and prizes along with your favorite game! Come for an afternoon of fun and be sure to bring a friend!

Lenten Series for Wednesdays 2026

Walking Wet: Living Our Baptismal Promises in Daily Life

This series gently invites us to slow down and remember who we are and whose we are. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing through the Wednesdays of Lent, we gather around God's Word, prayer, and proclamation to reflect on the promises spoken over us at baptism. Week by week, we are called to trust God's grace, to live with humility and compassion, and to walk faithfully with Christ as we seek to love our neighbors and bear hope in the world. See the schedule below.

Date	Theme	Preacher
February 18	Traditional Readings For Ash Wednesday	Rev. Niveen Sarras
February 25	Live Among God's Faithful People	Dr. Jean Memken
March 4	Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord's Supper	Rev. Amy Engebose
March 11	Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ Through Word and Deed	Rev. Dara Clifford
March 18	Serve All People, Following the Example of Jesus	Rev. Niveen Sarras
March 25	Strive for Justice and Peace in All the Earth	Rev. Amy Engebose

All services begin at 6:30 pm. There will be a light meal (soup, bread, salad, dessert) served before each service, starting at 5:00 pm. Once again, we are partnering with our friends at St. Paul Lutheran Church, and they will be preparing two of the Lenten meals this year. So come and spend some time with old and new friends alike as we ponder the wonder of God's love during this Lenten season.

Lenten Season Community Project



Help for the Homeless HYGIENE DRIVE™

We are a collection site!

Bring items to church anytime during these dates:

Feb. 22 - Mar. 15

Donations of hygiene and cleaning supplies make it possible for local crisis agencies to concentrate their limited financial resources on providing qualified staff, safe housing, nutritious food, education, and counseling to those they serve.

DON'T FORGET TO ALSO SUPPORT OUR ST. MARK'S FOOD PANTRY.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Racial Equity Ministry Team
presents a community screening of:
WHERE OLIVE TREES WEEP



Saturday, February 21st
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
140 S. Green Bay Rd., Neenah

Where Olive Trees Weep (documentary, 2024) portrays the challenges and resilience of Palestinians within the Occupied West Bank through first-hand interviews with activists, journalists, mental health workers, and other experts. **ALL ARE WELCOME!**

A discussion will follow the screening along with a light lunch. **FREE**. Please sign up by February 19, so organizers can plan accordingly. Sign up options: QR code, call or email the church office at 920.725-2828 or office@stmarksneenah.org or sign up at church.





JOIN US for ASH Wednesday



A Heart Set on Repentance

Ash Wednesday – February 18

Begin your Lenten journey with us:

- **12:00 PM** – ELCA Churches Service at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Neenah
- **6:30 PM** – Evening Worship at our church

Join us for this time of reflection, repentance, and receiving ashes as we prepare our hearts for Lent.

Our Sunday Servants

Date	Assisting Minister	Reader	Greeters	Ushers	Counters	Acolyte
February 1 Annual Mtg. Potluck	Jean Memken	Pennie Linna	Dom Christofilis Bruce Grundman	Linda Anderson Nancy Maslow	Jeff Tharp Kim Wallmuller Fern Fuhrmann Lorrie Wood	
February 8	J.T. Rose	Gwen Hoehne	The Clifford Family	LaVerne Arndt Rosemary Cermak	Pat Westphal Jason Blank Jenny Blank	Vayda Zielinski
February 15	Jeff Tharp	Bruce Grundman	Judy Fowler Ginny Schieck	Joy Case Jenny Case	Gwen Hoehne Doug Sebstead Renie Sebstead	
February 18 Ash Wednesday				John & Laurie Olson		
February 22	Pat Westphal	Tom Frantz	John & Laurie Olson Shaun Johnson	Bruce Grundman Jeff Tharp	Bruce Grundman Lois Kemp Linda Anderson	Dylan Steeber
February 25 Midweek Lenten				Pennie Linna		

Communion Assistants:

February 1 – (At the rail) – Joe Rehorst, J.T. Rose, and Ginny Schieck

February 15 – (Intinction) – Pat Westphal, Phyllis Ziemke, and Dom Chirktofilis

February 18 – (Ash Wednesday) – Sherri Denney, Bruce Grundman, and Linda Anderson

Altar Guild: Gwen Hoehne and Linda Anderson



Make a Joyful Noise! Choirs are Starting Up Again!

Vocal Choir – Practice Wednesday, February 4th with performance to be determined.

