



St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN
January, 2024 *Fortress*

NEW MERCY FOR THE NEW YEAR

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:19-23)

Where do you find yourself in this New Year? Are you happy and contented or discouraged and dissatisfied? Are you looking back on the year past with regret or with a sense of accomplishment? Are you looking ahead to the future with eager anticipation or trepidation?

Like the old song from "Fiddler on the Roof": "Sunrise, Sunset..." which says, "One season following another, laden with happiness and tears," perhaps there is a combination of many thoughts and emotions as we all look back at the days recently gone by and the months ahead. There is a great share of joy and sorrow, regret and satisfaction packed into every year.

But there certainly are those times when gloom seems to outweigh joy, and when hardships seem to overshadow the blessings. There are old problems that follow us into the future, and a fear of what lies ahead – things we simply cannot control.

The prophet Jeremiah found himself in a sad state of affairs as he made his way to the ancient city of Ramah, the birthplace of the prophet Samuel. He was there with many others from the land of Judea. But they were not there by choice. They had been driven out their homeland, and were looking back at the ransacked and burning city of Jerusalem, which had been the capitol of Judah. The Babylonians had conquered the land and her people. They had burned the city, knocked down the walls, and toppled the magnificent Temple of Solomon where the people were to worship the LORD, the living God.

As they were being herded off toward a land they did not know, a place where they would be in exile for 70 years, Jeremiah was among the captives of Judah. Even though he had warned the people that unless they repented of their sin such judgment would befall them, he too was swept away by the consequences of their sin.

But at Ramah, the Babylonian commander of the imperial guard recognized Jeremiah as the one who had prophesied against the people of Judea, and he let him go free. Although set at liberty, it

was still not great consolation for Jeremiah. His home was destroyed and his people had been taken captive.

It is believed that those events were the source of the words written in **Lamentations 3:19-20: I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.**

It was certainly one of those times in life when sorrow seemed to outweigh joy, and when pessimism had swallowed up hope. 586 B.C. was certainly not a year to look back on with joy; not for Jeremiah and the people of Judah.

However, despite the sorrow and discouragement, Jeremiah did not fall into despair. For he went on to say: **Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:21-23).**

Jeremiah had not forgotten the mercy of God. He remembered that God's love is great, so great in fact that God would never forget his children. Even at times when they did very bad things and disobeyed their loving heavenly Father, God had not forgotten them nor abandoned them. God would surely forgive, and had already forgiven them.

Yes, said Jeremiah, this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. I do not have to be lost in despair and wallow in discouragement. God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning. That is to say, with each new day when we awaken, and see the rising sun, we can know that God's mercy and forgiveness are new and renewed. With each new day we have a new start with God – a clean slate. Our sins have been forgiven, because God sent his Son Jesus Christ to remove our guilt and sin. Jesus' own perfection covers our sin-stained lives, and thus we are justified – declared righteous in God's sight through faith in Christ as our Savior. We are a new creation in Jesus every morning, every day, and forever.

That is what each and every one of us has as we walk forward into the up and coming year. We have the confidence of knowing that our old sins are forgiven, and that God's mercies are new every single day of our lives. Great is his faithfulness; that is to say, it is inexhaustible. It is never going to run out.

Therefore, wherever you may find yourself otherwise at the brink of this New Year, know that your confidence to go forward is found in Christ. For no matter what obstacles or hardships may face us, if we are found in Christ, we are exactly where we want and need to be. His mercies are always new, and his faithfulness is great. With boldness we walk forward into the year to come, and know that his everlasting and inexhaustible grace and mercy will see us through. Amen, and amen!

Blessed New Year!

In Christ,
Pastor Jeffrey A. Bovee

January Sermon Texts

January 7	Romans 11:13-15, 28-32	God Has Mercy on Us All
January 14	2 Thessalonians 2:13-17	Called by the Gospel
January 21	Mark 1:14-20	Called to Go Fish
January 28	Deuteronomy 18:15-20	Listen to the Prophet of the Lord

Bible Classes meet in the Church Basement
The class can also be found online at bit.ly/SJBibleClass

Thursdays at 10:30 am	Hard Sayings of Jesus	Pastor Rob Guenther
Thursdays at 7 pm	The I AM Statements of Jesus	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Fridays at 9:30 am	Book of Esther	Pastor Rob Guenther
Sunday, Jan. 28 at 9:30 am	Book of 1st John	Pastor Rob Guenther



Council Digest

The Church Council and Voters met on December 19. A summary of reports and actions from the meetings not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Ministrations

Transfer In

Hannah Gabb from St. Paul's Beverly Hills, FL

Transfer Out

Bethany Thomford to Our Savior, Burlington, IA

Pastoral Acts

Wedding

16 Dec Hannah Gabb and Justus Borgwardt

Funeral

14 Dec MacKenzie Boni

Council and Special Voters

Updates to the budget adopted in October were presented to the council and voters. The voters previously adopted a balanced budget for 2024. The report and updates included:

