

## September 2017 *Fortress*

### God's Comfort Calls Us from the Caves of Despair

1 Kings 19:9-18 There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel-- all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."

Have you ever done your absolute best at something, but even after all your hard work things just didn't turn out the way you had expected them to? Well, that was Elijah's problem. He had served the Lord diligently, trying to rid the land of Baal worship and to turn the hearts of the people back to the living God. In a contest against the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Elijah called on God who sent down fire from heaven in the sight of all the people, to prove that the Lord is God and that there is no other. The priests of Baal were revealed as false prophets. Baal was exposed as being no god at all, but only a worthless idol. Therefore, Elijah commanded the people of God who witnessed the event, to put Baal's priests to death, and the people followed Elijah's extreme command, proving that they believed what Elijah had taught them about the living God. But as soon as Jezebel, the wicked queen, who was Satan's tool to instigate Baal worship in Israel, heard what Elijah had done, she swore to have him killed. And so Elijah, in fear, ran away and hid in a cave. The Bible tells us: **There he [i.e. Elijah] went into a cave and spent the night.**

Now note that the "*there*," where Elijah was hiding was a place of significance. It was in a cave on Carmel, which in Hebrew literally means *the Mountain of God*. This was Mt. Horeb, the same place where,

many years earlier, God had appeared to Moses in the burning bush to send him on his mission to free the Israelites from bondage. It was the same mountain where, shortly afterwards, God had appeared to the Israelites in smoke and fire accompanied by trumpet blasts and peals of thunder, and spoke to his people in a voice so terrifying that they begged Moses not to have God speak to them directly, but that he would instead speak to Moses who could relay God's message to them. On that same historic mountain, God had come to speak to his people yet again. This time, to only one of his people a sulking prophet who, in anger, discouragement, and frustration, had retreated. While giving God the same silent treatment we often employ when we are angry at a loved one, he despaired, and said to himself and to God, what's the sense in living? I don't even want to deal with this wicked world anymore! God, take my life!

It is to his people in the caves of life that God speaks in the same words he spoke to Elijah. If you've ever found yourself in such a cave, you know what Elijah was experiencing. Perhaps you're in one such cave right now: A cave of fear, because you don't know what tomorrow may hold in store for you; a cave of anxiety because there is someone at school or work who is making your life miserable; a cave of doubt, because you are wrestling with your faith, and Satan is trying his worst to discredit all that you know to be true about God and his promises; a cave of guilt, because you know you have done things you should not have done, and you're wondering if you will ever be freed from the bondage of such evil thoughts and actions; a cave of resentment or hatred, a place where you simply cannot find it in your heart to forgive someone because of something he or she did to you.

Wind, earthquake and fire all reminiscent of the occasion when God delivered the Law to his people, on the same mountain 700 years earlier. So awesome was the event at that time, we read in Hebrews 12:21 **The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."** Those terrible sights and sounds demonstrated God's justice. He was manifesting his anger against anyone who would dare defy his commandments.

And so, once again, God sent those terrifying signs to his prophet in the cave. But the Bible says, God was not in the fire or in the wind or in the earthquake. Because even though God was displaying his awesome power through them, that was not the place he wanted his prophet to seek him. Such signs were a demonstration of the Law and its condemnation. God's law shows us our sin. It reminds us how weak and insignificant we are compared to almighty God. How frightening is the bare law which makes us realize what God demands of us, and how far we are from doing all he has required of us.

I am certain that those signs were frightening to Elijah too. Perhaps he wondered what God was going to do to him. I'm sure that he also felt the prick of the Law in his heart as he realized his own sin.

But the Bible goes on to say: **And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

God called to Elijah in a gentle whisper, *a still small voice*, as the King James Version refers to it. Elijah recognized the voice of God. For that is where God wanted Elijah to find him, in the gentle whisper of the Gospel.

Now, it is quite obvious that, even when God spoke to Elijah through the gentle whisper, he first spoke Law to him. He condemned him by asking, **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"** It was like us saying to a child caught in the act of doing something naughty, What are you doing? In other words, you're not supposed to be here; you're not supposed to be doing this.

But that is not where God left him. God does not leave us with the Law either. Instead, he came to comfort Elijah. He came to call him out of the cave of despair by showing him he had a plan for Elijah. God made it clear that his will would be accomplished. He assured Elijah that he was still in control. And most of all, he made it certain that he, the Lord Almighty, was the Savior of his people.

