



St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN
June, 2021 *Fortress*

CAN WE RETURN TO THE WAY THINGS WERE?

Lamentations 5:21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old.

It has been over a year. Wearing masks, socially distancing, following (or at least attempting to follow) the directions in businesses and grocery stores with arrows on the floor to direct traffic flow, not being able to eat in restaurants, having travel restrictions, being warned not to touch anything someone else might have touched... The list goes on.

It is certain that COVID-19 took its toll on all of us. We did our best to comply with the rules and regulations which were put into place in an attempt to curtail the spread of the virus and to keep society safe from contracting it.

I cannot tell you how many times I heard it said during this period of time-- I cannot tell you how many times I said it myself: "When will all of this be over?" I think all of us were wondering whether it would ever come to an end.

The Israelites found themselves in a bad way when they were conquered by their enemies. They were taken into exile, into a foreign land, where they didn't even understand the language.

God was chastening them. They had become complacent and had forgotten about serving the LORD with all their hearts. They put all kinds of other things, including pagan gods, above the true and living God. As a result, for a time, God took away all of the good and pleasant things from them, and caused them to long for what they once had. The prophet Jeremiah prayed on their behalf: **Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old.**

And then the day finally came when God did deliver the Israelites from Babylonian exile and brought them back to the land he had promised. But he had already warned them in advance in **Deuteronomy 30:2-3: When you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.**

There is a lesson here for us. No, we have not been taken into captivity to a foreign country, but we

had been taken captive by a pandemic. It inhibited us in many ways, including the way in which we worshiped and ministered to people.

But now, the restrictions have been lifted. Now we are able to remove the masks and sit shoulder to shoulder with our fellow believers in church. Now the worshipers and choirs can sing, and we can plan on having Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. We can fill the basement for Bible class and serve food for fellowship once again.

Yes, we can return to the way things were – that is, with one exception. We return to the way things were as people who have been improved by what we have endured. As we look back on everything that just happened and recall how many times we longed for things to go back to “normal,” may our hearts be filled with joy that they finally have. We ask God that we would not take for granted something as simple as being able to sit in a church pew without wondering if we are trespassing in a place we are not supposed to be sitting or walking into church and realizing we forgot our masks.

The point is, it is easy to forget the smallest things until they are taken away. Then we see they are not so small.

Each day, we need to ask God to give us grateful hearts, even for the smallest of blessings. But most of all, to thank him for the greatest blessing: Jesus Christ. There is nothing that can compare to the gift of salvation we have in Jesus, who lived a perfect life in our place, and died on the cross to pay the debt for our sin. Without him nothing else is of any value. Without him there is no joy or hope that has any lasting value.

Can we return to the way things were? We can, but instead let us return to something better. Focusing our hearts on Jesus we embrace with joy every blessing God has given us, even the ones we once had. Then everything we do will be better than the way it was because we will appreciate it that much more.

In Christ,
Pastor Bovee

Staff Minister Intern - Mike Tracy

To St John's Congregation and Staff,

It's been a pleasure working with you these past four months. I wanted to thank you for all you've done for me and the ministry experiences you have given me. I can confidently say I wouldn't have grown and learned as much as I have without your constant mentorship, support, and encouragement. I'm so grateful for the wide range of ministry experiences you gave me, and I especially enjoyed the opportunity to work with Pastors Guenther and Bovee, Staff Minister Dretske, and Lisa Goeglein.

As a result of this experience, I look forward to taking what I've learned with me into full-time ministry and applying these strategies to any call that God may bless me with.

Diane and I would love to stay in touch as we transition to our next congregation or calling. You can reach us at Michael.Tracy@outlook.com or phone 210-243-3496. It's been so enjoyable to watch ministry in action and help bring God's Word to his people. If there are any ways in which we can partner in ministry, please let me know.

Thanks again for this incredible internship, and I wish you all the best of God's Blessings.

Evangelism

We are approaching a major turning point in the pandemic we've been living through for more than a year now. Through the month of June, we will be gaining back our ability to fill God's house without a bunch of empty pews. Being able to worship together with more of our church family at a time will be a great blessing and welcome return!

