



St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN
August, 2020 Fortress

Shelter at Home

A Fortress Article for August 2020

“Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.” (Isaiah 26:20)

March 26th of 2020 the stay at home order was declared. The next day someone emailed me asking if I thought it was just a coincidence that it was on 3/26/20 that Isaiah 26:20 was being carried out. “Yes,” I replied, “I’m certain that it *is* just a coincidence.” We don’t look for verse numbers (of human invention) to coincide with dates (of human numbering) to interpret the Word of God. That being said, there is certainly much for us to learn today from Isaiah 26.

For starters, looking at the context of the chapter we see *why* God told his people to “shelter at home.” In verse 21 he said, ***“See, the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.”***

God would punish people for continuing to reject him and for rebelling against him. For, ***“Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and regard not the majesty of the Lord.”*** (v. 10) God was spanking the wicked as a warning to wake them from the slumber of their sinful rebellion before it was too late and their souls were lost for eternity.

Might God be doing the same today? Surely he still wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). And he will still use whatever means necessary to remind mankind of its mortality and immortality that he might call stubborn sinners to repentance. But Isaiah 26 is not without hope.

While this chapter clearly warns of God’s impending discipline, Isaiah also declares: ***“You [God] will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.”*** (v. 3) And he admonishes the people, ***“Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.”*** (v.4)

We, who see Jesus even more clearly than Isaiah did, know why we can trust in God: In love he sent his Son to live the perfect life we couldn’t in our place. He sent his only Son to die on a cross in our stead. He sent his beloved Son to endure the punishment of his wrath that we should have endured that he might rescue us.

And so Isaiah rightly declares, ***“Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.”*** (v. 12) It’s not by our works, nor by our might. It’s not by our good intentions or successful reforms. But it’s entirely by Christ’s work for us, due to God’s grace upon us, revealed by the Holy Spirit working in us, that we find peace with God. *He* has established peace for us. All that we’ve accomplished, *he* has done.

And now, as a result, we have this confidence: ***“But your dead will live; their bodies will rise.***

You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.”

While we shelter at home, we shelter in God’s grace, knowing that should COVID-19 end our lives here on earth, our lives will not end. We will live again! We will wake up from death to live with our Savior forever!

Is it a coincidence that Isaiah 26:20 speaks of sheltering at home when we began to shelter at home on March 26th, 2020? Most certainly, it is. But it’s no coincidence that God speaks his message of law and gospel to us in 2020. In love he warns that he will punish the wicked that show no regard for his grace. He does so to lead us all to repent and turn to him that we might find the message of the gospel: that God, in his grace has established peace for us by his Son.

So as we continue to practice social distancing and mask up in public, continue to find shelter, not just at home, but in God’s great grace for you. Hang in there! For Jesus is returning soon and will take all who remain faithful to him to his heavenly home!

Your servant in Him,



Pastor Guenther

Our Synod at Work

WELS Commission on Special Ministries: Part One

For the next two months we will take a look at the WELS Commission on Special Ministries. This month we will provide a basic overview and next month look at some of the areas in which they are involved along with a look ahead in each of those areas.

First of all, the Commission on Special Ministries consists of teams that are focused on equipping congregations for compassion ministry. The teams were originally formed to address disabilities and circumstances that might harm the spiritual life of church members. Because the Lord’s call to love each other and to reach the lost, Special Ministries teams have been given a broader perspective of the resources needed. The people that are served by Special Ministries teams are less likely to attend church or be a Christian because of barriers to their participation.

Special Ministries reaches out to individuals, congregations, and families to offer specialized services and resources to address the special need(s) that confront them. They serve people who are physically, mentally or emotionally in need of special consideration as regards to their ability to learn, worship, and participate in local ministries and everyday living situations. They also serve thousands of people who are away from their church home, such as military personnel, people living overseas, in prison, or in some other institution.

They have a publication entitled Love in Action, which highlights the mission and resources Special Ministries teams offer, not only for members of WELS congregations, but also for people in the community around churches. The unique demands in post Christian society and national crises offer many opportunities for WELS members to use their gifts to show extraordinary love.

To foster caring congregations, a training module with a Bible class was created, and a workshop was offered at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. Videos on welcoming back church members with special needs or circumstances were also created as part of the Welcome Home initiative.

