



**St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN  
March, 2023 *Fortress***

### **THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS**

**1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

Recently I received an email from a frustrated Christian friend who belongs to another church body. He knows someone with a debilitating disease, which is slowly robbing her of her ability to do all of the normal, day-to-day things. In fact, she has lost her ability to walk and talk. But he still visits her, and sings hymns at her bedside, and she responds in such a way that he knows she is genuinely appreciative.

Sadly, one my friend's close acquaintances is an atheist. She contends that the condition of that woman who is ill is proof that God does not exist. He did not agree, but did not know how to answer that person. And so he asked me if I had any insights.

For those who have read the Bible, and understand that pain, sorrow, and death are the result of sin, there is no contradiction between suffering in this world and the existence of God. For those of us who understand that God does not owe us anything good, and that if life were really fair, we'd all be hell, we see no viable argument in the atheist's observations. For all who take to heart that the Lord disciplines those he loves, and scourges everyone he receives as his child, suffering has no relevancy in contending that if there is suffering, God must therefore not exist. For those of us who believe, according to God's Word, that all things work together for the good of those who love God, and have been called according to his purpose, there is no puzzle here.

Why then, does the atheist come to such a conclusion, that if people are made to suffer, that God doesn't exist? **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** God himself has given the answer.

Although the unbelievers of this world may say that Christians are "close-minded," it is an unintentional compliment. One of the words used for a fool or simpleton in the book of Proverbs literally means, "open-minded," in Hebrew. The Christian's mind is indeed closed by the conviction that God's Word is true, even if he cannot fully understand it.

St. Paul reminds us that when sinners look at the person and work of Jesus Christ it doesn't make sense. By nature all of us are skeptical anyway. Therefore, when God, in his wisdom revealed his salvation plan to the world our natural reaction was to say, no, it cannot be so. This is foolish! What good can someone else's death be for me? How can we be saved simply by believing in what someone else has done for us and not by our own efforts?

Paul cautions us, however, not to rely on our own perception of the way we believe things ought to be. **For, he says, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** And again: **For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** What is seemingly foolish to the sinful mind of man is wisdom with God. What appears to be weak and anemic in the eyes of sinners, God uses to over-throw even the most powerful efforts of men. Yes, says Paul, what is preached in God's Word is foolishness to our Old Adam, the sinful nature within us all. But it is not foolishness to God, or to those whom he has made his own by faith.

We have now begun our annual trip down the Lenten road, which will culminate at the cross on Calvary. We will see God in human flesh, allowing himself to be mocked, beaten, and crucified. The Lord of glory, who has no sin, will become a sinner by taking our sin on himself. Immortal God who cannot die, will suffer death for all of us. Holy God will endure the damning pains of hell and be separated from himself. All of it will be contrary to our sinful way of thinking and beyond our comprehension.

However, we shall receive by faith what God has done for us. Faith simply trusts God's Word and promise. For Jesus did not say, understand; he told us to believe. It is about what God did for us, not what we have done for God that saves us.

The preaching of the cross will always be foolishness to sinners who reject the truth. It doesn't make sense. It may not even seem logical, since God's mode of operation goes beyond logic and sinful reason. Trusting in our own ideas, feelings, opinions and virtues will not lead us to salvation. Man's wisdom, at its best, can only point man to what he ought to be, but will never get him there.

God's wisdom reveals Jesus who is for us everything we need to be. God's wisdom does not merely dote over what we ought to be, but shows us who we really are in Christ our Lord as the redeemed children of our Father.

For those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, the message of the cross is wisdom, and the key to salvation. It is the path beyond Golgotha which leads to the open tomb, to the mount of Ascension, and finally to the gates of heaven itself. The wisdom of God is far greater than man's wisdom. God's wisdom is Christ who was crucified to buy us back with his own blood, and who rose to prove that we are justified.

