



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

“I Love You!”

“I love you.” Aren’t those great words to hear when they’re aimed at you? “I love you, dad. You’re the best dad ever.” “I love you mom. Thanks for all you do for me.” “I love you... Will you marry me?”



This month we celebrate Valentine’s Day and hear those words, “I love you!” and see them on cards and candies, accompanied with flowers and treats and special dinners.

Or maybe right now, you long to hear those words... You wish you had a significant other who told you that they loved you but you’re alone. Or the significant other that used to say those words to you is now gone – you broke up, you divorced, or they passed away. And you’re alone. And Valentine’s Day with all its candies and cards and sappy romance makes you sicker than eating a box of chocolates on your own in one sitting.

I get it. But more importantly, God gets it too. And whether you feel well loved by everyone around you or you feel more lonely than you’ve ever felt, you’re not alone. You’re never alone. You always have a “special someone” with you: ***“God has said, Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*** (Hebrews 13:5)

And quite frankly, he’s a “Valentine” that we don’t deserve. How many times can you treat a friend in a mean and loveless way before you lose that friend? How many times can someone cheat on their spouse before they finally get divorced? How many times have we rejected God’s love, chosen to live for ourselves instead of him, and cheated on him again and again? And yet, in spite of it all, he loves us anyway!

Last February (2023) there were \$25.9B in sales of Valentine’s Day related products in the United States. Yes, you read that right. That’s a “B” for billion! That’s a huge cost to say, “I love you!” But then look at the price God paid to say “I love you!” ...to you!! ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16) His own Son! His *only* Son! His *perfect* Son! What love!

This Valentine’s day, whether your marriage is going great... or not... whether you have a “special someone” who loves you... or not... whether you’re surrounded by friends and family... or not... feeling all alone... remember the love God has given you: ***“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** (1 John 4:10) ***“See***

what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1a)

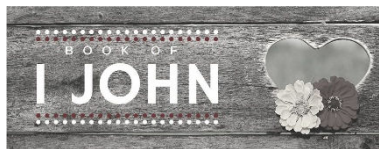
And then, respond to his love by loving... *“We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”* (1 John 4:19-21)

Maybe you know someone who is hurting – because their marriage is struggling, because they have no “significant other,” or because their spouse has passed away. Maybe you know someone who is feeling lonely and you can extend your love to them.

“I love you,” God says to us. “I love you,” God *proves* to us by his Son. “I love you,” we can say back to God. “I love you,” we say to each other. “I love you,” we show by our actions, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Join us this February for our Sunday morning Bible Classes at 9:30 am
to learn more about God’s great love for us
that leads us to love him and others in return.

We’ll be studying the book of 1 John and hear “The Apostle of Love”
describe our faith and our life in the “Epistle of Love.”



In Christ,

Pastor Guenther

February Sermon Texts

February 4	Mark 1:29-39	Jesus Came to Heal
February 11	2 Corinthians	The Gospel Unveils God’s Glory
February 14	Luke 22:47-53	Restraint
February 18	Romans 8:31-39	If God Is For Us ...
February 21	Job 40:1-2; 42:1-6	Accusations
February 25	Mark 8:31-38	But What Do You Say About Jesus?
February 28	Luke 23:1-12	Misconceptions

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

Thursdays at 10:30 am	The I AM Statements of Jesus	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Thursdays at 7 pm	The Hard Sayings of Jesus	Pastor Rob Guenther
*NEW Fridays at 7 am	Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Fridays at 9:30 am	Book of Esther	Pastor Rob Guenther
Sundays at 9:30 am	Book of 1st John	Pastor Rob Guenther

Council Digest

The Church Council met on January 16, 2024.

A summary of reports and actions from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Ministrations

Releases

Dane Hoffman
 Courtney Koch; Raelyn, Jace

Pastoral Acts

Wedding

21 Dec Dyani Ladd and Anthony Thomson

Funeral

29 Dec Aaron Gronau
 6 Jan Merlyn Bruns

The January council meeting served as a mini-orientation for new members who begin three-year terms of service on the council the following year. Peter Baganz will take over as secretary to fill the vacancy left by Wayne Wagner. Perry Meyer will serve as Treasurer replacing long time treasurer John Micheel. Mark Maurice joined the council as Stewardship Board Chairman to replace Dan Borgwardt. Sam Hunter replaced former Properties Board Chairman, Scott Deters. Nick Schmoller will serve as Board for Youth and Education Chairman taking over for Jon Hermanson. The council and voters expressed their appreciation for the outgoing members who completed years of service in their respective positions. We pray that God will bless Peter, Perry, Mark, Sam, and Nick as they carry out their responsibilities on behalf of the congregation.

