



St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church  
627 S. Washington St.  
New Ulm, MN 56073

April, 2019 *Fortress*

### April Fools?

"How come atheists don't get an annual holiday when Christians get so many?" an atheist asked his Christian friend.

"You **do** get an annual holiday!" his friend replied. "Every April 1st! You get April fool's day!" And he quoted Psalm 14:1, ***"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"***

Last year Easter happened to fall on April 1st. That left many atheists joking that Christians were the fools for believing that a man died and came back to life and that it means anything for them today.

This April we again celebrate the resurrection of our Savior from the dead. But are we fools for believing it? The apostle Paul admitted that if Christ were still dead, we are the biggest fools of all: ***"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."*** (1 Corinthians 15:13-14, 19)

But that's ***"if"***... Paul went on to say that the premise of those conditional sentences were wrong. ***"But,"*** Paul continued, ***"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20) And we have so much evidence to believe it! Consider just a few pieces of evidence...

#### 1) The Empty Tomb

Jesus was publicly executed by crucifixion and then placed in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. Three days later some women claimed the tomb was empty. It is very significant that this whole Christianity thing hinges on an empty tomb and a missing body because those are things that are publicly verifiable and empirically falsifiable. (Cf. the story some circulated in **Matthew 28:11-15.**)

The people in charge were viciously opposed to Jesus and anyone claiming he had risen from the dead. And they could have easily squashed the whole thing by producing a body and proving them wrong, which they certainly tried to do. But they couldn't. The tomb was empty and the body

was nowhere to be found.

Well, actually, it was *somewhere* to be found...

## 2) The Post-Mortem Appearances

Whether or not anyone today believes Jesus rose from the dead doesn't change the fact that a lot of people in the first century believed that they encountered and interacted with Jesus after his death. Jesus appeared to a number of people, in different places and at different times. (Cf. Paul's bold claim and list of eyewitnesses in **1 Corinthians 15:4-8**.)

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul relays information about Jesus appearing to dozens of specific people, including himself, and to hundreds of other people on top of them. Paul did not write this letter in a vacuum. These were real people who were really living their lives in a real time and place. You'll also notice he specifically states that most of these people are still alive. Read between the lines here: He's saying, "If you don't believe me, you're welcome to ask them."

And speaking of Paul...

## 3) The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Saul was an important guy from an important family in an important city. He studied at the feet of one of the most highly-regarded rabbis in the history of Judaism, on his way to becoming a prominent religious leader who enjoyed Sabbath, walks on the beach, and overseeing the detainment, imprisonment, and occasional killing of the pesky new Jesus-people for their awful blasphemies. Saul had everything a guy at that time and place could've wanted. (Cf. Saul's persecution summed up in **Acts 7:57-58 and 8:1-3**.)

Then he decided to change his name to Paul, join his enemies, throw away his reputation, authority, wealth, social standing, and every other thing he had worked for his entire life, in favor of traveling thousands of brutal miles and willingly subjecting himself to lashings, beatings to the brink of death, stonings, shipwrecks, starvation, dehydration, and years of imprisonment all so he could tell people that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.

And he did this because he was bored with his super-nice life.

OR... He did it because, as he told everyone who would listen until the moment his head was lopped off for doing so, he met the resurrected Christ. (Cf. his conversion story in **Acts 9:1-6**.)

And he wasn't he *only* one... !

## 4) The Boldness of the Disciples

This group of whiny snivelers whom Jesus chose to be his disciples had tried to be brave during Jesus' life and had failed time and time again. Even Peter, the alpha of the group and the one who had the guts to draw his sword on the soldiers who were arresting Jesus, soon after denied three times that he even knew who Jesus was. Because he was scared.

But later, Peter was executed for his faith. So were most of the other disciples. According to one source: James was killed by a sword. Thomas and Matthew were speared to death. Philip was tortured then crucified upside down. Bartholomew was skinned alive then crucified upside down. Andrew, James, Thaddeus, and Simon were all crucified. (Cf. what the disciples willingly endured in Acts 5:40 and 12:2-3.)

All of these men claimed to have interacted with the bodily-risen Jesus, after his death. Would they fearlessly proclaim this, all the way to their unimaginable deaths, knowing it was actually just something they made up? Of course, not! Who dies for a lie?!

And who would *believe* it... ?

## 5) The Explosion of Christianity

As you know, Christianity exploded after the exact thing that should have killed it before it was born: The death of Jesus. The number of converts multiplied exponentially, day in and day out, among a populace that did not believe people came back from the dead and would have thought the idea of worshiping a man as God reprehensible.