In Christ,  
Pastor Bovee

## March Sermon Texts

March 1	John 12:1-11	His Final Steps ... Led to a Dinner Celebration
March 5	Romans 4:1-5, 13-17	Righteousness is Ours Through Faith Alone
March 8	Matthew 21:12-17	His Final Steps ... Led to His Father's House
March 12	Luke 2:25-32, 36-38	Simeon and Anna "To Depart in Peace"
March 15	Mark 11:12-14, 20-25	His Final Steps ... Led to a Fig Tree
March 19	Matthew 1:19-25; 2:13-15, 19-23	"Joseph, Son of David, Do Not Be Afraid"
March 22	John 12:20-33	His Final Steps ... Led to Some Greeks
March 26	Romans 8:11-19	In Christ, There is Something Worth Waiting For
March 29	Luke 20:9-19	His Final Steps ... Led to His Enemies

### Bible Classes meet in the Church Basement

The class can also be found online at [bit.ly/SJBibleClass](http://bit.ly/SJBibleClass)

Sundays at 9:30 am	Book of Philippians - February 19 & 26	Pastor Rob Guenther
Thursdays at 10:30 am	Minor Prophets	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Thursdays at 7 pm	Great Prayers of the Bible	Pastor Rob Guenther
Fridays at 9:30 am	Women's Class: <i>The Screentape Letters</i>	Pastor Rob Guenther

## Council Digest

The Church Council met virtually on February 21. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

### **Transfers Out**

Tammy Koestler to St. Paul's Lutheran, New Ulm, MN

### **Adult Confirmation**

Brennon Brase

Aaron Gronau

Missy Martens; (Malachi Schwark, Levi Schwark,  
Sarai Weston, Maleficent Weston)

The president updated the council on the small group of St. John's and St. Paul's leaders work to compile a cost of education report. The St. John's representatives on this small group are Pastor Rob Guenther, President Jon Schaefer, BOCD Representative Greg Diersen, and Bookkeeper Mike Thom. This report is a complete picture of the cost of education at St. Paul's Lutheran School. The group's next steps include providing the furnished report to the congregations for consideration and update. For St. John's this will be an agenda item for the April 28 voters' meeting.

A team of auditors has been contacted to review the 2022 financial records with the goal of having the report ready for the voters at the April quarterly voters' meeting.

**Evangelism** chair Jesse Zahrt noted that communication is being sent to our prospects about Lent and Easter services. The prospects are those who have expressed interest and who attended previous St. John's and/or John & Paul Ministries events. The next steps include incorporating friendship evangelism by providing events that are "invite-friendly/easy asks" of our members. Members are asked to watch for visitors and ways to help fellowship and provide a welcoming environment for visitors to St. John's.

**Elders** chair Jason Mohr reported that the Elders will address the congregation. They are preparing a short presentation for upcoming communion services. The two goals are to

- encourage a return from home viewing of online services and participation in corporate worship.
- encourage communicants to sign in as a method of finding people in our congregation who need our spiritual support and encouragement.

**Stewardship** chair Dan Borgwardt reported that plans are being made to collect monies for a newly established compassion effort. The effort is called the Iris project. The purpose of this project is to assist in comforting and showing concern for mothers who have experienced a stillbirth, miscarriage, or infant death. Monies would be used to send a box of items to these women.

The Stewardship Board recommended supplementing the impending shortages in the funds for the Lutheran Chapel Hour and Lutheran Institutional Ministries, with an additional \$1000 transferred to each account in the budget from the endowment distribution account. They also recommended using endowment funds to purchase a new adjustable bench for our organists. The adjustable bench will replace the current bench that is adjusted using books and papers. The council approved both recommendations.

The stewardship board also submitted a bid for darkening the letters on the two cornerstones of the church and details for the approved concertato setting for St. John's 75th Anniversary. These details of the concertato setting for "Lord Jesus Christ, the Churches Head" have been publicized in the church bulletin. There has been \$25 given to the point. St. John's financial responsibility will be shared with Northwestern Publishing House. St. John's amount will be somewhere between \$600 to \$1000.

**Board of Youth and Education (BoYE)** chair Jon Hermanson welcomed Heath Dobberpuhl to the BoYE to fill a vacancy. The two big topics at their meeting were the tuition off-set and a new endowment fund for sons and daughters of the congregation studying for ministry. The board would be in charge of awarding and then distributing the endowment funds. These funds would supplement the support that can come from the Congregational Partnership Grants at MLC.