- During the last five years, budgeted expenses exceeded actual offerings by an average of about \$118,000.00.
- The voters adopted a balanced budget for 2024, including a reduction in the staff minister's hour to quarter time, moving to a WELS VEBA Plan 3 and HSA for called worker health insurance, and a zero balance for K-12 tuition assistance.
- Since October, there have been further savings in property taxes, health insurance, and participation in a Section 125 (Flex) Plan. Further details for these three areas include:
 - * The 2024 property tax bill is \$226 less than the amount budgeted (\$2,474 vs. \$2700 budgeted).
 - * Pastor Bovee informed St. John's that in 2024, his family has chosen to receive their health insurance coverage through MLC rather than St. John's. MLC prioritized providing for their faculty and staff, which includes Mrs. Bovee. This reduces St. John's 2024 health insurance and HSA costs by a total of \$14,664.
 - * Due to low participation, the Section 125 (Flex) Plan will be terminated as of Dec. 31, 2023—a total 2024 budget savings of \$919.
 - ◆ The total of these three updates is \$15,809.
 - * There is roughly \$6,000 that remains in the K-12 Education Assistance at the end of 2023.
 - * The Endowment Committee proposal was approved to release \$12,000 and use it for a one-time designation to the K-12 Education Assistance Fund.
 - ◆ The combined total of these five updates is \$33,809

The special voters meeting addressed two competing proposals to fund the K-12 Education Assistance fund. The two competing proposals were to

- Leave the 2024 budgeted K-12 Education Assistance Fund at a zero balance.
- Set the amount of K-12 Education Assistance at a REDUCED amount from the previous c. \$68,000.

The voters amended the 2024 budget to include \$33,809 in additional funding to the K-12 Educational Assistance Fund. This is still a reduction in the budget for K-12 Education Assistance by almost 50%. Congregation members can provide additional support to this fund along with their regular support.

Voters' Election Meeting

The council and voters approved the ballot and officers were appointed and council members elected. Officers and council members will be installed on January 14, 2024, at the 11 am service. This is the list of the voters' election meetings:

Secretary	Pete Baganz
Treasurer	Perry Meyer
BOYE Chair	Nick Schmoller
Evangelism Chair	Jesse Zahrt
Stewardship Chair	Mark Maurice
Properties Chair	Sam Hunter
BOYE Member	Jon Laabs
Elders Member	Nick Price & Josiah Stoering
Endowment Member	Mike Thom
Evangelism Member	Al Uher & Brandon Hanevik
Finance Member	Dale Thom, Suzanne Schmidt & Mark Micheel
MVL Delegate	Miles Wurster

MVL Alternate
Properties Member
Stewardship Member

Jim Danell & DJ Peterson
Mikal Schwark
Kurk Kramer & Mark Haefner

Future meetings:

Church Council: Tuesday, January 16 at 7 pm

Annual Voters': Tuesday, January 23 at 7 pm

Reports for Annual Meeting are due to the church office: office@stjohnsnewulm.com by Friday, January 12.

Jon Schaefer,
Congregational Chairman

Cards of Caring

Cards of Caring will meet this winter to continue to make cards for our homebound and thinking-of-you members, and for our three LWMS Befriend a Mission families. All supplies are furnished. If you are unable to create cards, we have other tasks you may do. We welcome those from 7th grade and older including MLC students. Our next dates are Saturday, January 13 and February 10. We meet from 9 am until noon. Come any time between those hours. We meet at 403 N. Minnesota St. (across from the Glockenspiel). This is an opportunity for fellowship and service to the Lord. Contact Lois Willems at 507-676-1230 with questions.



Youth Group

Back-to-School Cookie Baking and Decorating Event!

Wednesday, January 3, from 5:30 - 7:30 pm in the church basement for Youth and guests.

The cookie competition will have 3 categories for prizes (The Van Gogh, The Tasty Treat & The Creative Cookie).



Some basic cookie baking supplies will be provided, but it is encouraged to bring your own ingredients and tools to have your cookie stand out from the rest. Check your email for more details! RSVP by scanning the QR code to help prepare for the event.

St. Paul's School

Blessing Bags and Christmas Joy! Joy to the World!

Once again this year, the students at St. Paul's School enthusiastically engaged in a Christmas giving project instead of a traditional classroom gift exchange. This new tradition aims to teach students the importance of sharing their blessings, particularly with isolated or homebound members of their community. The first step involved collecting various gifts to fill the bags, and the students brought an assortment, including chocolates, wash towels, and hot chocolate packets.



Next, the students adorned paper bags with special Christmas messages. A total of 150 bags, creatively decorated by the kids, were filled with goodies and accompanied by cards explaining the source of their Christmas joy – the birth of Jesus, our Savior.

