



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

Freedom!

Happy July! This month we celebrate Independence Day—the day our nation's founding fathers declared independence from the rule of another country. Every July 4th we celebrate our freedom. And, of course, you know that that freedom wasn't free. It came at a price. One of my favorite movies is *The Patriot* where Mel Gibson stars as Benjamin Martin who bravely fights to protect his family and to win American independence from the British.

But that movie is a vivid reminder to me of what that freedom cost. In the struggle, Benjamin Martin lost his home and his plantation, his servants and many friends, and several times he almost lost his life. He did lose the lives of his daughter-in-law, and two of his own sons in the bloody fight. The freedoms we enjoy today came at great cost to others. And, remembering those who fought hard to win our freedoms, we are encouraged to continue to fight hard today to *keep* those freedoms.

But as we celebrate our national freedoms this month, let's also be sure to give thanks to the one who fought to win our lasting freedom—to Christ! Through him we are free from sin, death, and hell. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, ***"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery..."*** (Galatians 5:1)

If we have been set free, what have we been set free from? Sin, death, hell, the power of the devil. And how badly we need that freedom, right? Paul points out that the entire law is summed up in one command, just like Moses did, just like Jesus did. He said, ***"Love your neighbor as yourself."*** Have you always loved the strangers who live next to you as much as you love yourself? I know I haven't. And of course you know that verse doesn't just mean the guy who lives next door, but everyone. Have you always loved the guy at work as much as you love yourself? I know I haven't. (Sorry, Pastor Bovee.) Have you always loved your children or your spouse as much as you love yourself? I know I haven't. (Sorry, Becky, boys.)

The truth is that our sinful natures want to turn any freedom we might have into a license to sin even more! To ***"use [our] freedom to indulge the sinful nature."*** Well, Jesus already paid for my sin! What a waste to not enjoy what's already been paid for! After all, if someone paid for my meal, wouldn't it be a waste to only eat half?!" How sad we were! How enslaved we were!

And Paul gives the stern warning ***"that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*** And you know the alternative. Those who live like this ***will*** inherit hell. How badly we need to be free from ourselves and our sinful natures!

So thank God, friends, that he sent Jesus to set us free! ***"Christ has set us free."*** But, of course, that freedom didn't come free. There was a price that had to be paid—a huge price that only Jesus *could* pay. What was that price? Not a home or a plantation, not even the life of a son or daughter, but the very life of God himself. Jesus—true God—died on a cross. And far worse than physical death, he went to hell on that cross to pay for the acts of our sinful natures. That was the price of our freedom.

And ***we*** don't have to pay a thing! We weren't a part of that fierce battle that took place to win our spiritual freedom any more than we were a part of the Revolutionary War. Christ did it all—from start to finish—and we enjoy the freedoms that he won without having to pay a thing. ***"Christ has set us free."***

Brothers and sisters, you know that freedom isn't free. It comes at a great price. Rejoice that the ***biggest*** price has already been paid by our Jesus! Rejoice that the war has already been won for us! ***"Christ has set us free."*** And in view of his sacrifice and the freedom that we have by it, even though you and I may be asked to pay a price to keep our freedom, it's an easy call. Of course we'll fight hard to keep our freedom. So fight hard, friends and don't be burdened again by a yoke of slavery to your sinful nature. But live by the Spirit. Keep in step with the Spirit. Keep fighting the battle and press on! ***"Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [you] heavenward in Christ Jesus."***

(Philippians 3:14)

Your servant in Christ,



Pastor Guenther

Church Library

Welcome to summer! For the first time in a year, we do not need to wear masks if we are fully vaccinated. Church services are more memorable without masks. Thank the Lord!

Last month I told you about a trilogy in the fiction section. This one is by Kate Schuermann. The main characters in “House of Living Stones” are in a Lutheran congregation in Illinois. A new choir director comes to Bradbury and also teaches music at the local college. The church secretary watches over everyone, especially the young pastor. “The Choir Immortal” continues the plot and we learn more about some characters, as well as a romance blooming between the pastor and the choir director. The final book is “The Harvest Raise” when certain parishioners do put the Lord first, in their lives, and others do not. I recognized all of the hymns that the choir director and the choir sang, so they could be Missouri Synod. I enjoyed all three books.

A donation was made of a book “The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ.” A harmony of the four Gospels using the EHV translation published by NPH. We have two other harmonies of the Gospels in our library already but put together by someone else with a different translation. It would be interesting to compare the harmonies.