**Trustees** chair Scott Deters provided updates on the kitchen project and AED (automated external defibrillator).

1. Klassen plumbing had to replace the water heater in the mechanical room next to the kitchen. We had to convert to an electric water heater because they couldn't vent to the chimney. The chimney is clogged. This project is not part of the kitchen project.
2. South wall in the kitchen is being scraped and a coating of bonding material is being applied. Sheetrock is hung and being taped and mudded. Priming and painting to follow shortly after completion. The flooring was purchased and installation is planned for after painting is completed.
3. New equipment is being delivered and being stored in the basement. Scheduled delivery date for the dishwasher is on or around April 3rd.
4. One AED and first aid kit have been installed in narthex. The second units will be installed once the kitchen project is completed. Training for AED use rescheduled for before the March 21 council meeting at 6:30 pm.

A facilities task force reported on the prioritization of the sanctuary as the next project. The project might be a couple different phases. The first would be the floors and pews. The committee members (Dan Horner, Kurt Karstens, Jim Dretske, John Micheel, Jon Schaefer, Larry Black, Ron Zahrt, Mark Kowalke, Scott Deters, Rob Guenther) are collecting some word of mouth feedback while initially sharing the ideas for a sanctuary renovation.

The 75th anniversary committee reported on worship plans for this anniversary year. An organ recital by St. John's organists is being planned for September 10. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus is scheduled for the 11:00 service on May 7. The MLC College Choir will likely sing at a service in early fall on a date to be determined.

The council is reviewing the documentation to establish an Endowment for Ministerial Education. The endowment would be invested and managed by the endowment committee with the awarding and distribution completed by the Board of Youth and Education. The council will vote on approving the endowment before bringing it to the voters.

St. John's is scheduled to host the next semiannual joint council meeting with St. Paul's. An invitation will be extended for Tuesday, May 16, prior to the regular St. John's council meeting.

Jonathan M. Schaefer, Congregational Chairman

# Our Synod at Work

## The WELS Annual Report to Members

For a number of years this column has reviewed some of the highlights in the WELS Annual Report to their members. We will continue this practice in the next few columns by looking at this year's report that is entitled "Your Gifts, God's Blessings." The report is divided into four sections: Called to Prepare, Called to Proclaim, Called to Serve, and Called to Support.

As annual reports have done in the past, this year's report begins with a message from WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder. The message includes the following quote:

"The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is not primarily a Christian denomination. It is not primarily a non-profit Christian organization. It is not primarily to be defined as a building in Waukesha or as a group of full-time leaders who direct the mission and ministry of our church body. The synod, above all, is people. People like you, the members of your family, the people who sit beside you in church to worship, and the workers who have called to serve in the public ministry. It is people—all of whom have been given an amazing mission by God to preserve his Word and to share that Word with the world. It is people who have been joined together in a common faith and to carry out a common mission."

The report explains that WELS is the third largest Lutheran church body in the United States with 1,250 churches, 340,511 baptized members, and 272,555 communicant members. In looking back at last year's report there has been a one-year decrease in all three areas. Last year WELS had 1,276 churches, 353,753 baptized members, and 281,880 communicant members.

WELS has 284 Lutheran elementary schools, 362 early childhood ministries, and 29 area Lutheran high schools. This compares to last year's totals of 304 Lutheran elementary schools, 393 early children ministries, and 27 area Lutheran high schools.

WELS maintains four schools for the education of our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary. WELS also supports work in mission fields in the United States and in countries around the world.

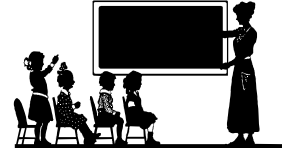
Known as the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, the synod's headquarters is in Waukesha, Wisconsin. It houses WELS' areas of ministry and support staff as well as the subsidiaries, WELS Archives, and the WELS Visitor Center.

Gerald Woodley

# St. Paul's School

## Making the MLC Connection

One of our school's stated goals for this year is to make more connections between students from St. Paul's and MLC so that students might find encouragement to become a called worker. We are making every effort to naturally connect our two schools in ways that are meaningful in purpose and encouraging to the students. The teachers have come up with many creative ways to make these connections.



During Lutheran School Week, we had pastor track ambassadors lead chapel services each day of the week. Sophomore and Junior men were provided with the topics that have been the message of our school year: hope, joy, peace, and power. Each one of them spoke on one of the words from our school year's theme passage, "*May the God of **hope** fill you with all **joy** and **peace** as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the **power** of the Holy Spirit.*" Romans 15:13.