Bell Choir – Practice on Sunday, February 8 at 11:15 am after worship and a little Fellowship.



GIVE NOW

Scan the code and give to support the ministry of St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Thank you.



The Mission of the Month for February is the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center which is part of the Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministries. They focus on four different ministry outreach areas.

The Threshold/Common Basket ministry includes everything that is distributed out their door including new quilts and blankets, diapers and wipes, morning coffee, mid-day sandwiches, hot meals, and hygiene kits. In the winter months, it also includes our energy assistance matching program.



Cultural immersions are visiting groups who come to learn about Lakota history and culture from the Lakota people. We strive to provide programming and presentations that foster mutual conversations and greater understanding of each other.

The Lutheran/Lakota Job Corp employs local people from the community of Pine Ridge to run and assist the ministries of the Reconciliation Center. This ministry provides people with a way to earn a living and support their families. They have added a mentoring element to the program for young adults.

Children and Youth—Currently, the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center hosts a variety of youth programs for young children, preteens and teens.

Please consider supporting this worthwhile agency this month. Include your donation in your offering envelope and mark “Mission of the Month” on the front of your envelope or denote Mission of the Month with your online giving.

Thank you, Faithful Servants!

Thank You to everyone that donated baskets and/or purchased tickets. We had a total of 65 baskets and brought in \$1,102. The proceeds will go to camp programs. Thank You to Jane Arps, Jeff Tharp, Sara Hopkins and our Youth Runners for keeping the day running smoothly.

Thanks,
Donna Joachim

Thank you to everyone that donated socks, blankets, cookies, pies or volunteered your time the day of the event at St. Paul's. Special Thanks to the drivers that helped to deliver 53 meals. There were 377 meals served between St. Paul's and Home Deliveries. What a wonderful way of doing "God's Work, Our Hands!"

God Bless,
Donna Joachim



Last year, the Church Council asked me to write an article about our Endowment Fund for this column. I wrote about the history of the fund and how contributions to the Endowment Fund are kept as part of the principal of that account which allows the fund to accrue more interest. So, a gift to the Endowment Fund is a gift that will continue to keep on giving as it creates more revenue to fund applications to the account.

But what exactly does the Endowment Fund support? Well, lots of things. But it could fund so much more. In the past few years, the Endowment Fund has supported individuals in our church who wanted to attend Lay School by paying their tuition and purchasing their textbooks. It has also been used to pay registrations for women attending WELCA events. It purchased enough tickets to the ESTHER Banquet so ten of our members could attend and represent our church at that event. So, think about what kind of conferences, meetings, or educational opportunities you might like to attend and write an Endowment Grant to ask for support to attend those meetings. I know some of our members are interested in attending the WELCA national convention that is being held in Des Moines this year. Could an Endowment Fund grant help pay for that opportunity? Fill out an application and see!

Last year, an Endowment Grant funded some children to attend camp when the Bible Campers fund was depleted. If you know a child that wants to attend camp or an ELCA youth gathering, an Endowment Grant might help that child attend those events. Likewise, if you see an opportunity to attend an enriching experience yourself that will strengthen your faith and bring you into a closer relationship with our Lord, apply for a grant to help defray the cost of that opportunity.

The Endowment Fund is not just for our members, and for the past several years, we have funded another ELCA church's Advent worship activities, and we have sponsored one of the summer concerts at Linwood House. I am thrilled we can support other churches and organizations, but I would like to see the fund used primarily for our own members. So, think about your ministry here at St. Mark's and how the Endowment Fund might help you carry that out. Do you need materials to finish a project, food to offer at an educational event, books or Bible study materials? Those are appropriate uses of our Endowment Fund. It could also be used to purchase new music, Sunday School materials, or reimburse travel to a conference that relates to your ministry team or the service you do here at St. Mark's. Apply for an Endowment Fund grant and let us help you carry out St. Mark's mission statement of love and service! – Jean Memken, *Chair of the Endowment Fund Ministry Team*

Don't Forget... Annual Meeting This Sunday!!!

Sunday, February 1 – Annual Meeting and Potluck – After Worship

You definitely want to be in attendance at our Annual Meeting where there will be election of officers and representatives to various meetings and committees. There will also be the selection of our "Missions of the Month" for 2026-27. Finally, we will hear highlights of what happened in 2025 here at St. Mark's and some updates on what is coming in 2026. And then there will be a potluck dinner for all to enjoy. The Church Council will provide the sandwiches, condiments, and drinks. Bring a dish to pass (salad, side, or dessert) and enjoy some fellowship with your St. Mark's family!