LeiLani Rahn, Church Librarian

July Sermon Texts

July 4	Lamentations 3:22-33	So Great is His Unfailing Love
July 11	Ezekiel 2:1-7	Stand Up and Man Up!
July 18	Amos 7:10-16a	Hear the Word of the LORD
July 25	Mark 10:35-45	Drink the Cup to Be Great

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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Council Digest

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

- Membership changes approved
 - Transfers In
 - Orrin and Linda Cole from St. Martin's, Watertown, SD
 - Transfers Out
 - Brenda Block to St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN
 - Pat Dittrich to Faith, Excelsior, MN
 - Carina Rahn to St. Martin's, Watertown, SD
- Ministrations
 - Baptism
 - 16 May Lincoln Taylor Uecker
 - Wedding
 - 6 June Hailey Gorr and Greg Miller
- Pastor Bovee reported on plans for Vacation Bible School on August 3-5 for children in grades K-6. The sessions will also serve as an art camp, using the visual arts to illustrate biblical themes. He is leading a summer Bible class each Sunday at 10:45 a.m. The topic is the Sermon on the Mount. Plans are progressing to resume our normal Bible Class and Sunday School schedule this fall, beginning September 12 during the 9:30 a.m. time slot. The pastors will take turns leading the class each for a 5-6 week section until about Thanksgiving time. After that, Bible classes will be led by MLC professors and guests.

- Deacon Brad Price reported 898 baptized and 734 communicant members at this time. Although it is too early to make long-range predictions, he also shared a worship attendance report showing a significant increase in weekend attendance now that the requirements for the wearing of masks and social distancing have been removed. A position description for ushers and lead usher has been prepared.
- Bill Dinse, reporting for the Elders, indicated that the board is working on the Ministry review and that their July meeting includes a visit from the church presidents of the Courtland and Brighton Township congregations to gather information on their ministerial needs. The two congregations have asked that St. John's consider providing ministry support. The Elders approved \$350 using professional growth funds to allow Pastor Guenther to participate in "Network New Ulm."
- Evangelism Board chair Jesse Zahrt reminded council members of some summer events being planned: 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). The church picnic, postponed because of extreme heat on the originally scheduled date, has been rescheduled for July 11. Stay tuned for an announcement of the exact date. Work continues on the online pictorial directory and a friendship register/prospect database strategy.
- Dan Borgwardt and the Stewardship Board continue work on the development of a "Time and Talents" inventory tool and board position descriptions. A related congregational survey is under construction.
- Reporting for the Trustees, chair Scott Deters noted that a favorable bid of \$1515 has been accepted to repair the lighting on the large cross in the altar area of the church and replace the 10 spotlights in the area with LEDs.
- President Thiesfeldt shared a mission/vision document to guide the work of the newly-formed Technology Advisory Committee. The committee has been divided into two subcommittees aligned with responsibilities for either software or hardware. He expects the group to begin its work sometime before the next council meeting.

The majority of the meeting was devoted to a review and update of the strategic ministry plan, *Hope in the Lord*. The first two of four goals were reviewed with the remainder to be addressed at the July council meeting in preparation for a report at the July voters' meeting. A few noteworthy developments from the June meeting follow.

- A fifth goal addressing technology issues both short- and long-term was added: Establish and implement a strategic vision for the use and integration of technology to support and enhance the mission of St. John's. The goal includes several initiatives that will be addressed initially by the Technology Advisory Committee.
- The first goal directed at ministry staffing issues is being addressed by the Elders and the Board of Stewardship. The original timeline calling for a recommendation on our congregation's ministry staffing by the October voters' meeting may need to be extended because of the request from the Courtland and Brighton Township congregations.
- The second goal dealing with congregational facilities has been refined for an initial focus on remodeling the sanctuary. Several possible needs have been identified, including lighting, flooring, pew refurbishment, and audio-visual needs. The Campus Facilities Task Force (CFTF) has been asked to develop a plan that will include this work as part of a 75th congregational anniversary thank offering in 2024. The CFTF met with a consultant the next evening to advance the goals of project.

The following schedule was set for future meetings:

- Next regular council meeting - Tuesday, July 20, 7 pm
- Next voters' meeting - Tuesday, July 27, 7 pm

Submitted by Steven Thiesfeldt,
Congregation president

Our Synod at Work

Called to Support: Part Two

Last month we began a review of the section entitled “Called to Support” from the Annual Report to WELS Member for 2021. As promised in that column we will continue to review that section by looking at the following: WELS Benefit Plans, WELS Foundation, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Investment Funds, and Financial Services.

