



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

Bad News; Good News

Have you noticed the newspaper headlines and the lead stories on the news? Sure the last twelve months have been pretty different. But in another sense, it's all stayed the same. The headlines don't really change that much over the years, do they? Plenty of ink is spilled about wars, murders, riots, or other forms of violent crime. Our eyes watch freezing temperatures, floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes unfold before us on the internet. Life can often look pretty bleak in many parts of the world.

But the problems aren't just in other parts of the world, are they? Sometimes the hurt, the pain, and the tragedies we often read or hear about actually invade our own personal lives. Being on the receiving end can lead us to blurt out in frustration:

"Why are my parents so grouchy? It's almost as if they take a grumpy pill each morning."

"My marriage has been in a rut for months, and the possibility of it changing seems hopeless. Some days I wish I'd never walked down the aisle."

"Why did my mom have to develop cancer? She has been a health nut her whole life. It doesn't seem fair."

"The kids are driving me nuts! It feels as though I have completely lost control."

"I'm so lonely that some days I honestly feel that I am the only one left in the world."

Life has its problems. Each of us has our problems. Death, sickness, broken promises, and severed relationships – do you ever get tired of all the bad news? It can lead us to wonder, "Is there a solution?"

Yes, there is! It starts first with God helping us understand that all of life's problems are really a symptom of the big problem of sin.

The awesome news is that God freely gives us the complete solution to that problem of sin. After living and dying for us, Jesus rose again on Easter Sunday. He is the solution! God tells us that he has given us "a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Tired of the bad news? Come and hear the good news of God's solution to life's problems. We have extra opportunities this month with our Lent and Holy Week worship services. Come hear the good news! This news will *never* become old.

In Him,
Pastor Guenther

Letters from the Elders of St. John's: Are you being fed with the Word of God?

Song of Solomon 2:4 He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.

Did you receive a letter from the Elders recently? Perhaps you wondered why. Maybe you were a bit offended that anyone would question your spiritual well-being. Perhaps there were some who thought that they were being singled out or took it to mean that they were being asked to leave the church because they weren't one of the "good members."

No, those were not the reasons the Elders sent out letters. They want to know if you're being fed with the Word of God. Your Elders and pastors are given the task and privilege from God to be your shepherds and overseers.

Let me illustrate it the way one of our Elders so aptly did: If your family sits down for the evening meal, and one of the children is missing, don't you wonder where he or she is? Don't you wonder if your child is being fed supper somewhere else or maybe is going hungry? Of course you wonder.

The same is true when it comes to the spiritual meal that is prepared for the people in our congregation. On a regular basis we offer God's Word as food for our people's souls. But if members of God's family are not attending worship services or there is no indication that they are being fed through St. John's Lutheran Church of New Ulm, we wonder if they are being fed or if they are going hungry. It is our responsibility to seek them out and feed them.

Jesus once told a parable about a man who gave a banquet and graciously invited many people. Sadly, many of them refused to come. They made every excuse as to why they couldn't be there. Too busy, was the overriding reason.

At this time when some might not be coming to church due to COVID-19 restrictions, it is understandable. Many are vulnerable, and it is a health risk to them.

However, that is not the kind of situation Jesus was addressing. He was reminding us that God invites into his kingdom, and seeks to bring us to his banqueting table in heaven.

In order to do that, he offers us his Word, the one and only thing that can nourish our souls and strengthen our faith in him. Without God's Word we cannot have faith. Without faith we cannot grasp the precious truth that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life for us and then died for our sins on the cross to save us. Only God's Word reveals that we are saved, not by good things we have done, but by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This is what we, the pastors and Elders of St. John's, are offering. As a members of God's family and as the lambs of his flock we are trying to make sure every child of God is fed and every lamb is cared for.

Therefore, if you received a letter from the Elders, it is not to criticize or single you out. Quite the opposite is true. You are being encouraged to be in the Word of God. Know that your pastors and fellow church members care about you and want to make sure you are being fed with the Word of God. If you are, that is great. If not, let us know. We are here to serve you.

If you are no longer in the area and are looking for another WELS church in your area, we can help you find one. If you do not have a WELS or ELS church in your area, we can still send you literature, direct you to where you can find our worship services online, send DVD's of our worship services, or even set up an appointment for one of our pastors, either from St. John's or another congregation nearby, to visit and bring you Communion.

In any case, we want to do all we can to make sure you are being fed spiritually. Therefore, if you did receive a letter, please respond and let us know how you're doing. The letters are sent in Christian love to give you encouragement, not to condemn anyone.