The boards shared their annual reports which were first distributed in the 2023 Annual Report at the voters' meeting on January 23, 2024.

Treasurer John Micheel in his report noted that for the year 2023, \$108,584 more was spent than

received for Home Operations. The Undesignated Funds began the year with a balance of \$127,711. These funds ended the year with a balance of \$59,643.

The council followed by the voters' authorized the annual financial review of St. John's 2023 financial books.

The council and the voters approved the renovations to the sanctuary. The plan was presented in two parts. This first part is to renew the sanctuary by a) replacing the torn carpet and cracked tiles with commercial-grade vinyl tile and b) cushioning the worn original pew cushions and pulpit chair cushions. Included are c) the painting of the nave and d) the addition of flexible seating for increased handicap accessibility and handbells. –Later planning and proposals can address the other features of the sanctuary space, like the paneling in the chancel and the acoustic materials in the chancel and nave.

Work on the sanctuary renovations will begin at the beginning of June. The materials take about four months to arrive once ordered because of the volume needed. The total projected cost, excluding the completed revarnishing of the pew caps, is \$127,756.60. In January, the initial down payment of 60% of the cost, \$71,463.60 is due. Between May and June, volunteers will help paint the walls in the nave (\$1,000), receive and store the flooring and pew cushioning materials, and order the chairs (\$7,650). In June 2024, the workers from Sharpes will install the new flooring and new pew cushions, modify the arrangement of the pews for more handicapped seating and the handbell choir. Upon completion, we will make the second and third payments as the floor and pews are completed for 40% or \$47,643 of the total cost.

Future meetings:

The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 20, at 7 pm.

The annual voters' meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 23, at 7 pm.

The next Joint Council Meeting between St. John's and St. Paul's is scheduled for May 21, 2024.

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 date is Saturday, 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.



St. Paul's School

Planning for St. Paul's School and Preschool 2024-2025

St. Paul's Lutheran is gearing up for enrollment for the 2024-2025 school year. We began by opening enrollment to preschool families before Christmas. We are steadily receiving applications for our preschool programs for both three and four-year-olds, with twenty-four applications at this time. We would be grateful to increase that number above fifty by the start of the school year. Our next enrollment will be for Kindergarten. In early February, parents are invited to attend a Round Up where they will be invited to enroll. (If you have not received an invitation but have a child going into Kindergarten, please contact the school at school@splnewulm.org). In March, enrollment will open for grades 1-8. (This is the earliest we have started enrollment, but we have found that decisions for staffing need to be made as soon as possible. Staffing decisions impact the overall budget, affecting the cost per child at St. Paul's School.)

Tuition has been set for preschool, but the Board of Child Discipleship, the school board, will soon determine the tuition for Kindergarten through eighth grade.

We hear many encouraging comments at the school, and I would like to share them with you to help you understand the importance of being able to hear about Jesus every day. Here is an example:

Thank you for all the time, energy, and patience you give to help our son grow and learn. He loves going to preschool, and I especially love when he comes home and tells me about the Bible story or makes a cross from something in the house and tells me Jesus died on the cross to be his Savior. Blessings to you this Christmas season and always.

Pete Markgraf
St. Paul's School Principal

Amazing Race 2024

Everyone is invited to take part in the events at school on Race Day, Sunday, February 4.

Taco in a bag lunch from 11:30-1:00, cupcakes, lightning basketball games and bean bags are all on the agenda.

We are looking forward to seeing you there, but don't forget about the silent auction! The classrooms are collecting items for their class silent auction baskets. The online auction goes live on Monday, January 29, and closes on February 4, at noon. You can access the auction website here: <https://virtualauction.bid/amazingrace2024>.

Contact Amy Rich at stampinnut@me.com with your questions.

Church Library

February makes us think of valentines and love. So this month we introduce a trilogy that shows love as well as hate.

The Refiner's Fire series by Lynn Austin is fiction. The first book is titled "Candle in the Darkness" and is Caroline Fletcher's story focusing on the "white" side of the slavery question in Virginia in 1853. Her father's plantation has many slaves, some in the house like the cook and the maids, some in the stables that keep the horses healthy and drive the carriages, and many others who work daily in the fields. The slaves live in poor cabins while the whites live in a mansion. The



story begins when Grady age 9, is sold to slave traders. His Mom is the chief maid to Mrs. Fletcher. Later we realize that he was fathered by Mr. Fletcher. Grady's Mom is the slave Tessie, and his grandfather Eli is a slave who is very sure of God's love, that Jesus can fix anything. They all are sure of heaven. Grady had been a childhood friend of Caroline. When the war starts in 1861, Caroline starts a journal of how things went during the Civil War, using wallpaper to write on, torn off the wall. She helps the North secretly to shorten the war, but her husband was fighting for the South.

