



*Fortress* October, 2019  
St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

### *"Thanks for Nothing!"*

Well, Fall is officially here. And that means that the harvest is right around the corner. The beans are starting to change color. But with the late start in planting, the corn could use a few more weeks of growth before the harvest. Lord willing the first frost will hold off a little longer. Then the harvest will be bountiful and the income wonderful! Then we would have good reason to offer heartfelt thanks to God!

But... what if the frost comes sooner? What if the harvest is small? What if hail came or a tornado and destroyed the crop? What if we yield nothing? We would still have reason to thank God.

God's prophet, Habakkuk, told his people that they always had reason to thank God. He said, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

A quick inventory of all that we have—the food that fills our refrigerators, the cars in the garage, the money in the bank—all of these give us every reason to thank God! But... what if we didn't have all of that? What if we had no job, no house, no health, no friends? What if we were like modern day Jobs and God took it all away? Would we still thank God even if we had nothing?

Habakkuk looked around and saw the results of God's discipline against his wayward people: The economy was in ruins. The farmers had no crops. The ranchers had no animals. The blessings God had given his people had all been stripped away as a punishment from God. They had nothing! And yet... Habakkuk still said, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior." What a wonderful attitude he had!

Is yours the same?

Sadly, all too often we complain if we miss just one blessing. Take my health and I whine to God. Take the nice weather and we gripe that it's too hot or too cold, too rainy or too dry. Offer healthy food and kids complain, "Do I have to eat that, mom?" We all at times have the attitude that says to God, "Thanks for nothing!"

And you know what we deserve for such ingratitude. We deserve to have every blessing stripped from us. We deserve to be given nothing! No crops in the fields and no food in our pantries. No Savior from sin, no grace of God. We deserve an eternity of regret in hell with none of God's blessings. And what can we do about it? Nothing!

But you also know what we have to do to make things right with God: Nothing! You know what punishment we get for our selfish, self-centered attitudes: Nothing! And you know why: Because even though God didn't have to do anything, he did everything for our salvation: Jesus, who is "in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7) Thank God for that nothing that he became. And as a human he lived a perfect life in our place. The thief on the cross confessed, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." (Luke 23:41) Thank God that he did nothing wrong and that he sees nothing wrong in us for Jesus' sake! Thank God that our punishment from God will be nothing! Thank God for nothing!

And even if the harvest failed and we had no other blessing from God, no crops, no money, no friends, no family, no health... we would still have every reason to echo Habakkuk and say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

For we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. (cf. Romans 8:39) We know that nothing is impossible with God. (cf. Luke 1:37) So we resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:2) and to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit (cf. Philippians 2:3), but to serve God in thanks in all that we do. For even if we lose everything else, we have all we need in Christ. Yes, even if we lost everything and were left with nothing, "Yet [we] will rejoice in the Lord, [we] will be joyful in God [our] Savior." And we will say to God with hearts full of gratitude, "Thanks, God, for nothing!"

In Christ,  
Pastor Rob Guenther

## October Sermon Texts

Oct 6	Luke 15:1-10	Rejoice with Jesus!
Oct 13	1 Timothy 6:6-16	Godliness <i>and</i> Contentment
Oct 20	Luke 16:19-31	You will take it with you
Oct 27	Luke 17:1-10	Lord, Increase Our Faith

## Upcoming Bible Classes

Sundays at 9:30 am	A Simple Way to Pray	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Thursdays at 10:30 am	2 Kings	Pastor Rob Guenther
Thursdays at 7:00 pm	Colossians	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Fridays at 6:30 am	“On Giving Advice to God Part 2”	Pastor Rob Guenther
Fridays at 9:30 am	Ecclesiastes	Pastor Jeff Bovee

## Staff Minister

We’ve had an increase in Sunday School students this Fall, which is a blessing. Adjustments have had to be made to accommodate the increase. There is a need to increase tables and chairs because of the increase of students. This is being addressed by Pastor Bovee.

Also, you may have seen another face around St. John’s serving in an official capacity. This is Staff Ministry intern Benjamin Ristow. He works with both Pastors and myself for his internship.

Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” And they had nothing to say. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.” (Lk 14:7-8)

Kelly Emde

## Wish List

St. John’s maintains a wish list of items that are not funded through the church budget, but which

could still benefit our ministry. The current list of items and cost estimates that follows has received approval through the Church Council:

- Organ registration memory upgrade (~\$16,000) – This upgrade will help to accommodate our multiple organists in storing registration presets in a digital memory system.
- Handbells, Handchimes, and Accessories (~\$13,000) – This equipment is essential for establishing a handbell choir.
- Timpani (~\$8,000) – Three timpani (also called kettledrums) will eliminate the need to borrow and transport these instruments when needed.

The Stewardship Board encourages members to continue with their regular, proportionate, and joyful support of our ministry plan. We maintain and promote this wish list to provide direction for those who desire to make a special contribution beyond their planned offerings, and to provide suggestions for designation of memorial funds. Anyone who would like to propose an addition to the wish list can obtain a submission form at the church office.

## Church Library

October brings the Reformation to my mind. Five hundred and two years ago on All Hallows Eve, Martin Luther posted 95 theses on the wooden door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. That was the start of the Reformation. What needed reforming? The church. The question then was: can a person buy his way into heaven? Luther studied the Bible (in Latin) and found “the just shall live by faith.” not by works, which is what the Roman church was promoting, with their indulgences.

Our church library has several books about Luther’s life and his writings, and actions. God blessed Luther with the ability to continue his struggle against the church of the day. Jesus had said that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that idea had gotten lost. All of these books about Luther were very interesting.

More books about Luther and his complete works can be found at the MLC library. Anyone with a New Ulm Public Library Card can check out a book from the MLC library. It does make sense that the Martin Luther College Library should have lots of books about Martin Luther, and they do.

Will you read something about Martin Luther this October?

LeiLani Rahn  
Church Librarian

# Council Digest

The Church Council met on Tuesday, September 17. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

- Membership changes approved

## **Transfers Out**

Melissa Bisel; Sydney Schauman (Rylan, Maxton, Charlie) to St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN  
Steve and Joan Fenske to Our Savior, Sun City, AZ  
Allison Lee to Immanuel, Manitowoc, WI

## **Transfers In**

Chris and Jennie Gorr; Madison, Hailey, Tate, Zach, Sarah, Keenan from Grace, Kenai, AK  
Ron and Sylvia Harper from First, La Crescent, MN

## **Profession of Faith**

Dale Thom

- Ministrations

## **Baptisms**

15 Sep Marin Rose Gunderson

15 Sep Dan Vanderlouw (Reaffirmation)

- Pastor Bovee reported that an increased Sunday school enrollment is challenging available meeting space and has required the purchase of additional tables and chairs.
- Staff Minister Kelly Emde reported that MLC student and St. John's member Benjamin Ristow is serving as a staff ministry intern this semester. May God bless his service in our midst!
- President Thiesfeldt noted that the Campus Facilities Task Force has organized and met under the leadership of Dr. Keith Wessel. The purpose of this group is to identify future facility needs for St. John's. The work is particularly timely since Treasurer Paul Gunderson reported the likelihood that the congregation will pay off our building debt in October, approximately nine months early. Even though we will be debt-free once that happens, St. John's members are encouraged to continue support of the Building Fund in anticipation of addressing current and future needs identified by the task force.
- The St. Paul's School Support Formula Review Committee meets October 8 at 7:30 p.m. St. John's will be represented by our pastors, Administrative Teacher James Dretske, Treasurer Paul Gunderson, Financial Secretary James Grunwald, and Stewardship Board member Roger Klockziem. The purpose of the meeting is to review the current formula used to determine the amount of financial support provided by St. John's for the school.
- Heath Dobberpuhl, chair of the Board of Youth and Education, brought a recommendation from the board that the separate representative to the St. Paul's Board of Child Discipleship (implemented several years ago as part of a pilot program) be made a permanent and a voting member of the St. John's church council with advisory responsibilities to the St. John's Board of Youth and Education. Although there was a consensus in support of the recommendation, the action will require a constitutional change approved by the voters' assembly. The board will address the details as a part of the Ministry Review to be conducted in the coming months.
- Another recommendation from the Board of Youth and Education proposing that the tuition offset be raised from \$575 per student to \$600 per student, effective with the 2020-21 school year, was approved.
- Treasurer Paul Gunderson provided an update on development of the proposed congregational budget for fiscal year 2020 with input from the various boards and committees. The completed budget will be finalized at the October council meeting and presented for approval at the October voters' meeting.