And even if you *didn't* get a letter from us, but have been absent from worship for a while (due to COVID or *any* other reason), please drop us a line and let us know how you're doing. We ask this with the most genuine of Christian motives, not out of being judgmental.

We are entrusted with God's banquet and we long to share it with you. As Solomon wrote: **Song of Solomon 2:4 He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.**

Know that you can contact your pastors anytime. Call, text or email.

Pastor Bovee (507) 217-6364
revbovee@gmail.com

Pastor Guenther (507) 240-2433
pastorguenther@gmail.com

March Sermon Texts

Mar. 3	Psalms 22	Savior in the Psalms
Mar. 7	Exodus 20:1-17	We Love the Law of the Lord!
Mar. 10	Psalms 2	Savior in the Psalms
Mar. 14	John 3:14-21	This Is the Way God Loves Us
Mar. 17	Psalms 41	Savior in the Psalms
Mar. 21	Hebrews 5:7-9	Jesus is Our Perfect High Priest
Mar. 24	Psalms 40	Savior in the Psalms
Mar. 28	Mark 11:1-10	"Blessed is the Coming Kingdom of Our Father David!"

Weekday Bible Classes meet in the Church Basement

The classes can also be found at bit.ly/StJohnsBibleClass

Sundays at 9:30 am	Lies About God	Prof. Dave Scharf
Thursdays at 10:30 am	Angels	Pastor Jeffrey Bovee
Thursdays at 7 pm	Book of Revelation	Pastor Rob Guenther

Evangelism

One of the initiatives the Board of Evangelism has been working on is with our own fellowship and getting to know each other as fellow members and friends of St. Johns. Although the current health guidelines have limited the capacities at which we may gather, it does not mean all contact is cutoff between members.

We are working on improving the type of content you will see on our social media outlets to make them more engaging and interactive. The intent is to get more interaction with each other on these platforms. That not only keeps us engaged with each other, but also shows visitors to our sites the friendship and interaction between our members.

The last year has taken a toll on the mental well-being of many of us. With this in mind, we encourage you to reach out to each other, your friends and neighbors. See how they're doing. It's as simple as reaching out to them online via email or social media, sending a text, making a phone call, or yes - even saying hello in person.

For those of you really itching for some in-person, real life interaction with other members, check out one of our Bible classes. Capacity is limited, but it does allow for a good number of people to meet. For the longer term (and warmer weather) thinkers, we are planning a church camping outing at Sleepy Eye on June 25th and 26th. You will find more details about that in the bulletin and upcoming social media announcements.

Blessings on your month.

Jesse Zahrt
Board of Evangelism

Council Digest

The Church Council met on February 16. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

- Membership changes approved
 - Transfers Out
 - Slade and Rachel Smith; Kaydence, Vivian and Charlotte to St. Mark, Green Bay, WI
- Ministrations
 - Funerals
 - 25 Jan Theodore Stoltenberg
 - 12 Feb Ron Harper
- Since the January council meeting, two key vacancies on the council have been filled and ratified by the voters. John Micheel (treasurer) and Jim Grunwald (financial secretary) have both agreed to serve in their respective positions until the next round of elections. Roger Klockziem has also been approved for a third term on the Board of Stewardship. One stewardship position remains open.
- A team of auditors has been secured to review the 2020 financial records with the goal of having the report ready for the voters at the April quarterly voters' meeting.
- Evangelism chair Jesse Zahrt noted that John & Paul Ministries plans include a March canvass to promote "Easter for Kids" on March 27 and Easter Sunday services on April 4 at both St. John's and St. Paul's. Lifetouch, the business that began the work of developing a pictorial directory for St. John's before the pandemic, has discontinued its work in that field. As a result, other options are being considered for the development of a church directory for our members.
- The Trustees are checking and cleaning out some of the old paint cans stored in the basement furnace room of the church in preparation for participation in the next county hazardous waste disposal opportunity. Chair Scott Deters has also arranged for improved internet service to our building.
- Two divine calls were extended by the voters at the annual meeting on January 26. Emily Stoering was called to teach at St. Paul's School on a permanent basis and James Dretske, to serve St. John's as staff minister for one more year on a half-time basis. We are happy to report that both Mrs. Stoering and Mr. Dretske have accepted their calls. A leave of absence is being considered for St. John's teacher Christine Baganz following a recent diagnosis for breast cancer. St. Paul's Principal Peter Markgraf is being treated for a severe and progressive case of neuropathy. Please keep these called workers in your prayers.
- Deacon Brad Price noted that attendance at many of our worship services is consistently approaching the current pandemic-imposed limit of 80 participants. He also has begun tracking weekly YouTube views of our worship services, noting that over 100 have been tuning in online each week.
- The Elders asked Pastor Guenther to write a letter to Governor Walz requesting a minor variance on Covid-19 restrictions that would allow an increase in our current seating capacity for worship services by utilizing every other row instead of every third row. No response had been received at the time of the meeting.
- The Stewardship Board recommended that the remaining \$5,000 Endowment Fund distribution from 2019 be allocated to the Campus Facilities Task Force to engage professional services as needed in the development of its plans and recommendations. The council approved the recommendation. An additional \$15,000 distribution from 2020 is still under consideration. Several different ideas were suggested by members of the council for consideration by the board. Plans were finalized for the 2022 offering envelope packet. It will include an envelope for the congregational Benevolence Fund to assist families with hardship situations. The Lutheran Charities envelope for late 2021 was designated in advance for WELS Christian Aid and Relief.
- St. John's is scheduled to host the next semiannual joint council meeting with St. Paul's. An invitation will be extended for Tuesday, May 18, prior to the regular St. John's council meeting.