So why did that happen? What can account for it? I'll tell you what can account for it: Jesus' tomb being empty, his body missing, and hundreds of people encountering him after his death and telling everyone they knew, swearing on their lives that they saw him with their own two eyes, willing to die rather than deny that Jesus was risen. That sort of thing would get around, y' know?

So, what does this all mean? The mountains of evidence for the resurrection of Jesus mean that, ***"Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20) It means that we're not fools for believing in the resurrection! It means that we're not fools for believing that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God! (After all, if the God-man who died and then came back to life again says that that's what it is, wouldn't you rather believe *him* than the so-called scholars?) It means that we're not fools for believing that our sins are forgiven! It means that we're not fools for believing that we too will rise even after death to live with Jesus forever in heaven! And it means that we're not fools for living our lives here and now—spending all that we have and being spent—to show our gratitude and thanks to our risen, living Savior!

May Jesus bless your Easter celebrations this April, as he again assures you that you're no fool for believing his promise that his resurrection means your salvation!

In Him,  
Pastor Guenther

## April Sermon Texts

Apr 3	Matthew 27:17-18	Pilate Perceives the Plot of the Jews; Pilate Under Pressure Seeks to Pacify the People
Apr 7	Romans 11:11-21	Ingrafted Branches
Apr 10	Matthew 27:27-34; Luke 23:34	Jesus Unjustly Punished, Persecuted and Prosecuted; Jesus Pardons His Persecutors
Apr 14	Isaiah 45:22-25	Let Every Knee Bow and Every Tongue Confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
Apr 18	Jeremiah 31:31-34	Out with the Old; In with the New

Apr 19	Galatians 3:10-13	Escaping the Curse
Apr 21	Luke 24:1-12	Remember How He Said ...
Apr 24		Confirmation Examination Service: 7 pm
Apr 28	John 20:19-31	Peace Be With You

## Upcoming Bible Classes

Sundays at 9:30 am		
April 7 & 14	Athanasian Creed	Keith Wessel
April 21	NO Bible Class	
April 28	The Distant Triumph Song - From a Distant	Nick Schmoller
Thursdays at 10:30 am	Book of James	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Thursdays at 7:00 pm	Book of 1 Kings	Pastor Rob Guenther
Fridays at 6:30 am	“On Giving Advice to God”	Pastor Rob Guenther
Fridays at 9:30 am	Book of Revelation	Pastor Jeff Bovee

## *Holy Week*

**Maundy Thursday, April 18 at 4 and 6:30 pm**

**Good Friday Tre Ore, April 19 at St. Paul's at 12 pm**

**Good Friday Tenebrae, April 19 at St. John's at 7 pm**

(Because this is the Service of Darkness it will begin at 7 pm)

(no Saturday service on April 20, the Saturday before Easter)

**Easter Sunday, April 21 at 7 and 9:30 am**

(no 11 am service on Easter Sunday)

## **Council Digest**

The church council met on Monday, March 18. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Membership changes approved

Darrell and Becky Berg from Christ, Saginaw, MI

Pastor Bovee reported that he expects to confirm 15 students during the 11 am service on Sunday, April 28.

Council members previewed the April 2019 *WELS Connection* featuring former St. John's member Ryan Kolander, currently serving as pastor of a Spanish mission in the Detroit area.

Staff Minister Kelly Emde has informed the congregation of his plans to retire effective January 1, 2020. The Board of Elders has been assigned the task of reviewing the position and considering the extension of a call by the voters for his possible replacement. At the present, it is a part time position.

Administrative Teacher James Dretske provided an update on his health. He continues to suffer from the effects of a fall over a year ago. His doctor has recommended that he put no weight on his damaged hip for three months to promote healing of the joint. Following that period of recuperation a decision will be made on the possibility of surgery to accelerate the healing process, stabilize the joint, and eliminate some of the pain he is experiencing. The current situation means that he is not able to serve in his usual classroom role at St. Paul's School, but he does continue to fulfill his administrative responsibilities on behalf of the congregation. He is able to move about in a limited way to attend meetings, worship services, etc. with the help of a walker. The council approved his request to continue in this role for the remainder of the school year. St. John's will provide partial compensation with the remainder being covered by disability insurance. Please continue to pray that God would grant Mr. Dretske health and healing according to his gracious good will and purpose.

