

St. John's Lutheran, New Ulm, MN
Fortress Newsletter
April 2017

**Thoughts from Martin Luther's Sermon about
Thomas on the Comfort of The Resurrection**

John the Evangelist further writes that Thomas was not present when the Lord appeared the first time to his assembled disciples on Easter evening. Now that the Lord comes just at the time St. Thomas is the first time absent does not take place without a reason; for Christ could have easily chosen an hour when Thomas could have been found in company with the other apostles. But it took place for our instruction and consolation that the Lord's resurrection might receive more and stronger evidence and documentary testimony. Now, on Easter he appeared to the assembled eleven; one week later, that is today, he appeared to them again and at the same time also to Thomas for whose sake alone this appearance or revelation took place which is more beautiful and glorious than that of eight days before.

The leading thought, however, for us to learn and retain from this Gospel is, that we believe that Christ's resurrection is sure and that it works in us so that we be resurrected both from sin and death; as St. Paul richly and consolingly speaks of it, and Christ himself here, when he says: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," and St. John concluding this Gospel teaches and admonishes about the use and benefit of the resurrection: "These are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and believing you may have life in his name."

This is indeed a powerful and clear passage, which highly praises faith and gives the testimony that we certainly have eternal life through the same; and that this faith is not an empty, dead thought on the history about Christ, but that which concludes and is sure that he is the Christ, that is, the promised King and Saviour, God's Son, through whom we all are delivered from sin and eternal death; for which purpose he also died and rose again; and that we alone for his sake acquire eternal life, in a way that is called in his name, not in Moses' nor in our nor any other man's name, that is, not because of the law, nor of our worthiness and doings, but alone on account of Christ's merits, as Peter says in Acts 4:12 – "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Martin Luther
(Sermon on John 20:19-31)

**A Note about Fellowship Principles
Regarding Current Practices at
St. John's, New Ulm and
Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As you may know, for the past several years our synod has been dealing with a controversy concerning the doctrine of fellowship, especially in connection with our area Lutheran high schools. Students outside our fellowship have been allowed to sing in the traveling choirs which represent our schools, synod, and congregations in our worship services. Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School is no exception. Recently,

MVL adopted a fellowship policy which allows those outside our fellowship to sing in our congregations with the traveling choir on MVL Sundays.

The official doctrinal statement of our synod, entitled, "This We Believe," says: "Church membership is a confession of faith (cf. *This We Believe*, 1999, p. 28-29, VII, 5,6)." Therefore those who belong to church bodies outside our fellowship do not represent us, but rather the denominations to which they belong.

Our synod's Conference of Presidents (COP) was also asked to address this issue synodically, and did so in a document entitled, "The Fellowship Study Committee Toolbox." All area Lutheran high schools, teachers, pastors, and congregations were supposed to study the document in order to determine how best to deal with the fellowship issue. The COP made their stand on the issue quite clear, and I support their conclusion. St. John's had a Bible study based on this document.

I was also asked by the leadership of our congregation to conduct a Bible study on this issue to express the doctrinal position I take on this matter. I did so this past summer in a four week study which was well attended.

St. John's congregation does not permit those outside our fellowship to participate as worship leaders or representatives of our synod or congregation at weddings, funerals, or other occasions. Furthermore, St. John's, New Ulm has always upheld the practice that those outside our fellowship should not lead or represent our church in any matter which would falsely convey fellowship where there is not outward unity.

The Elders of St. John's were charged with the duty of

offering a resolution to this issue for our congregation. After a great deal of discussion, the Elders thought it best not to put a policy in writing that might not be able to treat the issue thoroughly in a short summary. However, they also did not want this issue to continue to loom over us like a dark cloud. At the Council meeting on March 21, 2017, I offered to write to the congregation to give my judgment on this issue, since there are many who have concerns about this matter. The Council consented by majority vote.