All too often, we come upon a task which we believe to be simply overwhelming. And all too often it is because we fail, first of all, to remember that God is still our God. He has power we do not have. Next, we forget that we are not alone. God has preserved for himself a remnant. He does not expect us to shoulder the mission alone, just as he was not expecting that from Elijah. The Bible tells us that the Lord knows those who are his. God knew of 7,000 people in Israel who had not bowed to the image of Baal, but had remained faithful to God. In fact, the first thing God did was to bring Elijah into fellowship with one such person, a

man named Elisha, the prophet who would succeed Elijah as the prophet of Israel. God gave these men to each other for mutual encouragement, so that they might strengthen one another by their faith and witness about God.

What a wonderful reminder this was of the importance of Christian fellowship. How often it is that, when we find ourselves in the caves of trouble or discouragement, we withdraw from church and fellowship. It is during those times when we need the encouragement of Christian friends. How sad it is, the many people who during a time of turmoil or discouragement in life, avoid church, instead of fleeing to its open doors to find healing and comfort.

Today, you may be hiding in a cave. But God calls to you in the still small voice of the Gospel. He says to you, "What are you doing here, Mary or John or Tom or Ann (or whoever you are)? Come out. I am your Savior." He proclaims to us that Jesus has lived and died in our place. No one can condemn us. He knows about the person who is giving us problems. He understands the hardships we face with health or finances. He knows about the sins and doubts with which we wrestle daily. And God says, "I am still in control. I will provide for your every need. Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."

God says to you and me today, "What are you doing here? Come out of the cave of loneliness, despair, guilt, defeat..." God has a mission for you to live for him and to continue to spread his Word. He still speaks to us through his Word. He still preserves his people. He is still in control. And he is still the Savior whose ultimate plan and will are that we are saved by his grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor Jeffrey Bovee

## **From Your Staff Minister**

The school year is starting again which means that St. John's adds more worship and Bible study opportunities to the schedule.

Friday, September 8: Men's Breakfast Bible Study: 6:30 am at Perkins

Sunday, September 10:

Sunday School: 9:30 am

Bible Class: 9:30 am

Thursday, September 14:

Bible Class: 10:30 am

Bible Class: 7 pm

Friday, September 15: Women's Bible Study: 9:30 am

Catechism for St. Paul's School (8 am) and public school students (6:30 pm) begin on September 6th.

Women of St. John's will have their first meeting of the season on September 7th at 7 pm.

Please check your calendar to see in which of these opportunities you can participate!

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51)

Kelly Emde

## Call Meeting

Pastor Jonathan Hackbarth returned the call extended by St. John's, New Ulm. As a result, another call meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, September 12 at 7 pm.**

If anyone would wish to make a request to nominate a name for the call list, he or she should contact MN District President Charles Degner as soon as possible at [mndp@wels.net](mailto:mndp@wels.net).

## Women of St. John's

Our next fellowship activity will take place on **Tuesday, September 5th.** Melanie Mohror will give us up-to-date information about the Southern Minnesota Crisis Nursery located in the Ivy House in New Ulm.

We will also continue sharing our small group discussion points regarding our mission and constitution from our May gathering. Please join us!

Christine Baganz

## Archives

### School Days Then

It's time again to review our commitment to Christian education and our relationship with **St. Paul's School.** Hope the names and numbers bring back some memories. That relationship has been a significant part of St. John's history. Selected dates reflect the school year beginning in August. St. John's first year was 1949 and the financial arrangement with St. Paul's Congregation was less formal during the early years. Total enrollment reports note both increases and declines over the years.

**1957-58, Pastor was Rollin Reim.** St. Pauls' School principal was Arthur Glende. Other faculty: Theodore Pelzl, Edwin Nolte, Adolph Gerlach, Margaret Gamm, Esther Buenger and Ruth Otterstatter. The school was then located across the street from St. Paul's church. Total enrollment was 417; no specific figures were given for children from St. John's but 120 were from other Synodical Conference congregations. A January 1957 Special Bulletin notes a proposal for budget increase for St. Paul's School support from \$2,400 per year to \$3,600. It also notes that the estimated cost for the St. John's members' children is about \$8,000 per year.