- Following a presentation at the January voters' meeting by St. Paul's Board of Child discipleship Bob Martens on a concept under consideration by St. Paul's to have all teachers at the school called by St. Paul's, a Joint Partner Committee is being organized to study the idea and other matters of mutual interest. In addition to one of our pastors, St. John's has been invited to send three representatives. President Thiesfeldt has appointed two individuals who have agreed to serve and a third individual is considering the opportunity.
- Staff Ministry Intern Mike Tracy, assisted by Mr. Dretske, Pastor Guenther, Paul Wessel, and others, has prepared a detailed report outlining improvements to our technology infrastructure at the church that would allow the congregation, among other things, to live-stream its worship services. Some major wiring upgrades are already in the works, but the plans need further development, refinement, and funding. President Thiesfeldt was asked to appoint a new standing technology committee that would coordinate the effort at a strategic level while expanding, incorporating and redirecting the work previously done by LAVA on behalf of the congregation.
- Future meetings:
 - The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 16, at 7:00 p.m.
 - The next quarterly voters' meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 27, at 7:00 p.m.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt,
 Congregational Chairman

Our Synod at Work

WELS Annual Report to Members for 2021

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has distributed their annual report to members for 2021. This year's report is entitled "Your Gifts, God's Blessings." In the past we have spent several of Our Synod at Work columns pointing out highlights from the report and this year will not be an exception.

The report begins with a message from Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS President. He recognizes that "2020 was a year unlike any we have ever experienced" and mentions a Presidential impeachment, a pandemic, and the economic consequences of that pandemic that closed businesses and created unemployment as examples of this very uncommon year. He provides comfort, however, by stating that "despite the challenges, disruptions, and distractions of the past year, God enabled our congregations to preach the saving gospel and find creative ways to worship." "He moved his people to support the work of their congregations and the synod with their prayers and generous offerings." Rev. Schroeder reminds us in his comments that "God demonstrated once again that he is always true to his promises" of never leaving or forsaking us.

The report also mentions that WELS is the third largest Lutheran church body in the United States and has 1,269 churches, 349,014 baptized members, and 278,901 communicant members. It operates with 12 districts to allow for more area-specific ministry, personal contacts, and member involvement.

WELS congregations, either individually or as federations, operate one of the largest parochial school systems in the United States with 281 Lutheran elementary schools, 369 early childhood ministries, and 26 area Lutheran high schools. They operate four schools for the education of pastors, teachers, and staff ministers--Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, which is an organization of 32 confessional church bodies throughout the world.

WELS is headquartered in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and also houses the WELS Archives. The archives have been active, answering more than 175 research questions in 2019, along with adding more than a dozen collections to his archival holdings.

The annual report is divided into four sections: Called to Prepare, Called to Proclaim, Called to Serve, and Called to Support. Future columns, beginning with next month's column, will highlight each of these sections.

Gerald Woodley

Church Cleaning

There will be a church cleaning day scheduled for Saturday, March 20th from 9 - 11 am. Please note that it is a come and go event. Stay for as long or as little as you can.

Men, women and children are needed to get our church cleaned and ready for Easter. All cleaning supplies will be provided. Many hands make light work!

“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.”

Colossians 3:23-24

Women of St. John's

The March Women of St. John's meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 2nd at 7 pm in the church basement.

We will practice physical distancing and masks will be required.

We will have a presentation on movement and Aging Backwards given by Grace Bases and Liz Wessel.

All ladies are welcome and encouraged to attend. If you have any questions, please contact Denise Karstens at 507-766-5899.