Financial Secretary Jim Grunwald reported that Mark Micheel has agreed to replace John Bauer on the Finance Committee. John and his wife Linda are moving from New Ulm because of a job transfer. We thank John for his service on the Finance Committee.

MVL Principal Tim Plath has been invited to address the St. John's voters on the building plans currently under consideration and discussion for our area Lutheran high school. The meeting is set for Tuesday, April 23, at 7 pm.

President Thiesfeldt reported on a joint meeting at St. Paul's Lutheran Church between representatives from St. John's and St. Paul's to discuss our ongoing partnership at St. Paul's Lutheran School and other joint ministry ventures in the community. The group resolved to continue these joint meetings on a periodic basis. The next one will be a joint council meeting, hosted by St. John's on May 20.

Stewardship Board chair Dan Borgwardt reported on plans to publish an updated "Time and Talents" booklet and the board's review of our congregation's gift and memorial acknowledgement process. A recommendation to add a timpani and electronic memory upgrades to our pipe organ as wish list items was approved.

Reporting for the Board of Trustees, Scott Deters noted that the Trustees have been asked to facilitate a church cleaning planned for the morning of Saturday, April 6. The work of updating the lock and key inventory continues along with interior touch up painting of the church.

The Elders recommendation to increase the church secretary's hours by 10 hours a week during the school year remains on the agenda, but more information is being gathered before a decision can be reached.

Lord willing, St. John's Lutheran Church will complete repayment of its current facilities construction loan debt during the summer of 2020. The mission-vision statement for the formation of a Campus Facilities Task Force (CFTF) to consider "the future facility needs of the congregation and proposes a plan to address the funding of those needs" was approved. President Thiesfeldt will seek out individuals willing to serve on this task force prior to the next council meeting.

The family of a man who will be moving to New Ulm and attending Martin Luther College for two years beginning next fall as a second career student in preparation for the pastoral ministry has requested the use of our home at 601 S. Washington. Because it is difficult to find rental property in New Ulm for a large family, the council is considering rental of the home to the family even though it is on the small side for a family of eight. If you are aware of something that might be more suitable, please contact Steve Thiesfeldt or Pastor Guenther.

Next Church Council meeting – Monday, April 15, at 7 pm.

Next Voters' meeting—Tuesday, April 23, at 7 pm.

Submitted by Steven Thiesfeldt,  
Congregational chairman

# 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 ([kruegerh@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:kruegerh@mlc-wels.edu)).

1959, Pastors: Rollin Reim, Frederick Nitz (as of Nov). In September the congregation called Frederick Nitz to replace Pastor Reim who had resigned for doctrinal reasons. Pastor Nitz was installed on November 1.

1969, Pastor was Frederick Nitz. Stained glass windows for the superstructure, which had been dedicated in December 1966, were being installed as financing (gifts) became available.

1994, Pastors: David Kolander, Jeffrey Bovee (associate as of June); David Zabel was Director of Christian Education. Housing for pastors as well as the Director of Christian Education was a concern. Offers to purchase housing for Pastor Bovee were not accepted. Use of DMLC house at 231 S. Highland was arranged for remainder of the year and a parsonage was purchased at 510 S. Jefferson beginning in 1995.

2009, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. In April the congregation approved tuition offsets for St. John's students at St. Paul's School: 15% for the first child, 13% for the second and 10% for others.

2018, Pastors: Jeffrey Bovee, Rob Guenther (associate as of July); Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. Problems with two of the church furnaces occurred already in 2017 requiring holding services in December in the fellowship hall. New furnaces were purchased in January.

To be continued.

Bob Krueger

## Evangelism

**Volunteer summit** - Planning is underway by the Stewardship Board in conjunction with the Evangelism Board to investigate responsibilities for leading fellowship events – especially those involving meals - such as midweek suppers, funerals, special observances, congregational gatherings, etc. Watch for announcements regarding dates and times.

**Church Picnic** - Sunday, June 23rd is the tentative date for this event. Further details will be published.

**Evangelism Action Day** - Wednesday, April 10th from 1 - 7 pm will offer opportunities for St John's members to participate in evangelism training through the Praise and Proclaim program. Following the training, participants will practicing door-to-door canvassing in a section of New Ulm and end the day with a meal at MLC.