As a result, here is my statement on the matter: As the shepherd of St. John's I will continue to uphold the practice this congregation and our synod has always held to, and will not allow those outside our fellowship to participate in our worship services in any way that would confuse or convey a false expression of fellowship where there is not outward unity. Once again, I will reiterate that the practice I am upholding is what we have always exercised. To adopt the new policy set forth by MVL would be a deviation from the practice we have always had.

In a spirit of Christian love, we will always want to reach out to those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. However, we will want to speak the truth in love, as God's word indicates. St. Paul reminds us that love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). To allow those outside our fellowship to participate in our worship services in this capacity gives the impression that there is no difference between what they teach and believe, and what we teach and believe. It confuses those outside our fellowship as well as those who are part of our fellowship.

I encourage St. John's to continue to host MVL Sundays, but will ask that MVL will not allow those outside our fellowship to sing with the choir in St. John's worship services. Those outside our fellowship are welcome to attend the service as visitors however. A representative from MVL assured me that they would comply with this practice.

I encourage St. John's congregation to continue to support MVL, since it is a great treasure in our midst, and a valuable extension of our gospel ministry. I myself have long been a supporter of MVL. Two of my children graduated from there, and I have a third who is now enrolled as a student. I even taught freshman religion at MVL for a full year, and was glad to be able to do so. Therefore it needs to be understood that there is not any kind of personal vendetta or animosity against the school on my part. This also does not mean that I am against those outside our fellowship enrolling at MVL. If they come to hear the Word of God, good.

However, I earnestly believe that we need to make MVL the best it can possibly be. And not only MVL, but we must endeavor to strengthen our synod by upholding the truth of God's Word with sound practices, encouraging our congregations, called workers, and lay people to take a strong stand on God's Word and not simply to do what is easy or most convenient for the moment.

I am always willing to listen to concerns and questions anyone may have. However, after having thoroughly studied this issue for the past five plus years, my convictions are firm and I do not intend to deviate from this course. May our prayer be that we are motivated by a spirit of love and unity prompted by the Word of God to do what we do for the good of his Kingdom.

In Christ,
Pastor Jeffrey A. Bovee

Your Synod at Work

WELS Annual Report - Called to Prepare

We continue this month in highlighting the 2016 WELS Annual Report. The report is divided into various subcategories: Called to Proclaim; Called to Serve; Called to Support; and Called to Prepare. This month we will take a look at the section entitled "Called to Prepare."

The report highlighted Move-In Day at Martin Luther College. Students were greeted with tables around campus that advertised organizations to join and presented opportunities to both build relationships and to gain ministry experience. MLC's first semester on-campus enrollment in fall 2016 totaled 742.

The Pastoral Studies Institute Team of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary gained a new member when Rev. Jon Bare accepted a call to serve as the international recruitment director. He joins Rev. Brad Wordell, world seminary professor, and Rev. E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute. The team's assignment is to find ways to follow up on requests from groups around the world who want to align with confessional church bodies like the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Confessional

Evangelical Lutheran Conference through the training of their current church leadership.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School prepare high school students to attend Martin Luther College and serve as called workers. For the 2016-17 school, Luther Preparatory School, located in Watertown, Wisconsin, has 423 students. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, located in Saginaw, Michigan, has 218 students. Both schools offer "Taste of Ministry" opportunities for students, which include shadowing

called workers to learn more about their work. Students are also given firsthand gospel ministry experiences on campus and during mission trips. For example, 48 Luther Preparatory School students participated in mission trips in 2016.

The report includes personal experiences by individuals. For example, Jessica Zahrt, who teaches kindergarten and first grade at Our Savior's in Wausau, Wisconsin, and who graduated from MLC in 2016 said: "I love what I do. There's nothing better than seeing progress in young students' academic and social skills and watching their knowledge of God and faith in him grow."

Next month we will continue highlighting the 2016 WELS Annual Report.