Church Library

Ash Wednesday is past, marking the next 6 weeks of Lent. We can think again about the last week of Jesus' life on earth before He died, rose again, and went back to heaven, to prepare a place for us.

This month we have several children's books to introduce. My children, many years ago, enjoyed the many books of the Berenstain Bears written by husband and wife team, Stan and Jan Berenstain. Now the new Berenstain Bears books are written by Jan and Michael Berenstain or even just Michael. They still teach, with cute drawings, how to treat and get-along with our siblings, parents, neighbors, and friends. The new ones are titled "The Very First Easter" a "Valentine Treasure, 3 in 1" and "Father's Day Blessings." They can be enjoyed by the reader and the "readee."

Another group of children's books we are introducing, includes flip books which have two stories in one book. One has the Good Samaritan on one side, and it flips over for the story of Joseph and his brothers. A second one is Miriam, and Daniel. A third one is Martha and Jesus' Miracles. A fourth one is Christmas and Easter. These books are written by Vicki Kovacs, and illustrated by Elena Kucharik.

One more book is titled "Why is there a Cross?" by Kathleen Bastrom.

All of these are picture books or can be early readers. Enjoy them with your children or grandchildren.

LeiLani Rahn,
Church librarian

St. Paul's Lutheran School

splnewulm.org/school/

Kindergarten Enrollment

It is time for Kindergarten Round Up and enrollment. We are sending out invitations to over 80 students for kindergarten this year. We hope to get a great response from these families. If you have a child that is turning 5 by September 1 and have not received an invitation, you are invited!

You and your future kindergartener are invited to attend Kindergarten "Round-Up" on Monday, March 8, Tuesday, March 9 or Thursday, March 11 at 5:30 p.m. at St. Paul's Lutheran School. Please sign up and choose a session by going to <https://signup.com/go/FYJmXhn>. Contact the school office with any questions, 507-354-2329.

If you are undecided about what school will be right for your child, we encourage you to check out St. Paul's Lutheran during the round up. You will find that we can offer a complete education taught in the light of God's word. St. Paul's Lutheran School is here to assist families in excellent Christian education. We invite all of our church families and friends to consider joining our school family.

If you would like more information about our school, please call the office, 507-354-2329. If you have concerns about tuition, all partner congregations can offer financial assistance for their members. Also, our principal, Mr. Pete Markgraf, would be happy to meet with you over coffee to assure you that St. Paul's welcomes you!

History of St. John's - Part 7

First Steps Under The Good Shepherd's Guidance

Since the initial exploratory service on October 19, 1947, various professors from Dr. Martin Luther College served as preachers for this group on subsequent weekends.

On November 7, 1947, Professor Martin Albrecht had a full time teaching load at Dr. Martin Luther College. As a music professor he was about to begin rehearsals for the college Christmas celebration. Nevertheless, he, together with three other professors, found time to lead the students in a marathon, one-day, house-to-house canvass of the entire City of New Ulm. After that, the committee of four had to pour over the results of those surveys, make sure calls were made on residents who showed interest in starting another Lutheran church in New Ulm and report back to the meeting of St. Paul's congregation on Monday, December 1st.

In that meeting St. Paul's decided to ask the Minnesota District Mission Board if it would continue the work of establishing the new congregation. Eleven days later, the Mission Board met at St. Paul's and called Professor Albrecht to be the temporary pastor during the organization until a full-time pastor could be called.

On Sunday, January 4, 1948, St. John's Lutheran Congregation was formally organized. Approximately 16 members of St. Paul's met to call upon God for his blessing and begin the orderly process of establishing a daughter congregation.

Prof. Roland Hoenecke was elected to serve, at least temporarily, as the first "moderator" (chairman) of the new congregation. Alvin Rolloff recorded the minutes of the meetings for the time being. Pastors Hinnenthal and Schmidt of St. Paul's were present at this inaugural meeting to give their consent. Three months earlier, they had assured any St. Paul's member who wished to join this new congregation a peaceful release from St. Paul's. The first order of business was to distribute the model constitution which they received from their Minnesota District representative. After studying it and making the minor changes necessary for their particular circumstances, they adjourned with the plan to return in three days to approve it.