The second book in the trilogy is "Fire By Night" which shows us details of the war. Two women become nurses because the need is great and are therefore near the fighting. Grady meanwhile has escaped from his keepers and joined an all-black unit fighting for the North. The third book, "A Light to My Path" focuses on Kitty, a slave who marries Grady as a grown up. He is learning about the North and is free, but Kitty is still a slave, until the war ends. We learn many details of the treatment of slaves, plus Eli's faith that sees them through.

It was interesting to me that even under the duress of slavery, their faith in God's love kept them going to the end of the war, and beyond.

We pray you all remember that God loves you in February and always.

LeiLani Rahn, church librarian

Join the Handbell Choir

Join the Handbell Choir for a fun and unique fellowship opportunity. We are looking for 1-2 bell ringers. You don't need to be able to read music. The notes are color-coded for all levels of experience.

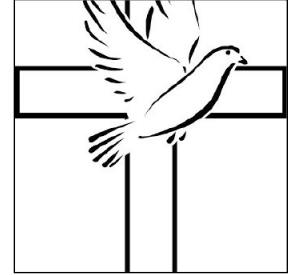
Any interested MLC bell ringers can play and earn IFE hours (category A). Hurry before the spots are filled. Come join the fun.

For more information, contact Becky Berg at rberg@mvlhs.org or text 989-280-7674.



In Loving Memory

<i>Unnamed</i>	Choir Fund	\$50
<i>Aaron Gronau</i>	Ministerial Student Assist. Fund	\$100
<i>Ikuko Poetter</i>	WELS Int'l Christian Art Projects	\$200



Women of St. John's

Our February meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 6th at 7 pm in the church basement.

Please join us for a presentation by MLC student, Abigail Kesting about Jesus Cares.

Following her presentation, we will have a brief business meeting that will include voting on our Quarterly Mission Offering Projects for 2024. Please join us for an evening of food, fun and fellowship.

Our Synod at Work

Update on Hmong Outreach in Vietnam

In 2018, WELS was invited by the Vietnamese government and the Hmong Fellowship Church to build a theological education center near the capital city of Hanoi, an unexpected and unprecedented mission opportunity for our Synod. Much progress has occurred since WELS began their efforts. WELS recently sent out information regarding the Hmong outreach and we will share some of that information in this month's column.

The new Theological Education Center was completed and passed inspection at the end of January 2023. WELS took full ownership of the building at that time. The new center includes a chapel, classrooms, and dormitory/cafeteria space for up to 60 visiting students at a time.

When COVID began, instruction shifted to online Zoom training, and a new three-year rural training program was started to reach more leaders and members in the rural congregations of the Hmong Fellowship Church. 55 leaders met on Zoom to study the first course in the rural training program. They met to study the gospel of Mark using the theme "In the Mighty Name of Jesus." The students were given a greater understanding of the mighty name of Jesus through this gospel's history, miracles, and revelation of our salvation in Christ our Lord. By the end of class, the students eagerly wanted to share this message with all the members of the Hmong Fellowship Church.

This all happened when the small group of 55 leaders taught a larger group of 700 leaders. Those leaders in turn instructed the leaders of more congregations. Then the leaders of all the congregations shared the name of Jesus to all 145,000 members in the Hmong Fellowship Church. Since that time, WELS has taught many other courses in the rural training program. Eventually, the goal is to complete a curriculum of 30 courses.

However, this is just the beginning. There are more than 2 million Hmong people throughout Southeast Asia

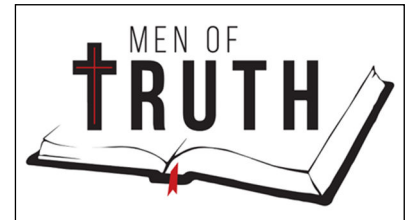
The many prayers and generous gifts for this ministry have allowed us to train 700 of the 1,400 church leaders that WELS wants to train. Support from WELS members provided travel, meals, and lodging to the leaders conducting the training.

You can learn more at wels.net/Vietnam. There is also a Facebook page at fb.com/WELSMissions that contains more information.