**Easter for Kids** – On April 13th, we will join St Paul's Church in hosting an Easter for Kids event at St Paul's School. Easter for Kids is a congregation and community event where children in grades Prek3-grade 4 come for a morning of fun and learning the Easter message of our Savior! Come and join us 9 am - 12 pm at St Paul's School. Register online at [splnewulm.org](http://splnewulm.org) or [stjohnsnewulm.com](http://stjohnsnewulm.com).

**Pictorial Directory** – Our next pictorial directory for St John's will be planned for the fall of 2020.

**New Movers postcards** – In conjunction with St Paul's church, we are notified of New Ulm residents who move to town, or move to a new location. We have prepared a new brochure for distribution with coffee labeled with St. John's information and a mug decorated with St. Paul's information. Delivery of these promotional gifts will be carried out over the next weeks by Pastor Guenther and Ev. Board members.

**Telling the Next Generation workshop** - This workshop will aid the MLC Early Childhood Learning Center in reaching out to unchurched families they serve. Members of St John's will work with the ECLC staff to investigate possibilities for sharing the gospel with these families.

**Email address collection and updates** – Ev. Board will head efforts to gather more email addresses and email updates during Bible classes, through bulletin announcements, and possible Sunday worship services. Anyone can add their email address to our data base by visiting the St John's website [stjohnsnewulm.com](http://stjohnsnewulm.com) and entering your information through the "Join our Email List" link on the homepage.

**Flat screen displays in church** – The LAVA committee is working on estimates for installing flat screens in the front of church for displaying announcements, videos, and eventually worship notes. Updates will be published as we have firm proposals.

## St. Paul's Lutheran School

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

### **BoCD Work** (SP Board of Child Discipleship)

#### **Tuition**

Tuition for the 2019-2020 school year has been recommended to the St. Paul's Council at \$1,175 for member students, up \$50 from the current year's tuition. St. John's Board of Education's worked on the annual budget for St. John's last fall and included an increase to the Tuition off-set in anticipation of an increase in school tuition for the coming year. Member parents of school-aged children can anticipate receiving a letter from the Bd of Ed in June to explain the off-set and its purpose to encourage first-fruit giving by our members through weekly offerings rather than meeting a budget through tuition.

#### **Band Recommendation**

The BOCD Approved the recommendation to raise the Band fee to \$75 (up from \$60) per band student and rental amount to \$85 (up from 80) for the next school year.

#### **Divine Call**

Steve Biedenbender received a Call to teach at Peace Lutheran School in Hartford, WI. He is being asked to teach fifth grade and be the director of their church and school music. Please keep Steve in your prayers. There has been no decision on the call at the writing of this report.



### **K-Round-up**

Kindergarten Round-up took place the end of February and was well attended. If there are families that missed the Round-up event, you can call the school office for details or pre-registration. (354-2326) St. John's Congregation encourages all of 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.

### **8<sup>th</sup> Confirmation**

The St. John's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be confirmed on Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup>. The examination will be held the previous Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 pm at St. John's Church.

### **Building Project**

Keep an eye on changes of school procedures in regard to the St. Paul's building project. There will be a Special Service at 11:00 on Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup> in the school gym with a groundbreaking ceremony outside. A "potluck" will follow in the gymnasium with the main dish being catered. Please bring a side dish or salad to share. (No Crock-pots, please.) Details are included in the weekly bulletin. A fence will go up on Monday, April 8 to enclose the construction area for safety reasons. There will be restrictions in regard to student drop-off and pick up as well as building use in the lower level. The limit to the lower level will affect the ability to have school events, therefore, the band Spring Concert will be moved up to Thursday, April 4<sup>th</sup> to get it in prior to the start of construction. Although there may be inconveniences this spring, we focus on the joy that the completed project will provide in the ability to bring the message of God's grace to the children who enter our doors. The school year was shortened to end with a full day on Friday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, so that the classrooms can be emptied and everything moved out to implement the refurbishing of the school. Closing Service will be held on Thursday, May 23 at St. Paul's Church at 6:30pm. A reception for the graduates will follow in the parish center.

### **K-12 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 are unable financially to do so. Distributions are given prior to Registration Day for St. Paul's School following a review of Applications for Tuition Assistance submitted before June 30<sup>th</sup> at the school. If there are families that find that they are in need of extra assistance, please contact our Bd. of Education Chairman, Heath Dobberpuhl.