Gerald Woodley

From Your Staff Minister

Thank you to all who prepared and served the meals during Lent and to the ushers who filled in for the mid-week services. Thank you to Prof. Wessel for preaching the Word for the services of Lent. I enjoyed my trip with the MLC Choir through Texas and New Mexico and I thank you for that opportunity. Both St. John's and MLC can benefit through the sharing of talents.

"As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.'" (Mk 16:5-6)

Kelly Emde

St. Paul's Lutheran School

BoCD Work (SP Board of Child Discipleship)

Tuition

The SP Council approved the \$30 increase to tuition which will bring the 1st child tuition for members to \$1060; 2nd child to \$960; and 3rd child to \$860. (The St. John's Bd. of Ed has discussed an amount in respect to a Tuition Off-set which has been in place for the past nine years and will bring a recommendation to the voters in the April Voter's meeting for the congregation as a whole to increase support for the education of our youth.) The fees for PreK will be discussed in the April BOCD meeting.

School Calendar

The board has approved a school calendar which begins Tuesday, August 29, 2017. St. Paul's Closing Service will take place on Wednesday, May 23, 2018.

K-Round-up

Kindergarten Round-up took place the end of February and was attended by thirty-three families. If there are families that missed the Round-up event, you can call the school office for details or pre-registration. St. John's Congregation encourages all our families with kindergarten aged children to enroll their children at St.

Paul's School where children hear the Word of God each day and each subject is taught in light of God's Word.

8th Confirmation

The St. John's 8th grade class of seventeen students will be confirmed on Sunday, April 30th. The examination will be held the previous Thursday, April 27th, at 7 pm at St. John's Church.

Self-Study

The self-study steering committee is preparing a school survey compiling the questions provided by each of the self-study committees. The final survey should be ready by the end of March. The plan is to send the survey to parents and church members during April. The survey will help the committees to gather data for narratives for the final report. An additional alumni survey is being prepared to gather data from high school age alumni of St. Paul's to help in the self-study. The surveys should be available during April.

Tuition Assistance Envelope

If you haven't used the envelope in your offering envelope box for K-12 Education Assistance, consider using it. Your gifts help support families who send or want to send their children to St. Paul's Lutheran School or MVL, but struggle or are unable financially to do so. Distributions are given prior to Registration Day at St. Paul's following a review of Applications for Tuition Assistance submitted before June 30th at the school. If there are families that find that they are in need of extra assistance, please contact our Bd. of Education Chairman, Steve Balza.

Calendar

- Apr. 1 Jr. Choir sings at 7 pm
- Apr. 3 Report cards go home
- Apr. 9 Gr. K-4 sing at 8 am
- Apr. 14 Gr. K-8 sing at St. Paul's Church at 12 pm
- Apr. 17-18 NO School - Easter Break
- Apr. 30 Gr. 8 sing - Confirmation Sunday
- May 5 NO School - Teacher In-Service

School's website: www.splnewulm.org/school

Respectfully submitted, James L. Dretske,
Administrative Teacher: jdretske@splnewulm.org

Movie Presentation of A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy

Please join us for an exclusive one-night screening of a movie on the life and legacy of Martin Luther, whose return to the grace of Jesus Christ sparked a reformation and the beginning of the Lutheran Church. The radical events, compelling personalities, and exciting drama of the Reformation are brought to life in A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy. The full-length documentary features thrilling reenactments of the sixteenth-century events with commentary from leading church-history experts. St. John's and St. Paul's Lutheran churches in New Ulm are co-sponsoring this screening at the New Ulm AMC Theater (1 N German

St., New Ulm) on Wednesday, May 3, 2017 at 6:30 pm. Please reserve your tickets in advance at this special website. <http://newulm.NewLutherMovie.com>. The deadline for ticket purchases to secure this screening is April 26.

Archives

Miscellany

This month's article again recalls items from service bulletins, newsletters, and council and congregational minutes from 60, 50, 25, 10, and 1 years ago. Hope you will find them interesting. Comments, questions, suggestions and corrections are welcome at kruegerh@mlc-wels.edu.