Gerald Woodley

Men of Truth

Lead the Next Generation
Saturday, March 16, 2024



Men of Truth invites you to a one-day men's conference, *Lead the Next Generation*. Pastors Jeremy Mattek and Dan Schmidt will take us through three sessions focused on leading the next generation. Join us to explore a life of service to Christ, identifying youth service gifts and understanding and engaging our youth. The day will also feature time for fellowship, encouragement, and reflection.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8:00 – 8:30 am | Registration w/ Light Refreshments

8:30 – 8:35 am | Opening Remarks

8:35 – 10:15 am | **Jeremy Mattek: Living Life in Service to Christ**

10:15 – 10:30 am | Break/Ministry Partners

10:30 – 11:45 am | **Dan Schmidt: Building Relationships with Our Youth**

11:45 am – 12:45 pm | Lunch in the MLC Cafeteria

12:45 – 2:00 pm | **Jeremy & Dan: Awareness of the Challenges Around Us**

2:00 pm | Final Wrap Up and Survey

LOCATION

Martin Luther College
1995 Luther Court
New Ulm, MN 56073

NEXT STEP

Visit MenofTruth.org for information on how to register

OWLS

Our local MN Valley Chapter 13 OWLS (Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors) will meet on Monday, February 12 at St. John'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 Mary Hoffman entitled, "Sex Trafficking Explained." Hope you can attend.

Central Africa Medical Mission

Greetings from The Warm Heart of Africa

As I write this letter, it is late December and it's amazing how it feels just like yesterday when we were celebrating the beginning of 2023. Now that we are just a few days away from ending the year 2023, there is so much to be grateful for-especially the gift of life that the Lord has granted us throughout the year.

Here in Malawi, December always comes with heavy rains. It's the time when all the farmers plant their fields knowing that the rainy season has arrived. However, this December was different because a lot of districts had not received any rains until mid-month. This brought so many worries to farmers as they had no hope on when the rains would start. But because our Lord is good, by December 20th, Lilongwe and other districts received heavy rains. People were happy and ready to work in their fields.

Despite being happy about the rains, during this rainy season the clinic faced challenges in so many ways. December 20th was a clinic day at Suzi and because it had rained heavily, we had difficulty traveling to the clinic site. The road was bumpy, and very muddy making it hard for driving. Despite all these difficulties, we still made it to the clinic as our land cruisers are good, even on bad roads.

Upon reaching the clinic, we found a large crowd of people, both men, women and children sheltering under the roof of the clinic and some under the trees as it was still raining. The people were happy seeing us as they thought we wouldn't make it due to the bad road. When our staff were setting up the clinic, our clinicians had already started seeing the patients that were triaged by the village staff before we arrived. These people were very sick and the complaint that presented the most was malaria.

Malaria is a condition that worsens during the rainy season and is one of the leading causes of death in Malawi. From the month of October on, our clinic started registering an increase in malaria cases that worsened in November and December. Not only has this malaria affected children under five, but it is also affecting adults. As a clinic, we are always prepared for this as we carry enough malaria testing kits and medication for uncomplicated malaria. Not only that, but we also carry with us medication for complicated malaria which we give to patients before we refer them to hospitals for continued management. As always, our staff, who are hardworking and team players, did an outstanding job in dealing with the large number of patients we saw that day. When a staff member sees that a colleague needs help, they can be relied on to jump in and assist without being told to do so. We thank God for this and may he continue blessing all of the staff.

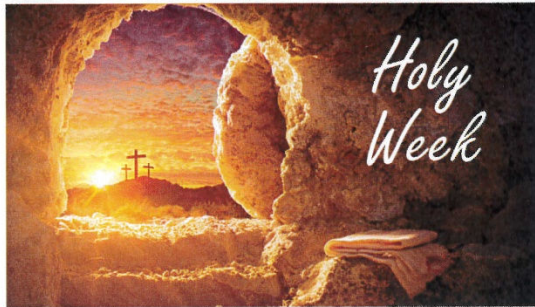
To all our donors we say thank you for your continued support and prayers. May our Lord Jesus Christ continue blessing you.

Have a very blessed and happy New Year!
Violet Chikwatu, Nurse in Charge



Midweek Lent Services

Wednesday, February 14, 21 & 28, March 6, 13 & 20
11:00 am, 4:00 and 6:30 pm



Palm Sunday

Saturday, March 23 at 6:30 pm
Sunday, March 24 at 8, 9:30 & 11 am

Maundy Thursday

Thursday, March 28 at 11 am, 4 & 6:30 pm

Good Friday

Tre Ore Service: 12 pm at St. Paul's, New Ulm
Tenebrae Service: 7 pm

Easter Sunday

Sunday, March 31 at 7 and 9:30 am
Easter Brunch: 8 - 9 am