The connections we make may not have an impact on the vacancies for pastors and teachers in the next few years, but we are showing our students that it is men and women who were just like them a few years ago that will be the next generation of young people to share the word of God in pulpits and classrooms around the world and right here in New Ulm. We are praying for these young people to recognize their gifts and to consider becoming pastors and teachers.

## Volunteers Needed

Church cleaning is scheduled for Saturday, March 11th from 9-11 am. Please note that it is a come and go event. Stay for as long or as little as you can.

Men, women and children are needed to get our church cleaned and ready for Easter. All cleaning supplies will be provided. Many hands make light work!



"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ." Colossians 3:23-24

## *In Loving Memory*

<i>Beverlee Haar</i>	Missions Undesignated	\$20 \$100
<i>Cathy Vogel</i>	Undesignated	\$25



## Church Library

March this year is Lent, since Easter is April 9. We have an extra chance each week to contemplate the sacrifice of Jesus with midweek Lent services as well as Sundays. Without Jesus we have nothing.

We have 2 new books to introduce this month.

The first one is non-fiction by Eric Metaxas who also wrote 2 books already in our library. This one is called "7 Men" and is short biographies of seven men the author considers "great." He begins with President Washington who did not want to be king. The six others are William Wilberforce (antislavery in England), Bonhoeffer (a German pastor who was against Hitler in WWII), Eric Liddell (a racer who refused to race on Sundays), Jackie Robinson (first black man in professional baseball), Pope John Paul II (first non-Italian pope in centuries who believed everyone was a child of God), and Charles Colson (helped many to find Jesus in prison). Most of these men were Christians.

The second book is a fiction book, "Winter Is Not Forever" by Janette Oke. It is book 3 of a series that we have books 1,2,and 4 already in our library. Josh has to decide what to do with his life. The other books have seasons in their titles, spring, summer, and autumn.

Also, this month I want to introduce 5 CDs to our library. Three are CDs: "Meet Martin Luther" (3 CDs), "The Great Divorce" by CS Lewis (3), and "Can I Trust the Bible" by Sproul (2). The other 2 are MP3 CDs: "The 4 Loves" by CS Lewis (1), and "Upside Down Spirituality" by Chad Bird. I have not listened to these, but they should be good.



Blessings on your Lent.

LeiLani Rahn,  
Church Librarian

## Easter Outreach Baskets and Community Canvas!

Join John and Paul Ministries on April 1st from 12 - 2 pm to assemble 400 Easter outreach baskets and/or canvas throughout our community to invite our neighbors to Easter worship!



A complimentary volunteer pizza lunch starts the event at noon, so please sign-up using the poster QR codes or the form at [johnandpaulministries.com](http://johnandpaulministries.com). We look forward to seeing you there!

To fill the outreach baskets, donations of the following are appreciated (400 of each are needed)!

- Easter candy and/or jelly beans (new, in original packaging, 10 oz. or above)
- Seed packets for midwest flowers, herbs, or vegetables (new, in original packaging)



## MN Valley Lutheran Camp formerly Camp Shetek

MN Valley Lutheran Camp exists to provide elementary age children to the opportunity to worship the Lord and grow in their Christian faith as they participate in outdoor activities under the direction of Christian Counselors.

The camp will be held from Sunday, June 18 - Friday, June 23 at Sibley State Park in New London.

To register and find more information go to [www.campshetek.org](http://www.campshetek.org).



## WELS Youth Night at The Beacon

WELS Youth Night will be on Sunday, March 26th from 6 - 8:15 pm at The Beacon ministry center in Mankato.

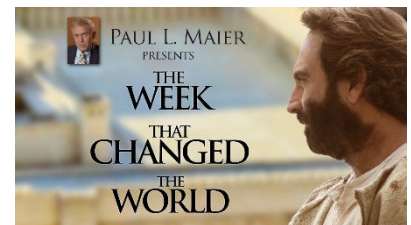
This event is free and is designed specifically for all teens in 9th-12th grade. There will be food, fun, fellowship, and most importantly faith.

Please sign up in advance using the QR code. Contact Stephanie Otto with questions at [sotto@gustavus.edu](mailto:sotto@gustavus.edu).



## Women of St. John's

The March meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 7th at 7 pm here at church. Please join us for the video "The Week That Changed the World" along with a study of proofs of the resurrection.