ANNUAL MEETING

*Sponsored by the St. Mark's Youth Ministry Team.
All proceeds will go towards the Bible Camper Fund.*

Valentine's Dinner

St. Mark's Lutheran

All are welcome: couples, singles, young, & the young at heart. Tell your friends & family

Doors Open at 5:00 PM Appetizers at 5:15 PM & Dinner at 5:45 PM

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH

ENTERTAINMENT | DINNER | PRIZES

Advanced Ticket purchase is recommended.

Tickets available in the church office during office hours and on Sundays after Worship. \$10 per/person

Voices of Peace at Linwood House



The popular Gospel group, "Voices of Peace," are back in action and will perform a concert at Linwood House in Appleton on Sunday, February 22nd, at 2:00 pm. This concert is sponsored by St. Mark's Lutheran Church Endowment Fund and was rescheduled after one of the members of the group required a hospital stay this past summer. Since it is inside, seating is limited, but the director at Linwood House wanted to be sure St. Mark's members knew about it and that they were welcomed to attend.



We joyfully share that **Emma Anderson** will celebrate her **99th birthday on February 4th**. We thank God for her life and faith. Birthday cards may be sent to:

Emma Anderson
2930 W. Oakridge Road
Neenah, WI 54956.

Happy Birthday, Emma!

Biblical Love Notes

The following compliments from the Song of Solomon may not go over well on Valentine's Day: "I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots" (1:9). "Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead" (4:1). "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing" (4:2). "Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses" (4:4). "[Your] eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set" (5:12). "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat" (7:2).

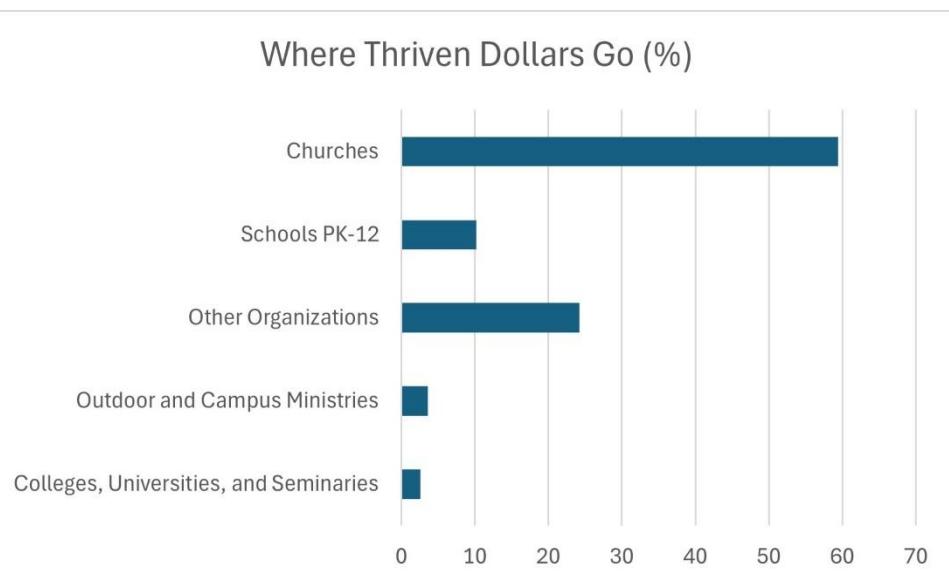
On the other hand, how about this one: "You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you" (4:7).

A Time to Give

thrivent®

It's time again to commit your Thrivent Choice dollars. Thrivent Choice is a charitable grant program that gives eligible Thrivent members the opportunity to influence where Thrivent distributes a portion of its charitable funds each year. Clients are invited to direct Choice Dollars among thousands of enrolled nonprofit organizations including churches, camps, schools, seminaries, campus ministries and more. More than \$619 million in Choice Dollars grant funds has been distributed since this program

started in 2010. The chart shows how that money was distributed. So if you are a Thrivent member, be sure to designate where to give your Choice dollars this year. Deadline to donate is March 31. Not sure how? Check in the church office to get some help.



St. Timothy's in Menasha is presenting the musical, "Once Upon a Mattress", on March 13-15 and March 20-22. Showtimes are 7:00 pm for March 13, 14, 20, and 21, and 2:00 pm on March 15, 21, and 22. Come and see St. Mark's member Jenny Case in this performance!

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



February