On Wednesday, January 7th, twenty-seven men represented their families together with the rest of the confirmed members in a standing vote to approve the constitution. These are the charter members who met that evening:

Martin Albrecht	Fred L. Nieno
William P. Backer	John E. Oldfield
Herbert H. Bade	Henry G. Plagge
William Beckendorf	Walter Plagge
William G. Brei, Jr.	Ervin Reiner
Alfred Bruer	Alvin A. Rolloff
William Fuhrmann	Stanley M. Spangenberg
Helmuth Hagen	Clarence Stadick
Roland H. Hoenecke	Willard Tanley
Richard J. Jahnke	Cornelius J. Trapp
Elmer Kitzrow	Victor F. Voecks
Robert Kolb	Francis Warner
Willard Kuester	Clarence Willhite
Oscar Levenson	

The elected leaders who filled the first offices of our congregation were:

Chairman: Roland H. Hoenecke

Secretary: Fred L. Nieno

Financial Secretary: William Brei, Jr.

Trustees: Helmut Hagen, Walter Plagge,
Stanley Spangenberg

Committee of Ushers: Clarence Stadick,
Henry Plagge, Ervin Reiner, Herbert Bade

When it came to naming this new Lutheran congregation, reminiscent of the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, many excellent names were suggested. Finally, the name John was chosen. John means “God is gracious.” As redeemed children of God, what could be more pleasing than to point to the undeserved love of the the Savior who loved us to the point of death, raised us life with Himself in the water of Holy Baptism and has continually ministered to us for these 72 years through Word and Sacrament?

Respectfully submitted,
Wayne A. Laitinen

MLC Ladies' Auxiliary

Thank you to all those who supported the Food Bank with products and cash donations this past month. Your donations are greatly appreciated. Families continue to benefit from this aid. Your ongoing support is important.

On March 2nd the annual Bingo Night will be held virtually. Thank you to everyone who contributes to this event. Many students participate and prizes are awarded. Monetary donations in any amount to the Auxiliary to fund the projects for the school are also needed. Please keep the MLC family in your prayers.

Jeneane Thiesfeldt, contact person
507-240-4523, thiesfjm@gmail.com

Band of Brothers

The 2021 Men of Truth Conference will meet this year under the theme *Band of Brothers* on April 10th at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in New Ulm. This year's engaging keynote speaker is Pastor Mark Jeske. Our panel comprises of Dr. Benjamin Kohls, Mr. Phil Scriver, and Pastor Tim Hartwig. Mrs. Michelle Markgraf is our guest speaker from Kingdom Workers. Go to www.menoftruth.org for more information!

OWLS

No OWLs meeting? Again?

I've been thinking. No, I have been really hoping that our New Ulm congregations' seniors can get together for our August picnic to renew our lagging fellowship. On second thought, maybe what I have been hoping for is too small a thing. Hoping for "normal" life to return is probably too small a hope for us seniors who still carry in our bodies and souls a very, very deep infection.

I'm thinking for a moment of Mary, Jesus' mother at the wedding celebration in Cana. She was hoping the week-long celebration wouldn't be a bummer because of an embarrassing lack of wine for the "normal" good fellowship. She approached Jesus, perhaps almost timidly, hoping, just hoping he might do a little something to relieve her concern. After all Jesus' coming with his five new disciples may have put an unexpected strain on "normal" wedding planning.

In response to her hoping Jesus did a "little something." He turned 80 gallons of water into 80 gallons of fine wine! Jesus did much more than a little something, no doubt thrilling his new, still learning disciples. John writes in ch 2: "Jesus revealed his glory and his [fledgling] disciples believed on him."

Ah, they believed! But oh how that faith needed to grow. It needed to grow much deeper, trusting that he can help far beyond restoring smiles, beyond curing personal infections and disappointing social disruptions. Like COVID-19 health cautions.

But developing this growth of faith in human hearts would cost him! It would cost him dearly. And yet that was the plan his and his Father's heart was firmly set upon.

In our church's worship for a couple of recent weeks our pastors have been introducing us to this plan. Remember Pastor Guenther's sermon on Jesus' long day of many miracles of bodily healing to produce grateful smiles? The next day another crowd of the needy ill were lining up once again. The disciples told Jesus, expecting to see another day of smiling faces at their receiving of healing. But Jesus surprised them by saying something, well not so crude as "Let's get out of here!" but something that implied he had more important things still to do elsewhere and he led them on to where he could teach still other people to understand and desire the mercy really needful for them. So they left the ill behind and moved on. Then the next Sunday Pastor Bovee helped us sense the depth and cost of our human need for mercy upon our deepest infection. He revealed that it would cost nothing less than the death of the glorious Son of God. Yes, Jesus had a far more serious program plan for his life than bringing an end even to such a smile-obscuring event as a pandemic. We'll explore that wonderful purpose and plan of God during Lent. After that we may once again, soon enough, return to that fuller but lighter, "normal," fellowship Jesus is also willing to provide in his deep love for us.

Darvin Raddatz