**1967-68, Pastor was Frederick Nitz.** Henry Krenz was the principal. Other faculty: Mrs. Robert Kolb, David Schweppe, Mrs. Arthur Glende, Miss Norma Duesterhoeft; Mr. Gene Hoyord was the college supervisor for the DMLC student teachers. Total enrollment was 435; 82 from St. John's. Special support for the school as listed in the 1968 annual report was \$8,610.

**1992-93, Pastor was David Kolander; David Zabel was Director of Christian Education.** Principal was Dale Markgraf. Other teachers called by St. John's were Jean Schroeder, Marlene Wendler and Wendy Ristow. Total enrollment was reported at 359 (pre-K-8) with 136 from St. John's. By way of a new arrangement: 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were departmentalized and teachers moved from room to room. Additional support was listed at \$72,360 in the 1992 annual financial report.

**2007-08, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske.** Principal was Mike Koestler. The 2007 budget lists \$4,214 by way of additional support besides the salaries of 5 teachers called by St. John's—total educational support \$232,436. Students from St. John's numbered 63 of 237 (K-8). The September 2007 Fortress reported the availability of laptop computers for use by students for research and other learning aspects.

**2016-17, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske.** Principal was Greg Thiesfeldt. Continued emphasis on "A Time to Build" anticipating remodeling and expansion. School start was delayed as a result. Mr. Nick Kressin was installed to teach grades 5 and 6 and to serve as Athletic Director. Of the 272 students (K-8) 92 were from St. John's. Students from St. John's continued to benefit from tuition offsets of \$530/\$430/\$330 (depending on family number) per child. Parents paid tuition totaling \$38,900. The budgeted amount for special support, in addition to the salaries of four teachers, for 2017 was \$135,000.

Obviously there were many changes but an unchanged commitment to Christian education.

Bob Krueger  
kruegerh@mlc-wels.edu

## September Sermon Texts

Sep. 3	Matthew 15:21-28	Lord, Help Me!
Sep. 10	Revelations 7:1-8	You Are Sealed with God's Promise
Sep. 17	Judges 16:22-31	Samson: Saint and Sinner
Sep. 24	Ezekiel 33:7-11	Return to the Lord, O House of Israel

## Council Digest - August 2017

The St. John's Church Council met on August 15. A summary of reports and action not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

- **Membership Changes**

- Transfers Out**

- Abigail Bitter to Mt. Olive, Mankato, MN

- Abigail Hemmelman to Trinity, West Bend, WI

- Kermit and Laura Moldenhauer to Our Redeemer, Madison, WI

## **Transfers In**

Cindy Kewatt from St. Peter, St. Peter, MN

Stephen and Valerie Pearson from Bloomington Living Hope, Bloomington, MN

Amy Santelman from Grace, St. Joseph, MI

## **Adult Confirmation**

Rickey and Margaret Meyer

- Rev. Jonathan Hackbarth, currently serving Salem Lutheran Church, Woodbury, Minnesota, is still considering our divine call to serve as administrative associate pastor.
- Pastor Bovee reported an opportunity to purchase some used sound equipment (a mixer, two speakers and an amplifier) from MLC for \$180. The equipment has been borrowed in the past from MLC for use during our outdoor worship services at German Park. Our Audio-Visual Fund could be used to cover the cost of the purchase. Although the council was in favor of obtaining the equipment, Pastor Bovee will consult with LAVA chair John Paulsen before offering to make a purchase.
- As previously reported at the voters' meeting on July 18, Pastor Bovee noted that a new photocopier is available through Marco that will provide an equipment upgrade and reduce the monthly cost of our lease by over \$150. He shared the details of the lease and the council suggested that he move forward with the purchase.
- Treasurer Paul Gunderson prepared a budget planning template and provided an orientation for the 2018 budgeting process. The various boards and committees will be working on their respective budgets in preparation for the September council meeting.
- The Board of Stewardship Chairman Josiah Stoering reported plans for a congregational mission festival on the weekend of November 5. Missionary Michael Duncan, currently serving the WELS in Nepal and Pakistan, will be the guest preacher.
- The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 19, at 7 pm.
- The next quarterly voters' meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 24, at 7 pm. The agenda will include presentation of the proposed congregational budget for 2018 and election of congregational officers.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt  
Congregational Chairman

## **Cards of Caring**

St. John's Cards of Caring group will resume its activity of making cards for our "home bound" and "thinking of you" members on Saturday, September 16, 2017, from 9 am until noon.