Along with worshipping together, we will also have more opportunity to get together for Christian fellowship. The board of Evangelism has been hard at work lining up opportunities to do that over the next few months. Here is a quick overview of activities to watch for:

- June 13: Church Picnic. We will be gathering together at Hermann Heights Park to enjoy food, fellowship and fun.
- June 25-27: Church camping outing in Sleepy Eye. We have the entire campground reserved and as of this writing, we still have some slots available. Whether or not you are camping with us, you are all welcome to come down to the campground and enjoy the activities with us.
- July 19-22: Soccer Camp. This event is a great invite to visitors as it's a non-threatening way to get to know us while still hearing about the great gift of Jesus.
- July 24: Sleepy Eye Waterpark. This event was a well attended and much loved church fellowship activity in the past. Join us as we splash around and visit with each other at the waterpark.
- August 3-5: Art Camp/Vacation Bible School. This event is in the planning stages right now with a "Let's Unmask" theme. Another excellent opportunity for outreach to the children of our community as well as fun for our own children.

We hope to see you at these events!

Jesse Zahrt, Board of Evangelism, thezahrts@gmail.com

June Sermon Texts

Jun 6	Mark 2:23-28	Rest in Peace
Jun 13	Mark 3:20-35	Jesus Comes as the Great Robber
Jun 20	Mark 4:26-34	Lessons of the Kingdom from the Garden of God
Jun 27	Mark 4:35-41	Our Storm God Savior

The Summer Bible Class will meet in the Church Basement
The class can also be found at bit.ly/StJohnsBibleClass

Sundays at 10:45 am	Sermon on the Mount	Pastor Jeffrey Bovee
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Women of St. John's

The Women of St. John's met on May 4, 2021. Pastor Guenther led us in a devotion where he read a first person sermon from his book, [Their Sandals](#). Based on Ephesians 3:2-12, we learned about Tychicus of Ephesus and his conversion and subsequent ministry under Paul. We had the reminder that as God's saved people, we are all able to have a personal ministry leading others to Him.

Pastor Guenther then gave a presentation of how he self-published his book through www.CreateSpace.com. He also told us how others could self-publish in order to spread God's Word. Because the cost for him is only \$2.50/book, he is able to hand this book of first person sermons away for free. "The Internet is equal to Paul's Roman ships to spread the Gospel."

Business Meeting: A discussion was held on whether we need a new constitution. (At present we are legally separate from St. John's.) The question was posed as to whether we need a constitution at all. A second discussion asked if we want to pay banking fees as a separate entity. These topics were tabled until the next meeting. Officer elections were postponed until November 2021 – COVID-19 permitting. The goal for our September 2021 meeting will be to encourage new members. There were questions as to whether masks would be required. Pastors will be consulted.

Cards of Caring will resume in September.

The Women of St. John's June meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 1st at 6 pm at Washington Park. This month we will be having a fellowship meal. Each individual will bring their own meal and drink. In case of inclement weather, the meeting will be moved to the church basement. All ladies are encouraged and welcomed to come for evening of fellowship and fun!

Service Opportunity

Do you enjoy socializing with others? Do you have a desire to welcome guests and members as they arrive for worship or Bible studies? Do you have a knack for serving others? Consider serving as an usher or a greeter.

Ushers ensure worshipers feel welcome and safe while also seeking to provide good order during worship services.

Greeters offer hospitality to everyone and provide assistance to guests visiting St. John's.

No experience is necessary, and training is provided. For a full description of either position, contact Brad Price at brprice005@gmail.com

Council Digest

The St. John's Church Council met on May 18. The council hosted the members of the St. Paul's Church Council for a joint council meeting, held semi-annually between the two congregations. The historic purposes of these meetings include mutual communication, encouragement, and cooperation. Pastor Rob Guenther of St. John's led the opening and closing devotions. Attendees heard reports from Pastor Donald Sutton of St. Paul's, Pastor Rob Guenther of St. John's, Principal Peter Markgraf of St. Paul's School, and Bob Martins of St. Paul's. A summary of topics addressed follows:

- In addition to the partnership we share in the operation of St. Paul's Lutheran School, the two congregations cooperate in a variety of activities. Those activities are organized under the name John and Paul Ministries (see the website for updates at www.johnandpaulministries.com). The group's goal is to host a variety of events with a primary focus on outreach. As reported by St. John's Board of Evangelism chair Jesse Zahrt, here is a tentative list of targeted activities for the coming year:
 - ⇒ June 24 - German Park/State Street Theatre Partner with State Street Theatre's *Twelfth Night* outdoor performance at German Park to engage with the community. Possible coupons for concessions along with a Marriage Refresher invite.
 - ⇒ July 18 - Participate in Bavarian Blast Parade
 - ⇒ July 19-22 - Soccer Camp
 - ⇒ September 11 - Summer Send-off Community Outreach Event at St. Paul's School (same day as HermannFest)
 - ⇒ October 30 - Trunk or Treat at St. Paul's School
 - ⇒ November 26 - Participate in the Parade of Lights
 - ⇒ January 9, 2022 - Winter Carnival Community Outreach Event at St. Paul's School
 - ⇒ April 2, 2022 - Easter Outreach Baskets
 - ⇒ May 8, 2022 - Baptism Sunday/Mother's Day Special services at St John's and St. Paul's (preceded by a May 7th presentation on the meaning of Baptism)
- Principal Pete Markgraf provided an update on the school. Erika Grundmeier and Dawn Weisensel are substituting for Christine Baganz in the kindergarten classroom as Christine undergoes treatment for cancer. Please keep Mrs. Baganz in your prayers as she endures this ordeal. It looks like at least 35 kindergarteners will enroll for next year with the likelihood of an increase in enrollment over this year's level of 273 students. One hundred of those students are from St. John's.
- Bob Martens, St. Paul's Board of Child Discipleship chair, reported on the work of the recently-

formed Joint Committee to consider topics of mutual interest related to the operation of St. Paul's Lutheran School. Current discussions have included the school support formula and the representative distribution of faculty from St. Paul's and St. John's congregations.

- Pastor Don Sutton of St. Paul's will retire from full-time ministry on June 30. He was thanked for his service to St. Paul's and the New Ulm community.
- The next joint meeting will be hosted by St. Paul's and was tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, November 16.

After the St. Paul's council was dismissed for the evening, the St. John's council continued with its regular meeting. A summary of reports and action not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

- Membership changes approved

Transfers Out

Brenda Block to St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN

Carina Rahn to St. Martin's, Watertown, SD

Transfers In

Wayne and Kara Johnson from Ascension, Plymouth, MN

Releases

Zack Bases

Nadine Berle

Brad Besemer

Jessie Bloedel

Mackenzie Boni; Ben McElrath

Christa Brown

Keith and Pam Burdorf; Kyle

Mark Carroll; Waylon

Dan and Laura Clyne; Madlyn, Grayson, Bentley

Elise Cronin

Meredith Ducuns

Rhonda Ebling-Kokesch; Teagan, Payton, Eleri, Marcus, Marleigh

Michelle Foley

Laura Franta

Jeremy Fredrickson

Christina Gieseke

Dennis and Cynthia Gustafson

Dalene Guttum; Laura, Kevin

Jonathan Haase

Elizabeth Haase

Amanda Hargraves

Jonathan Hartwig

Josh Hartwig

Kathy Henderson; Drew

Savannah Hess; Austin. Alaina

Brian Holm

Jason and Heather Jewison; Anthony, Megan, Logan

Allen Kopischke; Kendal
Matthew Kopischke
Madison Krueger; Maverick, Alayna
Jonathan Mack
Priscilla Meinert
Ashley More
Stephen Patterson
Hannah Pehling
Kara Pottorff; Logan
Dustin Reinhart
Randy Reinhart
John and Eileen Schmidt; Jacob, Caleb
Scott Schmidt; Morgan; Ezra Webster
Austin Schroeder
Kayla Spurgeon
Cindy Talledge
Dana Tanley; Jared
Travis Theurer
Tim Tustin; Carter
Brian Ubel
Ron and Janell Vonderharr; Brandon, Brittany
Mitchell Walters
Ryan Walters
Adam Watson; Melly
Lori Watson
Daniel Wenninger, Jr.
Jordan Wenninger
Joel Willems