There are a number of projects and new resources to provide thousands of volunteers with opportunities to serve others in love and it is these areas that we will focus on in next month's column. Some of the areas of focus will be: Mission for the Visually Impaired; Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Mental Health Needs Committee; Military Services; Prison Ministry; and Care Committee for Called Workers.

Gerald Woodley

Church Library

Have you been reading more this summer? Keeping your kids entertained with books? It does work. Now on to school, perhaps.

One book I read this summer is "Prepared to Answer" by Mark Paustian, a professor at MLC. We already have this book in our church library, but I had not read it before. Prof. Paustian answers various questions he had been asked, using Scriptures to give the answers. A sample is "Do you really believe in miracles?" or "If I work hard enough, God will accept me," or "Religion is a crutch for the weak." He has good answers for 33 questions in this book, using Bible Stories to help explain.

A second book by Prof. Paustian, "More Prepared to Answer," has 32 more questions answered. Our library has both books.

Another book I read recently is "Treasured Lives" a history of Bethesda Lutheran Home in Watertown, WI. The author is Marlys Taege Moberg who was a Corporate Affairs Administrator at Bethesda and Executive Director of the Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities and wrote this history in 2004, their 100th anniversary. Bethesda began in 1904 to be a place to help persons with various disabilities, when unkind terms like "idiot" and "imbecile" were used by many. Eventually the terms were changed to be kinder. Bethesda was a help to thousands of families over the years, including mine. Prior to 2004, Bethesda was switching gradually from a self-contained campus to having group homes in many states. More recently, I found that they have torn down most of their buildings and have only a headquarters building there. WELS was involved with the Missouri Synod at Bethesda for many years but now it is only a Missouri Synod entity.

Enjoy the last month of summer and stay healthy !!
LeiLani Rahn, Church Librarian

Council Digest

The church council met on Tuesday, July 21. A summary of reports and actions from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

Ministrations

Transfers In

Kati Aguilar from Christ the Vine, Temecula, CA

Amelia Thomford from Divine Savior, Doral, FL

Transfers Out

Benjamin and Kiara Ristow; (Lydia) to St. Peter, Weyauwega, WI

Dan and Tingting Schwartz; (Elijah, Jason) to St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN

LaShawn Smith; *Josiah, *Sebastian to St. Paul's, N. Mankato, MN

David and Leah Wendland; (Lillian, Elliot, Otto) to Our Redeemer, Madison, WI

Baptisms

19 Jul Leona Jeune Dinse

 Mack Edgar Dinse

Pastor Bovee announced plans for Sleepy Eye Pool event on 8/1. Bible class will be on Thursdays only beginning 9/17 – at 10:30 am and 7 pm. Classes will be online; each Pastor will teach a topic for six weeks; switching their respective time, but repeating the classes for the following six weeks.

Constitutional Rewording adding a representative to St. Paul's Board of Child discipleship will come before the voters:

Article 2, Section 3. Officers

The church council officers shall consist of a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, a financial secretary, a deacon, a board of elders chairman, a board of youth and education chairman, a representative to St. Paul's Board of Child Discipleship, a board of trustees chairman, a board of stewardship, and a board of Evangelism chairman. These officers shall be elected by the voters at the congregation's election meeting.

Article 3, Section 12. Representative to St. Paul's Board of Child Discipleship.

The elected representative will represent St. John's and be St. John's voting member at St. Paul's Board of Child Discipleship meetings. The representative is also a voting member of St. John's church council. The representative shall report from time to time to the St. John's Board of Youth and Education as needed.

Voters will be asked to ratify Joel Thomford on Board of Youth and Education

Retirement service for Jean Schroeder

Sunday, August 9 at 11 am service.

Next regular council meeting

Tuesday, August 18 at 7 pm.

St. Paul's Lutheran School

splnewulm.org/school/

BoCD Work (SP Board of Child Discipleship)

Present Calls/New Positions

-Mrs. Becky Guenther accepted the PreK Call. In the last BOCD meeting, the Board approved that the call would be considered 100% joining the few full-time students to the morning session and going with the few full-time students in the afternoon.

-Mrs. Katie Hermanson was hired for the teachers' assistant in the PreK.

-Mrs. Christine Baganz and Mrs. Emily Stoering, along with Staff Minister Mr. James Dretske will be installed on Sunday, August 30, in the 11:00 service. Mrs. Baganz will teach kindergarten and Mrs. Stoering will teach a 5th/6th grade classroom.