The thank you cards the students received after the deliveries expressed words of gratitude like...” It was a day brightener for me.”, and ”God bless you all,” ”Everything from the neatly decorated bags to the variety of goodies inside was a joy to receive. You certainly brightened the day for the two of us.” and ”Your kindness is greatly appreciated!” The students and faculty at St. Paul's School wish you all a Merry Christmas all year long!

Pete Markgraf, St. Paul's School Principal



St. Paul's Preschool Open House Monday, January 15 from 4 - 7 pm

New preschoolers, please come and visit!

St. Paul's Preschool offers full day & part-time sessions for 3,4 and 5 year old children.

Watch for a preschool Information/Registration mailing in early January.

St John's, New Ulm, St. John's, Sleepy Eye and St. Paul's, New Ulm members and our school families are invited to have first choice of preschool sessions through January 15th. Community "Open Registration" begins January 16. Some sessions fill by early February.



If you have questions, please contact our preschool director, Mrs. Heidi Meyer at preschool@splnewulm.org.

Wish List

The Church Council has approved the addition of two items to the Wish List, both of which originated with the Campus Facilities Task Force:

1. **48 Chairs** (with arm rests and hymnal racks below the seats) for nave seating -- \$7,500 These linked chairs will replace seating the first three pews on each side of the nave. The seat cover will match the covering planned for the pews. These movable seats will provide flexible seating arrangement (e.g., to accommodate choirs or handicapped). Purchasing these in anticipation of the planned renovations may offset the possible price increases in the coming months.
2. **Painting** the walls of the nave -- \$1,000 is the anticipated cost for paint and materials; volunteers will be solicited to provide the labor. The color to be selected will coordinate with the renovation. This project is to be completed before renovations begin.

Please consider supporting these efforts in addition to your regular church offerings.

Handbell Ringers Needed!

Join the Handbell Choir for a fun and unique fellowship opportunity!

There are openings in the group!

You don't need to be able to read music. The notes are color coded for all levels of experience.

Come join the fun! For more information contact Becky Berg at rberg@mvlhs.org.

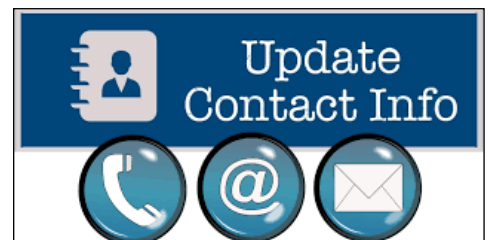


Has Your Contact Information Changed?

Please contact the church office at 354-6744 or office@stjohnsnewulm.com with any changes to your home address, cell phone number, and email address.

Also, if your children have moved, please update us with their new contact information so we can better serve them, too.

Thank you!



Our Synod at Work

WELS Military Ministry

The United States operates about 450 military bases within the United States and has approximately 750 military bases in around 80 countries. When a WELS member enlists in the military, he or she can potentially end up in any of these locations.

WELS military members have unique needs. Their families feel the stress of a loved one being away on a long deployment. There is the emotional and psychological strain of serving our country in difficult ways and dangerous situations. We thank God for providing individuals willing to defend our country and freedoms. One way we can respond is by making sure that WELS members in the military are spiritually served by pastors who understand the unique challenges of military life.

To support WELS members in our armed forces, WELS operates the Military Chaplaincy Program. We have a full-time European chaplain based in Germany. He travels to military bases throughout Europe and, when necessary, other locations around the world. WELS also has a part-time national chaplain based in Minnesota who serves as our official representative to the U.S. Armed Forces. Ministry needs are so great that WELS is expanding that position to full-time.

The national chaplain will now be located near one of our largest military bases in San Diego, California. However, he does much more than serve the military families at that base. He travels around the country, offering training and support to over 100 military contact pastors—parish pastors who serve a congregation near one of the stateside military bases. The national chaplain helps these pastors better understand how they and their congregations can support our WELS military personnel and their families with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The national chaplain also plans how to serve WELS members stationed away from a WELS church (something that is increasingly common as congregations consolidate or close). He supplies troops with Lutheran materials tailored to their specific needs. He provides remote pastoral counseling to WELS soldiers, seamen, and airmen when requested, and refers troops to Christian Family Solutions when professional counseling is needed. Along with the European chaplain, he is responsible for visiting deployed forces when possible, including those in war zones.

The national chaplain is also responsible for the plan to escalate pastoral service in the event of a large-scale conflict or major mobilization of forces. He maintains regular contact with the Pentagon to determine how WELS troops might be best served spiritually.

WELS members can choose to financially support our military ministry.

Gerald Woodley

OWLS Meeting

Our local MN Valley Chapter 13 OWLS (Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors) will meet on Monday, January 8 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, New Ulm. Fellowship begins at 11:30 am with a pot luck meal at noon. After a devotion, we will have a presentation by Bonnie Schirlinger entitled, "What it is like to be Blind."



Hope you can attend. Contact Myron Fluegge with questions at flueggemtj@hotmail.com.