### **Calendar**

- Apr 4 Spring Band Concert
- Apr 18 Dist. 88 Busing will be available
- Apr 19 Students sing at 12 pm at St. Paul's Church
- Apr 19-23 NO School - Easter break
- Apr 24 Confirmation Examination Service
- Apr 28 Confirmation Service: 11 am
- May 23 Closing Service at St. Paul's Church
- May 24 Last Day of School: 3 pm dismissal

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

# Our Synod at Work

## WELS Annual Report: Called to Prepare

Last month we began our review of the WELS 2019 Annual Report to Members with an overall summary of the yearly report, which this year is called “Your Gifts, God’s Blessings.” This month we will begin looking at the various sections in the report, starting with the section entitled “Called to Prepare. The report looks at Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and our preparatory schools.

The report states that the mission of **Martin Luther College** “is to train a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meeting the ministry needs of WELS and who are competent to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions and the Book of Concord.” We are fortunate to have Martin Luther College right here in New Ulm, where in the fall of 2018, 764 undergraduates were participating in this important training.

To meet the ministry needs of WELS, MLC (1) prepares men for pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary; (2) prepares men and women for service as teachers and staff ministers in the synod’s churches, schools, and other institutions; (3) prepares men and women for other church ministries, responding to the needs of WELS; (4) prepares international students for ministry in partnership with WELS mission fields; and (5) provides programs on continuing education that meet the ministerial needs of WELS.

In May, 2018, 27 men graduated from **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary** in Mequon, Wisconsin. The seminary prepares men to begin pastoral ministry by “providing them with spiritual, theological, and professional training.” In addition, the seminary is also able to provide pastors with opportunities for continued growth in all their callings through its institute entitled Grow in Grace. The Grow in Grace program offers “continuing education courses, a mentoring initiative for new graduates, a clearinghouse of resources for pastors, and an annual retreat for pastors who are celebrating milestones in their ministries.”

**Luther Preparatory School**, which is located in Watertown, Wisconsin, and **Michigan Lutheran Seminary**, which is located in Saginaw, Michigan, prepares high school students for future service as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. For the 2018-19 school year, Luther Preparatory School has 419 students and Michigan Lutheran Seminary has 102 students. In November, 2018, senior boys from Luther Preparatory School were able to visit Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to learn more about the WELS’ pastoral training program.

The other sections in the Annual Report are entitled “Called to Proclaim; Called to Serve; and Called to Support. We will look at each in future editions of this column.

Gerald Woodley

## **MLC Ladies' Auxiliary**

MLC Ladies' Auxiliary has expressed its gratitude along with the gratitude of many students for the outpouring of baked goods and gift cards that were won by the students at the annual Bingo Night event which was held in February. Please continue to support the MLC Food Bank through the remainder of the school year. The students and their families appreciate your donations. A detailed list of nonperishable items needed can be found in the donation box located in the old narthex. Items and especially monetary gifts and gift cards to local businesses can also be delivered to the receptionist's desk at MLC. Thank you.

Contact person: Jeneane Thiesfeldt 507-240-4523 [thiesfjm@gmail.com](mailto:thiesfjm@gmail.com)

## **Youth Group**

### **Upcoming Events:**

- Apr 12 Help decorate and set up for the Easter for Kids: 6:30 pm at St. Paul's School
- Apr 13 Help with Easter for Kids: 8 am at St. Paul's Lutheran School
- Apr 20 Decorate the church fellowship hall for Easter Brunch
- Apr 21 Help serve Easter brunch

## **Staff Minister**

Thank you to all who prepared and served the meals during Lent and to the ushers who are filling in for the mid-week services. Your stewardship is greatly appreciated.

During April we will have the Examination Service for our Catechumens. This is a chance for those who haven't studied a Catechism recently to hone their memories on what we Confessional Lutherans were taught in our youth.

Church cleaning will take place on April 6<sup>th</sup> from 9 am to 1 pm. Members in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and older are welcome to participate.

"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'" (Lk 24:2-6a)

## Church Library

Have you looked through the devotion section of the church library? There are over 100 books or pamphlets useful as devotions. Some are good during the Advent and Christmas seasons, but most are good for anytime. A few of them are translations of works by Martin Luther. A good portion of all these devotion books were published by NPH—Northwestern Publishing House, our synod's publisher.

If you have children or grandchildren, there are many books to read to them, or they can read themselves. We also have devotion books for kids. The one I remember from long ago is "Little Visits with God". Since then they have written "More Little Visits With God", "Little Visits with Jesus", Little Visits for Families," "Little Visits for Toddlers" and more. We have these and others. We also have picture books with the Easter Story on our cart.

Check us out.

LeiLani  
Church Librarian