Continue to keep all called workers in your prayers and pray that the Lord of the Harvest will move more young people to enter the training for work in the public ministry. There are many vacancies across the U.S. and a vast need throughout the world for workers to take the Gospel to all nations.

Registration

Registration is scheduled for **Thursday, August 5th - 8:00am -7:00pm AT ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL** and will include the taking of **School Pictures** for all students and staff. Families will have the ability to purchase necessary religion books and visit other stations providing information for various things. **Emails were sent to Families asking them to sign up Online in advance for a time to come. Photo areas will be sanitized between sessions and staging areas planned with social distancing in mind.**

2020-2021 Start

The exact plans for the new school year were still unsure at the writing of this report. A committee of faculty members along with a "Covid Committee" has been meeting to determine the steps of each of three possible plans, one of which will be announced at the end of July. The PreK is considered essential care and will begin as planned on September 2nd. The plan at this point for the 2020-21 school year will begin on Tuesday, September 1st for grades 1-8. PreK & Kindergarten will begin on Wed., Sept. 2nd.

Calendar

Aug 5	Registration Day at St. Paul's School
Aug 9	Jean Schroeder 40th Anniversary/Retirement Service at 11 am Followed by reception
Aug 30	Installation service for: Christine Baganz (Kindergarten) Emily Stoering (Grades 5-6) Jim Dretske (Staff Minister)
Sep 1	First Day of School (Grades 1-8)
Sep 2	First Day of School (PreK-K)
Sep 4 & 7	NO School: Labor Day Weekend

Respectfully Submitted, James Dretske,
SJ Staff Minister
sm.dretske@gmail.com

Sending Offerings through Bill Pay

Several members of St. John's have asked if there is a way for them to make their weekly offerings automatically either online or by an automatic bank transaction.

St. John's is investigating our online giving options, but are not yet ready to receive online gifts. For the time being, we suggest that our members consider using your bank's online Bill Pay service to make weekly or monthly gifts to St. John's.

If you have questions about using Bill Pay to make donations, please contact Financial Secretary Mike Thom at 507-217-7671.

Student of the Month

St. John's recognizes the importance of supporting the future called workers of the WELS and has created the **Ministerial Student Scholarship Fund** as a means of assistance to St. John's members training for service in the ministry. These funds are equally distributed to the St. John's members who are third and fourth year students at Martin Luther College or attending the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Kristin Uher is one of the students who is receiving funds and is attending Martin Luther College.

I have pretty much always wanted to be a teacher. Both of my parents are teachers and I have looked up to them and wanted to follow in their footsteps since I was little. I have three years of school left before I can join them in the public ministry, but I am eager to do so!

One of my favorite classes was called Reading in the Content Areas. I really enjoyed this class because it introduced me to many methods of incorporating literature into all subject areas and allowed me to explore how I might do that in my future classroom.

A class I found challenging was Chemistry, however, it was very cool to gain more understanding of the complexities of God's wonderful creation.

When I am not in class, I can sometimes be found working in the campus Bookstore, working the cash register, organizing books, or folding sweatshirts. I also work at Kwik Trip a few nights a week. Balancing work and school work can be difficult sometimes, but making use of resources in the library and studying with friends helps me to stay on top of my responsibilities.

When I am not working or doing homework I enjoy being a part of the theater productions on campus and playing games with my friends. Your generosity helps me continue to enjoy every part of the ministerial education I am getting at Martin Luther College. Thank you for your continued support and for keeping me in your prayers. I look forward to serving you as a called worker soon!

Directory Pictures

We are again contracting with Lifetouch studios to photograph our St John's family for our pictorial directory. These are the dates and times:

Tuesday – Friday, August 4 - 7 from 2 - 9 pm

Saturday, August 8 from 10 am - 5 pm

Thursday & Friday, September 10 & 11 from 2 - 9 pm

Saturday, September 12 from 10 am - 5 pm

You can schedule your appointments using an online scheduling link that you can find on our website, www.stjohnsnewulm.com, but we also will have paper forms available on weekends at church for those who would rather sign up in person. You will find them in our gathering space.

The dates are coming up quickly, so schedule soon!

If you have any questions, contact our church office at 507-354-6744.