- Pastoral Acts approved

- Baptism*

- 16 May Lincoln Taylor Uecker

- President Thiesfeldt reported the vacant position on the Finance Committee has been filled by Mark Weinkauff. The only vacant congregational position remaining at this time is on the Stewardship Board.
- Deacon Brad Price noted that with Covid restrictions having been lifted, he has begun recruiting a full slate of ushers for our worship services.
- Board of Youth and Education chair Paul Wessel shared two documents he is developing for the board: 1) an articulation of position descriptions; and 2) an organizational chart.
- Bill Dinse, reporting for the Elders, noted that the board is working on the strategic issue of ministry staffing for our congregation, including a recent request from the Courtland and Brighton Township congregations to provide pastoral support. The presidents of the two congregations will be invited to the July meeting to address their needs. Now that Covid restrictions have been eased, we will resume our normal summer worship schedule (6:30 p.m. Saturday; 8:00 and 9:30 a.m. Sunday) starting the weekend of June 5/6 and continuing through the summer. Masks will no longer be required and social distancing will be eliminated. Communion will continue to utilize individual cups only and the kneeler will not be used for the time being. The drop box method for offerings will also continue for now. Bible class will occupy the 10:45 a.m. time slot each Sunday.

- Evangelism Board chair Jesse Zahrt noted some summer events being planned: June 13 (church picnic); June 25-27 (congregational camping in Sleepy Eye); July 19-22 (soccer camp); July 24 (Sleepy Eye water park fellowship activity); July 25 (Visitors' Sunday - Encourage members to invite a friend to church); August 3-5 (VBS with a "Let's Unmask" theme). Work continues on the online pictorial directory and a friendship register/prospect database strategy.
- Dan Borgwardt and the Stewardship Board are working on the development of a "Time and Talents" inventory tool and board position descriptions.
- Reporting for the Trustees, chair Scott Deters noted that the repairs on the 601 S. Washington property are progressing and plans for a Saturday, May 22, landscaping workday on the church grounds are in place.
- The council is faced with making long-range decisions on the best way to address technology equipment, infrastructure, and software needs for the congregation. Our current network has served adequately, but was established using equipment more suitable for a residential environment and should be upgraded to something for a commercial or educational setting. Recently, our efforts to live stream worship services have been hampered by the inadequacy of the system. In order to address and provide guidance on issues of this type, a new Technology Advisory Committee (TAC) has been formed and awaits formal organization. In the meantime, Staff Minister James Dretske has been instrumental in soliciting proposals from various businesses in the area to address our technology needs. The input of staff ministry intern Mike Tracy also proved invaluable in this process. Mr. Dretske provided a summary of the proposals received to date and indicated that we are awaiting one more before asking the TAC to review them and recommend an action plan for consideration by the council. We hope to have that recommendation by mid-summer.
- President Thiesfeldt asked that all boards use the next meeting to address strategic planning assignments. The June council meeting will have work on *Hope in the Lord* as its primary activity. The following schedule was set for future meetings:
 - Next regular council meeting - Tuesday, June 15, 7 pm
 - Next voters' meeting - Tuesday, July 27, 7 pm

Submitted by Steven Thiesfeldt,
Congregational president

Student of the Month

St. John's recognizes the importance of supporting the future called workers of the WELS and has created the **Ministerial Student Scholarship Fund** as a means of assistance to St. John's members training for service in the ministry. These funds are equally distributed to the St. John's members who are third and fourth year students at Martin Luther College or attending the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Callahan Diersen is one of the students who is receiving funds and is attending Martin Luther College.

1. What made you decide to become a pastor or a teacher?

I've always enjoyed learning - particularly about the various sciences. Being raised by teachers and being surrounded by teachers my whole life, I knew the teaching ministry was for me. As a science teacher, I can continue to do what I enjoy so much: studying God's Creation and sharing God's Creation and Salvation with His children.

2. How many years of school do you have left?

0.25 years - I graduate and get assigned a call in May

3. What class do you enjoy the most?

All chemistry classes & Genetics

4. What class do you find the most challenging?

Genetics

5. Do you have a job while you're in school? If so, what do you do? How do you balance work and studies?

I've served as an RA in the dorms for the past two years. I've worked at Runnings in New Ulm for the last 6 years, and I worked on campus as a biology tutor for 2.5 years. Balancing work and studies can be difficult, especially when working 20+ hours per week on occasion. I just had to find time when I could to study. Late nights happen.

6. What are your hobbies when you're not in class or studying (or at work)?

I love baseball, and have enjoyed being on the MLC baseball team for four years and watching the Twins on tv. Aside from baseball, I always enjoy hanging out with my friends in a multitude of ways - watching movies, athletic events, disc golfing, chatting in the caf, etc.