1957, Pastor was Rollin Reim. A January service folder notes a change for Bible study times from Sunday afternoons to Wednesday evenings and includes this reminder: "Find time for this hour even if it means leaving the dishes in the sink. Don't be afraid to come in casual clothing."

1967, Pastor was Frederick Nitz. With the superstructure now complete and in use, regular reports titled "Building for His Habitation" were discontinued. Some work continued including the installation of art-glass windows in the nave along with other miscellaneous work and needs. Volunteers were invited to help prepare and sod the church lawn (April) and to "bring a shovel and a rake."

1992, Pastor was David Kolander; David Zabel was Director of Christian Education. In March members were asked to come to one of several group meetings titled "Circles of His Grace" to hear a pastoral presentation on how to view "special gift" opportunities in a balanced way and to receive information about our Synod's "Lift High the Cross" offering and MVL's "Forward in Faith" emphasis.

2007, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. In October the Board of Trustees reported the sale of the congregation-owned house at 605 S. Washington and that the vacated area would be used to expand the parking lot.

2016, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. In the January congregational meeting the congregation approved a pilot position dividing responsibilities between the Chairman of St. John's board of Education and a new position as St. John's representative on St. Paul's Board of Child Development.

To be continued.

Bob Krueger

Stewardship

God has blessed our congregation with talented called workers and laypeople, and large membership that make us able to spread out the necessary work among many. We have a beautiful, secure, and comfortable property and building with ample financial blessings. We are located in a peaceful and supportive community with a cooperative and loving sister congregation nearby. Moreover, we have a vast array of opportunities to share God's Word and do His work.

Let us respond to these blessings in humility, not with a Pharisee's pride and pomp. For we recognize that God has called us, through faith, to be stewards of these blessings. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16). God has given us these gifts to use. Therefore, let us joyfully proclaim God's name and faithfully come to worship, Bible study, fellowship opportunities, and volunteer events, so that we may fully benefit from His blessings.

May we also find opportunities in our daily lives to spread these blessings to our families, our communities, and our places of work. May we daily find ways to be joyful, causing those around us to wonder what this light is that shines in us and from us. Let us be happy stewards of God's Word by taking chances to share His word to inspire, motivate, admonish, and instruct. I pray that God uses us to spread His blessings and His salvation to those around us.

Josiah Stoering
Stewardship Chairman

Church Council Digest

The St. John's Church Council met on March 21. A summary of reports and action not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Membership changes

Adult Confirmation

Lori Blackwell

Ministrations

Baptism

11 Mar Maverick James Krueger

A decision on our fourth call for an administrative associate pastor should be known by the time this newsletter is published. Pastor Stephen Helwig of Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska currently is holding the call.

The Board of Elders has been reviewing and discussing the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Fellowship Policy since March 2016. The policy outlines the guidelines under which non-WELS/ELS students may enroll at MVL and sing in its traveling choir. Having completed their study, Elders Chairman James Rathje shared a report which was accepted by the council. A summary and explanation of the Elders' work and report is provided by Pastor Bovee on page 2 of this newsletter.

Treasurer Paul Gunderson reported a favorable balance in the Building Fund and recommended that the congregation make a double mortgage payment during the month of April (the normal monthly amount is \$6,947). The recommendation was approved. The congregation has less than three years of payments remaining on its Thrivent construction loan from 2004.

The congregation has received a gift of stock valued at about \$2,500. A recommendation to liquidate the stock was approved.

The council approved a recommendation from the Board of Education to continue the practice of offsetting tuition rates at St. Paul's Lutheran School for children of St. John's members by \$500. Administrative Teacher James Dretske's monthly report contains additional details.