- President Thiesfeldt rescheduled a meeting of the Nominating Committee for Tuesday, September 24, at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting is to come up with a slate of candidates to fill various elective positions on the council and appointive positions on congregational boards for three-year terms of service beginning on January 1, 2020. Voting members of the congregation who are willing to have their names placed in nomination for a position are invited to contact President Thiesfeldt prior to the date of the meeting.
- President Thiesfeldt continues to seek a new congregational archivist to replace Prof. emeritus Robert Krueger when he retires from the work at the end of the year. The formation of a support committee is also being considered. Please contact President Thiesfeldt if you have interest in this work.
- Since teacher Jean Schroeder has announced her retirement at the end of the 2019-20 school year, the Board of Elders and the Board of Youth and Education continue to develop a plan for her replacement. St. Paul's Principal Pete Markgraf has indicated that some internal reorganization of the teaching staff at St. Paul's suggests that St. John's should call a kindergarten teacher. A final recommendation will be brought first to the council in October and then to the voters' assembly for consideration. Once the voters have approved extension of a call, a call list of local candidates will be requested of District President Dennis Klatt. The earliest a call can be extended is October 15. Assuming approval is granted, the voters' assembly will extend the first call for Jean's replacement sometime later in the month of October or early November.
- Board of Trustees chair Scott Deters reported that the church property has received its annual fall preparation for winter by checking the heating system and treating the building for possible insect infestation.
- Board of Evangelism chair Bill Pekrul provided an update on a request to address the Ladies of St. John's in an attempt to gather information that will allow the upcoming Volunteer Summit to be as productive as possible. John and Paul Ministries and the Raider Event Committee (REC) will sponsor a "Trunk or Treat" outreach activity on October 26. The REC will supervise the outdoor activities and the outdoor registration table will be manned by one of the pastors. The indoor activities and food will be organized by a team from St. John's. Planning is also underway for a Winter Carnival and an MLC Early Childhood Learning Center outreach event.
- Board of Stewardship chair Dan Borgwardt provided a report highlighting the following items:
  - \* The "Time and Talents" booklet nears completion. A continuously updated version will be maintained on Google Drive, available for printing as needed.
  - \* The Worship Committee has asked the Stewardship Board to provide additional promotion for worship-related items on the wish list. The Board will accent the need for donations for hand bells along with the other items on the wish list in the bulletin and the Fortress.
  - \* Quarterly contribution statements for the third quarter will be distributed through the church mailboxes. The reports will contain a message of encouragement from God's Word and a graph to illustrate congregational offering contributions thus far for the year.
  - \* After an investigation of offering the option of electronic giving to our members, the item will be removed from the agenda. There is little demand for this service, but it entails significant cost and accounting efforts.
  - \* The synodical "10 for 10" stewardship initiative will be reviewed by the pastoral staff prior to board consideration.
- The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 15, at 7:00 p.m.
- The next quarterly voters' meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 22, at 7:00 p.m.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt,  
Congregational Chairman

## Archives

The subject for this month is, again, Christian education, specifically, St. John's connection with Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School. That only goes back to 1979, MVL's first year. Prior to that many of St. John's members made use of Dr. Martin Luther High School/Academy. The growing enrollment of Dr. Martin Luther College led to the Synod deciding to move what was primarily a worker preparatory school to Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. Information in the archives (bulletins, newsletters, congregational minutes and reports) varies in detail—especially in regard to enrollment of St. John's members and comprehensive reports from MVL for some of the earlier years. However, the following does indicate St. John's connection to and interest in Christian education. The following was gleaned from what could be found in St. John's archives with help from the MVL staff. It's a bit brief compared to previous months due to some personal problems but will maybe keep you up to date.

### **1979-80**

Enrollment was 45.

### **1988-89**

Principal at MVL was Jerome Birkholz. Enrollment was 193.

### **1994-95**

John Schultz was MVL Principal/Administrator. Enrollment was 270.

**2008-09**, MVL Principal was Tim Plath. Enrollment was 232

### **2018-19**

Enrollment was 214.