7. Anything else you'd like to say to the St. John's members who support you?

I am very thankful for all of the support St. John's and its members have shown me for the past nine years, whether spiritually or monetary. It has been a great blessing to be a member of this church as I grew in my faith and knowledge which has prepared me for a life of ministry.

Our Synod at Work

Called to Support

We continue to summarize some of the important information that was contained in the Annual Report to our Members in 2021 from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This month we will take a look at the section that is entitled "Called to Support." We will focus on the Northwestern Publishing House in this column and next month take a look at some of the other support services offered by WELS.

The Northwestern Publishing House is part of these support services. It provides Christ-centered, biblically sound resources to the people of WELS and beyond. It publishes *Forward in Christ* and *Meditations* (both of which are available here at St. Johns). It also provides elementary and Sunday

school curricula, Bible studies, worship materials, music, and faith-strengthening books for members of the WELS. Last year the Publishing House released more than 25 Christian resources in print and digital formats. Some of these included:

1. *Whatever is True, A Christian View of Anxiety*
2. *Your Life Has Meaning*
3. A vacation Bible school course, plus a “staycation” version for families at home
4. *Hymns for Life*, the first year of a three-year hymnology course for Lutheran elementary schools
5. *In God’s Orchard* and *Full Accessories of God*—both of which are Bible studies for women that were written by women
6. *Civil Government*, which is designed for small group study
7. *5-Minute Bible Studies for Teens* and *5-Minute Bible Studies for Families*
8. 13 music offerings for organ, piano, choirs, and vocal solos.

Northwestern Publishing House responded to support churches and WELS members during the pandemic. They offered wellness supplies, resources for immediate digital download, and Faith Care Packages for those unable to attend church in person. In addition, they introduced At-Home Christ-Light Sunday School with trained teachers presenting lessons via video. The program is designed to reach children unable to attend traditional, in-person Sunday school.

Also, Northwestern Publishing House continues work on the new *Christian Worship* hymnal and its expansive suite of resources.

There are a number of other activities in WELS support—WELS Benefit Plans, WELS Foundation, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Investment Funds, and Financial Services. We will look at these programs in the next edition of this column.

Gerald Woodley

OWLS

We are getting closer to meeting.

On our apartment blackboard someone has chalked the message: “It doesn’t take any effort to be kind.” That must be a minimal standard for kindness! Even just thinking of others doesn’t come easy. And thinking together with others is still harder; but it can alert us to new ideas and actions of meaningful kindness. An acquaintance of ours loathed the idea of wearing hearing aids. She received friendly advice from friends who were willing to encourage her. Eventually she gave in. She bought hearing aids. She just loves the new life she has gained. She has managed to escape mounting isolation and loneliness which COVID-19 had helped to worsen.

I was struck recently by Jesus’ earnest insistence, the night before he died, when he announced to his followers: “You are my friends! Not just servants, but **friends** whom I have chosen.” That night he prayed to His Father for the strength to serve us according to the plan on which he and his Father had agreed; and the next day, suffering ridicule and pain, he followed through: He died for our sins. How does this Friend of ours want his friends to regard each other? He says it simply: “Love each other as I have loved you..”

A very early writer explained the early church’s growth as a simple matter: “Behold, how these Christians love one another!” They not only cared about each other; they took care of each other in the frequent plagues of that era while non-Christians fled the town for safety. When it comes to talking about love in the church, we Christians are not just the objects of the love that grows the church, we are subjects of the love that grows the church.

While our local OWLS meeting to promote faith-life and friendship connections are still on “pause,” our National Committee has been meeting by Zoom and has arranged the OWLS National Convention for October 20-22 right here in New Ulm at MLC and Best Western. The Convention Agenda and the Registration Form have been duplicated and will be available to all in the narthex in June. More about the Convention will appear in our Sunday bulletins.

Submitted by Dar Raddatz

Archives - Pastors of St. John's Over the Past 73 Years



Professor Martin Albrecht
1948 - 1950



Pastor Roland Gurgel
1950 - 1953



Pastor Rollin Reim
1954 - 1959



Pastor Frederic Nitz
1959 - 1978



Pastor Norval Kock
1978 - 1991



Pastor David Kolander
1978 - 1991



Pastor Jeffrey Bovee
1994 - Present



Pastor Wayne Laitinen
2001 - 2016



Pastor Rob Guenther
2018 - Present