This fall we will meet in St. John's basement Fellowship Hall. We welcome all members ages 12 and older as well as Martin Luther College students to join us. Their creativity and help has been greatly appreciated in past years. Our task will be to make birthday and Thanksgiving cards.

No talents required! Come for fun and fellowship.

Contact Lois Willems at 359-7403 with questions.

# St. Paul's School

**Registration** School Registration took place on Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup> in the SP Parish Center. Although the attendance numbers won't actually be finalized until the school is in session, it appears that our enrollment will be slightly higher than last year. We ended the year with 271 (92 SJ) students and looks to begin the new school year with about 275 in grades K-8. Our enrollment at St. John's will remain about the same (90-32.7%). A more accurate report will be reported in the Annual Report in January. May God be praised to have each of these children in the school to hear the saving message on a daily basis. There are presently 47 - PreK students enrolled which includes both three and four year olds.

**School Opening** School begins on Tuesday, September 5<sup>th</sup> with an opening service that will begin about 8:15. The theme for the school year will be "Grace – Faith – Scripture" (in Christ Alone) focusing on the verse from Ephesians 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" joining the Synod's emphasis on celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 theses.

**Changes in Staff** The full time school faculty in 2017-18 will be the same, yet there will be two changes to the part time faculty:

Mrs. Rachel Tacke will no longer be teaching 7-8 art classes. The art classes will be taught by Mr. Biedenbender.

We added Mrs. Beth Tess to teach the Saxon Course 3 section of 8<sup>th</sup> grade math.

Two other changes were made in our non-teaching staff:

Mrs. Kate Carlovsky will be our pre-kindergarten teacher's aide, replacing Mrs. Nikki Steenbock.

Mr. Tim Plocher is the new Raider Kid Care director, replacing Mrs. Beth Scharf

**Curriculum Changes** The following are curriculum enhancements planned for 2017-18:

Grades 7-8 will use a new Bible History curriculum in 2017-18, Concordia's Bible History.

Grades 7-8 will be taking a STEM class, "Design and Model," through the Project Lead the Way (PLTW)

Gateway to Technology organization

Grades 7-8 language arts classes will use online curricular materials from IXL resources to enhance editing and grammar skills; Mrs. Griebel (7-8 English teacher) will also continue to use materials from the Voyages series (Loyola Press) to supplement instruction in writing and other disciplines of the language arts.

The primary and intermediate levels (grades 1-6) will use Easy Grammar as the foundation of their language arts resources- using the Voyages series to supplement the writing curriculum.

All levels have added teaching resources for spelling from Zaner-Bloser to enhance instruction.

**Teacher In-Services** The Faculty and staff participated in the ALICE training during its early August Faculty meetings.

This training will help teachers and students be prepared for events that we hope we never have the need, but to be prepared to the best of our ability. The faculty also attended MVL for the Area WELS Teachers In-Service on August 16 featuring presentations on Blood-borne Pathogens and "Writing Across the Curriculum" presented by Prof. Paul Grubbs. The WELS Minnesota Teachers Conference will be held on the MLC campus on Thursday and Friday, October 19-20. There will be no school on those dates.

**School Building Project Bathroom Project** – Correction changes were made in the bathrooms from errors that were made during construction last summer. Results passed inspection and final payments were made to complete the bathroom project. The funding campaign is nearing the \$2 million mark. Thank the Lord for continuing to bless the project with generous gifts.

The hope for additional gifts totaling \$1 million would bring the total within reach to secure a loan to complete the first phase. The first phase at this point contains plans to build a new entrance that would house the school offices and a handicapped accessible elevator. In the upper level it would house a larger classroom and additional resource and faculty work rooms. The project phase would also include an Early Childhood wing and allow some necessary building updates to the present structure. Continue to keep this project in your prayers.

**New Standardized Testing Program** St. Paul's School will use the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) achievement testing program. The MAP tests are formative, meaning that they provide reports on individual students that can be used to plan curricular and instructional changes that focus on areas that need improvement. The tests will be given three times – fall, winter, and spring. MAP uses computerized tests which will be more time-efficient than the Terra Nova testing program previously used. Finally, MAP will provide the quick results so that our teachers can make meaningful changes in learning strategies.