WELS Benefit Plans

The plans serve WELS and Evangelical Luther Synod workers and organizations. The VEBA health plan provides benefits for church and school workers in accordance with God’s Word while remaining compliant with the federal health care reform laws. The WELS Pension Plan provides workers with a source of guaranteed income during retirement. The WELS Shepherd Plan provides workers the opportunity to save and invest a portion of their earnings to provide retirement income.

WELS Foundation

The Foundation exists to help God’s people support gospel ministry through WELS. It currently administers more than 1,200 donor-directed planned gifts, including endowment funds, donor advised funds, and gifts that provide income payments to the donor and loved ones. In fiscal year 2020, the WELS Foundation distributed \$5.88 million to WELS Missions and Ministry Support, \$1.92 to ministerial education schools, \$88,000 to the Church Extension Fund, \$810,000 to congregations, and \$522,000 to WELS-affiliated ministries and Lutheran high schools.

WELS Church Extension Fund

The fund provides financing through loans and grants to mission congregations so they can acquire land and ministry facilities to be used for gospel outreach. In fiscal year 2019-20, \$24.2 million of new loans and \$2.9 million of new grants were approved to mission and mission-minded self-supporting congregations.

WELS Investment Funds

The program is a self-supporting subsidiary of WELS. It has the mission to provide cost-effective, professionally managed investment portfolios exclusively for WELS-affiliated ministries. By pooling investment resources, congregations can take advantage of lower cost, institutionally priced investment alternatives that wouldn’t be available otherwise. As of September 30, 2020, WELS Investment Funds manages \$251 million in assets.

Financial Services

Financial Services provides accounting and financial services that support and serve WELS ministries. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, WELS has continued to be blessed with a solid financial position that allows the synod to maintain existing ministries and to branch out into new initiatives. In the fall of 2020, the process of developing the synod’s ministry financial plan for the next two years began among the areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, synod leadership, and the Synodical Council.

Gerald Woodley

Art Camp

Art Camp will be held August 3 - 5, from 9 - 11 am at St. John's Lutheran Church. The event is open to students from Kindergarten - 6th grade. Students in 7th grade and older are invited to be helpers and also do art projects. The cost is \$20 for grades 2-6; \$5 for K-1st grade.

There will be lessons on acrylic and watercolor painting, pastels, pencil drawing, cartooning and caricaturing, and also age appropriate crafts for younger artists. Each student will receive a watercolor set and a t-shirt to take home following the camp.

For parents with little ones: we are providing snacks and some amenities at Lincoln Park. The frog pool will be rented for one of the days for children 8 and younger. Sign-up will be available soon.

Church Picnic

Due to the excessive heat, the church picnic has been moved to Sunday, July 11th at Hermann Heights Park.

Come enjoy the food, fellowship and fun.



We have both pavilions rented from 4:30 – 8 pm. Brats and hotdogs will be provided.

We ask those of you whose last names start with A-L bring a dessert and those M-Z names bring a side dish.

We hope to see you there!

OWLS

The OWLS invite you to take a look at the Registration dates for the Seniors October 20-22 National Convention here in New Ulm. There is still plenty of time to register but the Early Bird Deal is over in mid-July.

Another reason to consult the Convention Information (Available in Narthex) is to learn the Seniors Meetings (age 55 and up) which the OWLS arrange are meant to help encourage and engage Seniors in friendship ministry *among* the elders of the congregation. This means we seek to open our eyes to natural opportunities to provide *service to* the members of our congregation as they seek to find ways of dealing with their aging bodies and minds. This also means we seek to encourage and engage seniors to recognize that many of us are now living rather healthy and long lives so that other seniors can be *served by* us. Both ends of the senior spectrum are facing new ways of thinking about the long life they have begun to live by Christ's gift even in the here and now.

Aging is different from what it used to be! It can take a whole lot longer now than it did in our father's and mother's day. A whole new generation has been added to the church, some say, by what our fathers and mothers [not to mention our Lord!] have done to lengthen the age span of the average American radically. "Since 1900 the percentage of Americans age 65 and over has more than tripled and the {actual} number has increased 11 times." And since the 2000 census these numbers have increase wildly. No wonder, in reviewing mere medical statistics of a recent test, I learned, I could live another 5 years! Barring a heart attack or stroke! 92 years??!! Oh my, the Lord is good. Maybe there is friendship ministry that I can still do. And maybe there is still friendship ministry I will still need to receive.

But what I would especially like to get at is this: Check the Convention topics and you will note the number of topics that will help us keep our eyes open to others and how we may help them though we be quite old ourselves. There are plenty of roles in life for seniors even when we are retired but have open eyes—and hearts.

Submitted by Dar Raddatz