Chairman Bill Pekrul of the Board of Evangelism noted that although there has been a delay in its distribution, the new congregational photo directory is being proof read and nearing completion. The board is also investigating a partnership with our sister congregation St. Paul's to sponsor a joint screening of the new Luther movie at the local movie theater for use as a community outreach event commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The Board of Stewardship, chaired by Josiah Stoering, is preparing a booklet describing the purpose and function of all congregational organizations. The document is in the editing stage. The board is working to increase awareness of Biblical stewardship principles at St. John's. Quarterly letters of encouragement are being prepared for distribution to our members.

Board of Trustees Chairman David Rausch indicated that the electrical service in several areas of the church has been upgraded.

The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 18, at 7 pm.

The next quarterly voters' meeting has been rescheduled for Tuesday, May 9, at 7 pm because of a conflict with the Minnesota District Pastors' Conference on the original date.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt,
Congregational Chairman

Library News

A new addition to the children's section of the library is title "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It." Jonathan Mayer illustrated the words of this favorite hymn which was written by Erdmann Neumeister and translated by Robert E. Voelker. The illustrations portray the life of a baby boy from his baptism until he receives the crown of life everlasting in old age.

"Sexual Morality in a Christless World" was written by Matthew Rueger and published by Concordia Publishing House. He writes of the sexual culture of the Romans and the Jewish people before the birth of Christ. Early Christians faced pressure from the Roman perspective on sexual morality and the rabbinical Jewish traditions. Jesus encountered many who were practicing sins against the sixth commandment and He encouraged them to repent of their sin and worship the true God. The author uses scripture to answer the

arguments of today's society which promotes and accepts homosexuality. He encourages Christians to arm themselves with scripture so that they can defend their beliefs against the sexual immorality of the world today.

When checking out materials from the library, be sure to fill out the card and leave it in the yellow box on the credenza. When returning materials, place them in the return basket and the card will be replaced in the material.

Eleanor Runke
Church Librarian

Women of St. John's

The women of St. John's met on March 7. Pastor Bovee led a devotion based on Psalm 142. Before the psalm begins, there is a note that refers to it as a maskil of David, written when he was in the cave. David found himself pursued by enemies multiple times throughout his life and found himself hiding in fear in caves on occasion. God was with him and delivered him from the hands of his enemies. God is our refuge and strength as well. He produced an escape from sin, death and the devil. He is our Savior.

Mr. Brad Price presented a program on the Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program. Brad is the administrator for WELS prison ministry. The mentoring program began in December of 2016. It is not strictly focused on those who have been to prison, but is also for people who have the same mindset as those in prison. Prisoners who are released have to acclimate to life outside prison. They have to learn how to use the newest technology, get a license, find housing and a job. They may be lacking life skills, such as balancing a checkbook or knowledge of how to prepare a meal. How can we get involved? One way is to become a one-on-one mentor. Another, more recent development, is to volunteer to teach life skill classes once a week at the church. One training session for those interested in mentoring was just offered on March 18. More will be coming.

*****Attention:** Our next meeting will take place Tuesday, April 4 at 7 pm. JoElyn Krohn, the financial literacy coordinator for Martin Luther College, will be presenting a program about the financial literacy program at MLC. Here is what she has to say about it:

Financial Literacy at Martin Luther College:
M (money) L (life) C (career) DIRECTION

Students across the country graduate with loan debt that is increasing at an alarming rate. We wanted to address this concern for our students at MLC by creating a financial literacy program that teaches students about responsible borrowing and also helps give them tools to make better financial decisions for their future. I am excited to spend some time sharing the initiatives we have started on campus. I will also share some resources that have been helping our students.

Christine Baganz
Women of St. John's Secretary

Reflections

Women of the area are invited to the annual Reflections Service which will be held on Sunday, April 2 from 2:30 - 4 pm. We will gather at St. Paul's Lutheran Church for dessert, fellowship, and a candlelight service of songs, readings, and prayers. Our theme will be "Eve: Our Sin, God's Grace". More details and the sign-up sheets are found in the narthex or by e-mailing kgrunwald@splnewulm.org.

Questions, please contact
Mary Hussman at 354-3001 or
Karen Grunwald at 507-217-6229.