**Self-Study and MNSAA Accreditation Renewal** We are on schedule to complete the self-study and strategic plan as required by MNSAA for accreditation renewal. We look forward to the site visit by a MNSAA team April 11-13, 2018.

### **Calendar**

Sep. 5 First day of school  
Sep. 17 Jr. Choir (Gr. 5-8) sing in the 11 am service  
Sep. 24 Grades K-4 sing in the 8 am service  
Sep. 25-Oct 6 MAP Testing

Respectfully Submitted,  
James Dretske, SJ Administrative Teacher [jdretske@splnewulm.org](mailto:jdretske@splnewulm.org)

## **Your Synod at Work**

### **WELS CHRISTIAN AID AND RELIEF**

Since the August edition of the WELS Connection dealt with WELS Christian Aid and Relief, it might be a good time to take a look at what Christian Aid and Relief does. The mission of Christian Aid and Relief is drawn from the scriptural encouragement in Galatians 6:10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is the synod's "ministry of compassion," bringing physical relief to people suffering from natural disasters and severe medical and financial emergencies in the form of cash grants, food, clothing, and medical supplies. Christian Aid and Relief also partners with WELS missionaries to support humanitarian aid projects that can build bridges to proclaim the gospel. They review annually humanitarian and grant requests that are forwarded to them from the Boards of World Missions and Home Missions.

Their expenditures are divided into two categories: relief expenditures and humanitarian aid projects. From July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016, our relief expenditures were \$439,443 with \$154,877 designated for domestic relief efforts and \$284,566 for foreign relief efforts. From July 1, 2016, to December 31, 2016, our relief expenditures were \$144,403 total with \$103,440 designated for domestic and \$40,963 for foreign.



Specific opportunities to provide relief in the past two years included \$21,000 in support of our Central Africa Medical Mission; multiple individual grants for called worker crisis counseling through Christian Family Solutions, and other domestic aid for food pantries, inner city relief, and general aid for called workers and congregational members.

Major opportunities to provide relief in the past two years centered in Nepal, where \$82,000 was granted for earthquake relief. They provided food and water, blankets, Bibles, and tents for temporary worship. A grief counseling workshop was also funded to train our Christian leaders there to share the comfort of the gospel with people suffering catastrophic loss.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief also continues to provide help for families with catastrophic personal and medical difficulties by assisting the local efforts of congregations and missions as they reach out to those among them in need.

Gerald Woodley

## Library News

Since we are observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I have displayed the many materials found in our library about Martin Luther on the cart in the library. It includes some books written in the past as well as some of the newer books. It also includes some DVD's and a video. Please take the time to visit the library to view the display.

Prof. em. Frederick Wulff has written a book titled "Aging with Faith and Common Sense." He writes about his many travels and how the elders in different nations are treated. He also writes about his experiences while living in an independent living community. He writes: "Old age is a gift from God. The Bible gives us hope, comfort and encouragement in our journey of aging."

"The Harvest Raise" is the third book in a series called the Anthems of Zion. It was written by Katie Schuermann and published by CPH. She uses humor to tell the story of life in Zion Lutheran Church, it's pastor, and members located in the fictional town of Bradbury. "House of Living Stones" and "The Choir Immortal" were the first two books in this series.

A new book added to the children's section is called "God Made it For You." It is the story of creation written for children six to nine years old. It demonstrates how God's love is reflected in the world He made for us. The author is Charles Lehmann and it was illustrated by Kathleen Hemly.

Eleanor Runke  
Church Librarian

## Sharing the Gospel, Restoring Lives

Last September, the first Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program (MRVMP) planning meeting was held. The group established its mission to share Jesus with citizens released from jail or prison, as well as with needy people in our churches and community, and help them toward godly and productive lives.

Since that initial meeting, much progress has been made. Two mentor training classes were held earlier this year that introduced 26 local members to mentoring people in need. Several attendees are mentoring people now and sharing the power of the gospel with them. The picture below was drawn by a mentee in the program. God be praised for the changes the Holy Spirit is making in his life.

Program members continue to meet with local human services departments, courts, and employers to mutually assist each other.

The MRVMP planning committee is made up of members from St. Paul's and St. John's Lutheran Churches in New Ulm. More workshops will be offered soon.

If you would like more information on volunteering or supporting this ministry, contact Brad Price or email [prisonministry@wels.net](mailto:prisonministry@wels.net).