## Men of Truth

Join us for our 8th Annual Men of Truth Conference, **Men Mentoring Men**, held March 25th at Martin Luther College.

Three featured speakers led by Keynote Jeremy Mattek will explore the subject of fellow Christian brothers mentoring and discipling each other.



More information and registration links can be found at [www.menoftruth.org](http://www.menoftruth.org). See you there!

## St. John's congregation will observe its 75th Anniversary in 2023!

The planning committee has chosen Sunday, August 6 as the special day of celebration.



Two services with communion will be held at 8 and 10 am. We will not have a Saturday evening service that weekend.

Former St. John's pastor David Kolander will be the guest preacher.

A fellowship meal is also being planned.

Watch for more details in upcoming church bulletins and newsletters.

## SW MN Area Lutheran Chorale

The SW MN Area Lutheran Chorale cordially invites you to their spring concerts that will be held on Sunday, March 26 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Vesta at 2 pm and St. John's Lutheran Church, Sleepy Eye at 7 pm.

## Archives

### **The Distaff and the Shepherd's Crook**

*The Beginnings of St. John's Ladies' Aid*

In the church archives lies a tattered, gray, canvass-covered book with RECORD stamped on the cover. An envelope is affixed under the cover. It contains the signatures of ninety-four women who joined St. John's Ladies' Aid from its inception in 1949 until December 13, 1962.

The following pages were filled with the minutes of monthly meetings framed in the graceful cursive of "Mrs. John Oldfield, Sect.," "Mrs. Alvin Rolloff, Sect." or "Mrs. Walter Plagge, Sec." Over the years the signatures took on a less formal "Mrs. Gronholz," "Mrs. Brei," "Mrs. Johnson," or simply, "Elsie Muetzel." A little of Marlene Rolloff's nurse's training could be seen by a smattering of Latin shorthand throughout her term as secretary.

During that first decade, the St. John's Ladies' Aid usually met in the basement-church on a Wednesday afternoon monthly. Following each meeting three of the ladies hosted a light luncheon. Usually in August, the ladies hosted a pot luck picnic at Flandreau Park for their families.

Right away in 1949, a constitution and by-laws was adopted. The first elected officers were Mrs. Victor Voecks, President; Mrs. Howard Vogel, Vice President; Mrs. Walter Plagge, Secretary; and Mrs. Howard Birkholz, Treasurer. All matters of business were decided according to Roberts' Rules of Order and carefully recorded.

The first meeting was held on March 16, 1949. Mrs. Oldfield noted *"The meeting was opened with a devotional service by Pastor M. Albrecht, at which time he pointed out that our foremost aim must be to further and enrich our spiritual life and find Christian fellowship, rather than to form a mere social organization."*

Each month's meeting usually began with the pastor leading a prayer and a meditation on Holy Scripture. Then the pastor might follow with an exciting report from our home or world mission fields. For instance, in the meeting of September 1949, *"Rev. Albrecht gave a short, but interesting talk about his trip to the various new mission churches of our synod."* In December 1949, after the Christmas hymns, *"Mrs. Baer gave an interesting lecture of a woman's view point of the ways and means of living in Nigeria, Africa."* Filmstrips were emerging as our synod's go-to mass media vehicle by the mid-1950s. Films like "Life in Rhodesia" (today: Zambia) and "Bethesda Lutheran Home" were shown in those years.

Until 1963, when the synod-wide Lutheran Women's Missionary Society was formally established, our congregation's women found their meetings a major conduit for information on the progress of the Gospel.

The members of St. John's Ladies Aid put their informed faith into action. Toys were collected and sent to the orphaned children who were being cared for at our Apache Nursery in Arizona. Thirty yards of flannel were purchased to sew clothing for those same children. Ladies often opened their houses to host those who could help with the sewing between meetings. Three months later, the minutes reflected the final product of all that flannel: *"Mrs. Hagan and Mrs. Bruns were appointed to wrap and mail the kimonos to Arizona."*

During the Korean conflict, clothing was collected and sent to Korean children. At the request of the Ladies' Aid, articles of clothing were donated by St. John's members to send to refugees in Germany who were still reeling from the aftermath of WW II. Care packages of Christmas cookies were sent to "The Old Folks' Home in Belle Plaine."

Respectfully Submitted,

Wayne Laitinen,  
St. John's Lutheran Archivist