As with St. Paul's School there's more to St. John's relationship with MVL than just names and statistics but a continuing and important commitment to Christian education.

Bob Krueger

## St. Paul's Lutheran School

### **Opening Service**

School began on Tuesday, September 9<sup>th</sup> with an Opening Service without visitors due to the restriction of 300 allowed in the lower level. Mr. Markgraf led the devotion in worship focusing on the theme, "Passion, Priority, Purpose". It is based on Romans 5:8: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

The school year officially started with a total of 290 (130 SP 44.8%; 100 SJ 34.4%; 38 Non-member 13.1%; and 22 Other WELS 7.6%) students enrolled in Grades K-8 bringing the total to 346 students, up from 326 students last year. There are presently 56 children in PreK.

### **St. Paul's School Building Project**

There are still some “growing pains” as the building is still under construction. Access throughout the upper level is limited to the classrooms. The library is being used to house the copier until the faculty workroom is completed later this fall. The cafeteria and gym are available in the lower level as well as refurbished rooms used for band, choir and after school care including the Raider Room and what is left of the old PreK room after changes. There are multiple uses for these rooms while construction continues including room for the nurse. The kitchen has been completed with students and staff adjusting to the new changes. The lower level occupancy was increased to 300, up from 150 last spring. Knutson Construction provided a small trailer close to the upper entrance which is being used as a make-shift office for Mr. Markgraf and our secretary, Kristal Miller, until the entrance way and office areas are completed. Staff and students learned patience as certain things were still wrapping up details. Classrooms did not have clocks or bells and upper grades didn't have touch boards to start the year. It is good for all to go through these challenges so that when everything is complete all will have increased appreciation for all the blessings that will come with the completed changes. May God be praised for all these blessings! The school parking lot will be repaved during the first week in October. There will be a day or two of repaving and stripping followed by a new traffic flow pattern. Details of the traffic flow changes include a one way road from Payne Street to Garden Street.

### **Ministry Scholarship Fund Envelope**

If you haven't used the envelope in your offering envelope box for Ministerial Education Scholarship Fund (September), consider using it this month. The gifts in September/October will go toward the tuition of members of our congregation who are preparing for ministry at MLC and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Gifts to students at MLC are being matched through the MLC Partnership Grant Program. There are currently two member students at WLS and twelve at MLC. Gifts from congregations for these grants need to be a minimum of \$250 and can be as large as \$1000. Please give this your prayerful consideration.

### **Teacher In-Service**

The WELS Minnesota District Teachers Conference will be held on Thursday and Friday, October 17-18. It will be held at Bethany College in Mankato under theme, “The Lord is My Light” with religious keynote speaker: Pastor John Boggs, Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, FL presenting on the theme. There will also many other education presentations to choose from for teachers. There will be no school on those dates

### **MAP Testing**

St. Paul's School will be using the **M**asures of **A**cademic **P**rogress Testing again this fall to assess the academic levels of the students as they begin a new school year. Students in grades 3-8 will be using their classroom Chrome Book computers to complete test. There is immediate feedback for teachers to see the results of the tests. This feedback will help teachers focus on the needs of their students. The testing will be given three times throughout the year. The battery of tests will include Language, Reading, and Math. We have been very blessed to have the resources to maintain a high level of learning at St. Paul's School. With the late start to the school year, there may have been an adjustment to the start and end date which would push the testing into the first two weeks of October.



## Calendar

Oct 6 Grades 5-8 sing at 11 am  
Oct 17-18 NO School - Teachers' Conference  
Oct 25 Kindergarten begins having Friday classes  
Oct 27 Grades K-4 sing at 8 am  
Nov 8 NO School - Teacher In-Service

[splnewulm.org/school](http://splnewulm.org/school)

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

## Our Synod at Work

### EQUIPPING CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

At this summer's Synod Convention, the Equipping Christian Witnesses program was launched. It is a two-year capital campaign that celebrates the 2020 silver anniversary of Martin Luther College. Each congregation has a contact person for the campaign and I am indeed fortunate to have been asked to be that contact person for St. John's.

The program consists of three areas: (1) Student Recruitment—the goal is to have 900 to 1,000 students eager to train for Gospel ministry; (2) Student Financial Aid—a congregational partner grant matching fund which hopes to raise from \$3 to \$5 million; and (3) Student Facilities—A Luther Heights Residence Hall (which needs \$10 million) and a Knight Center (which needs \$3 million).

In the words of MLC President Mark Zarling: “Now is the time for all of us to equip even more Christian witnesses to share Christ's love with the world. That is what this campaign is all about. We will re-energize our **RECRUITMENT** of students for the holy adventure of ministry. We will provide even more **FINANCIAL AID** so that every student who wants to train for ministry can do so. And we will equip these students with and enlarged **FACILITIES**—a living and learning environment worthy of this training.”

Enrollment recruitment is important. For several years, the WELS has had an increasing demand for more pastors and teachers. Large numbers of baby boomers are retiring, and WELS simply doesn't have enough candidates to replace them. After new pastors and teachers were assigned in May, many congregational vacancies remained. In Call Day 2017, 33 pastors were assigned with 99 pastor vacancies unfilled; in Call Day 2018, 34 pastors were assigned with 116 pastor vacancies unfilled; and in Call Day 2019, 30 pastors were assigned with 104 pastor vacancies unfilled. The same type of figures can be given regarding teachers. In Call Day 2017, 117 teachers were assigned with 48 teacher vacancies unfilled; in Call Day 2018, 136 teachers were assigned with 60 teacher vacancies unfilled; and in Call Day 2019, 142 teachers were assigned with 80 teacher vacancies unfilled.

Student financial aid is also important. 75% of MLC students graduate with debt with \$25,000 being the average amount of debt. In addition, student facilities are important. In a survey of MLC students taken in 2015, the students listed a new residence hall and student gathering spaces as the top needs on campus. A new residence hall also offers a number of summertime possibilities. During the hot summer months, a new residence hall with air-conditioning and semi-private bathrooms would allow MLC to host larger events for the greater synod, as well as being positioned to host youth camps.

The October edition of the WELS Connection is devoted entirely to the Equipping Christian Witnesses program. It will contain other important information. You can also get more information online as [mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign](http://mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign). We will also have more information in future columns of Our Synod at Work.

Gerald Woodley

## **Cards of Caring**

Fall is coming and school is beginning, so it is time again for St. John's "Cards of Caring" volunteers to meet for fellowship and to make cards for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and birthdays for our "Homebound" and "Thinking of You" members.

We will meet on the following Saturdays: October 19, and November 16. You are welcome to join us any time between 9 am and noon as your schedule permits. We will again meet at 403 N. Minnesota St. (front door is on 4th North St.).

We welcome MLC students and members ages 12 and older. There are activities for everyone to do. No "card making skills" are required.

For information, contact  
Lois Willems at  
507-676-1230.

## **Women of St. John's**

The Women of St. John's met on September 3, 2019. Pastor Guenther led the devotion. He told us that September 3rd is the 500th anniversary of "Galatians Day." On this day in 1519 Luther released his commentary on the book of Galatians. This commentary kick-started the Reformation that had begun 2 years earlier. Luther's main theme was that the righteous will live by faith. We can do nothing for our salvation. It is Christ alone who saves us.

The meeting was held at the MLC Library. There was no Business meeting. Instead, we were given a tour of the Library led by Grace Bases and Liz Wessel. They explained the many things available to us. These included the Children's Library, the Curriculum Library with its assorted manipulatives and teaching aids and the Media Center. The women were able to create a number of things using the die cuts.

The MLC Library belongs to a consortium with over 30 other libraries. It has also been painted and improved over the last 2 years.

We closed with coffee refreshments in the “Starbucks Room”. Our hostesses were Jeneane Thiesfeldt and Leilani Rahn. Attendance: 16

Ruth Aufderheide, Secretary

## **Youth Group**

Thank you to all the youth who were able to attend the Kingdom Workers event at MLC! Many bags of every day items were made for other children in need. Thank you!

The October event will be the annual leaf raking service project on Saturday, October 26 beginning at 9 am. We'll rake until about 11:30 am and then come back to church for chili and sandwiches.

Please sign up in the narthex if you can help!

Parents, if you can help drive there is a section on the sign-up sheet in the narthex or email me at [ali3b2g@gmail.com](mailto:ali3b2g@gmail.com).

Lisa Goeglein