



St. John's Lutheran Church
New Ulm, MN

April, 2024 *Fortress*

What If...?

When I go through St. Paul's classrooms answering "Pastor Questions," I often get some unusual questions that I can't answer. For some reason, most are about how old someone was when they died. "How old was Thomas when he died?" "Sorry, kid. I have no idea. God doesn't tell us." But often I get "What if...?" questions. "What if Lazarus were never born?" "Well... I guess he wouldn't have died and Jesus wouldn't have raised him from the dead. He would have raised another person instead."

Do you ever wonder, "What if...?" What if there were no cars? How would you get to work? Would you ride a bike? Would you walk? Would you ride in a horse-drawn carriage?

What if there were no computers? Well, you'd need to buy more paper and more stamps without email, right? Or maybe you'd get a typewriter. Forget online banking, most credit card machines, navigation systems, not to mention all your video games!

What if there were no resurrection from the dead? And specifically, what if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead? Some in Paul's day were saying just that; that there was no resurrection from the dead, not really. "Maybe you could live on in people's memories as they remembered what you did while you were alive. Maybe you could leave a legacy behind that would improve the lives of others because of what you did. But to rise, bodily, physically, to come back to life after being dead... well... that's the stuff of fiction," they said.

But Paul challenged their thinking. He considered what life would be like if they were right. **What if Jesus never rose from the dead? "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."** (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

"What if...?" What if this life is all there is? The Beatles famously sang, **"Imagine there's no heaven—It's easy if you try—No hell below us, Above us only sky."** Can you imagine if they were right? What if there is nothing more than this life?

Well, Paul answers that question. If Christ did not rise, then Christianity falls apart. If Christ did not rise, then there is no resurrection at all; this life is all there is. Enjoy it. Then die. Become worm food. We have no moral responsibility, no obligations to serve anyone but us, so, "Eat, drink, and be merry. For tomorrow we die."

But let's look at the evidence... Can we all agree on these historical facts that nearly all scholars, Christian and atheist alike, all hold to be true:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion
2. Jesus was buried in a private tomb.
3. His disciples were discouraged after that event.
4. Jesus' tomb was found empty.
5. His disciples thought they actually saw the risen Jesus on a number of occasions.
6. Due to these experiences they were willing to die for their belief.
7. James, a skeptic, was converted and became a leader of the early church.
8. Saul of Tarsus, an opponent of Christianity, was converted and became a major proponent of Christianity.

The New Testament story is not a legend. It was written within two generations of the events by eye-witnesses and was corroborated by non-Christian historians. More than thirty historical figures are confirmed by sources outside of New Testament. The accounts we have are not legends.

The New Testament story is not a lie. The authors include embarrassing details about themselves, difficult saying that they didn't understand, and clearly distinguish Jesus' words from their own. They also reference verifiable facts and witnesses and provoked their readers and their enemies to check it out for themselves! And if that wasn't enough, their martyrdom certainly removes all doubt. Who dies for lies? The accounts we have are not lies.

The last "out" that those who want to deny the Gospel have is to suggest that, "They were deceived. They believed it, but were mistaken, or fooled."

Here are the five most common explanations offered...

- #1 - **"The disciples were hallucinating."** But hallucinations are experienced by individuals, not groups. No one says, "Remember the dream we had?" Not to mention, Jesus didn't just appear once to one person, but dozens of times to hundreds of people who physically touched him and watched him eat food.
- #2 - **"The disciples went to the wrong tomb."** But why didn't enemies reveal the "right" tomb then? Did the guards mess up too? Collective amnesia of Jews, Romans, and Christians? Plus, the empty tomb didn't convince them, but resurrection appearances. Especially Saul/Paul and James who both died as martyrs.
- #3 - **The "Swoon Theory."** Some suggest that Jesus didn't really die, only swooned or fainted. Later, he revived and escaped. But professional executioners were convinced that he was dead. Pilate double-checked. Joseph and Nicodemus embalmed him. Who mistakenly embalms a living person? And, if he merely swooned, then how did he move the rock and get past the guards? Even non-Christian sources, including the Jewish Talmud (which is not exactly friendly to Christianity), state that Jesus was killed on the cross.
- #4 - **"The disciples stole the body."** But then they were the deceivers and not the deceived. Again, who would be arrested, beaten, tortured, and martyred for what they knew to be a lie? "Who dies for lies?" Yet, that's what the guards asserted: The body was stolen while they slept. But think about it: How would the guards know the disciples stole the body if they were asleep? And finally...
- #5 - **"A substitute (likely, Judas) was killed in his place."** This is actually written in the Muslim Quran. But there is no evidence. This theory comes hundreds of years after the events and suggests that all the eyewitnesses were mistaken about Jesus' identity. It also fails to explain why the tomb of the mistaken man was later found empty, why the Talmud reports Jesus' death, and basically suggests that everyone from the 1st century was wrong.

Someone once said that, **"Skeptics must provide more than alternative theories for the resurrection. They must provide first century evidence for those theories."** And yet, there is no evidence of any other explanation. When you consider the evidence, there is only one reasonable conclusion: **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..."** (1 Corinthians 15:20) And thank God that you know this is true.

For because of our sin, we have earned death. For all the times we've been too distracted by the entertainment the world throws our way to even consider the evidence or bother studying it, for all the times we've let Satan keep us blindfolded, happy to never consider the "What if..."s, for all the times we've chosen not to believe the truth that stared us in the face because it would mean that our selfish desires would be unrealized... for our sin we deserve death. **"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."**

"But... Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..." (1 Corinthians 15:20) Through Christ, his perfect life lived on our behalf, and his innocent death on the cross, our sins are forgiven! He's paid the price that we owe! He gave us credit for all the good he did! And Jesus' resurrection is the proof that God accepted it! **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."** (Romans 4:25)

What if there were no cars? Well, we'd all be in a little better shape. What if there were no computers? Well, we'd have to come up with different ways to work. What if there were no telephones? We'd get used to telegraphs and passenger pigeons.

But so what!? None of that matters compared to this "What if...": What if Jesus had never been raised? Well, then, ***"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."*** So thank God that you know this glorious truth: ***"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..."*** Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Pastor Rob Guenther

April Sermon Texts

April 7	John 20:19-31	Peace Be With You
April 14	1 John 1:5-2:2	Bleached by the Son
April 21	John 10:11-18	There is One Flock and One Shepherd
April 24	Confirmation Examination	
April 28	1 John 3:18-24	Be Confident in Christ

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	Mary: Mother of God	Pastor Rob Guenther
Sundays at 9:30 am	Worship	Pastor Jacob Behnken



St. Paul's Lutheran School

The 2023-24 school year continues, and much work has been completed as we prepare for the coming 2024-25 school year. Three primary questions dominated the discussions:

To the first question, the decision was made to permanently call Mrs. Klug. Along with that decision, Mrs. Spike will be moving to teach in a fourth Grades 3 & 4 classroom to aid with the two large grades we will have at that level next year. God be praised for faithful servants!

To the second question, the EANS (Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools) funding has been a fantastic blessing, allowing our school to hire and pay a large complement of paraprofessionals and providing budget flexibility to add additional help in other areas and ways. However, that funding is now complete, so the discussion shifted to what we can do moving forward. For the 2024-25 school year, the BOCD recommends including the funding required for 4.5 FTE (full-time equivalent) paraprofessional positions in the budget.

This leads to the final question, focusing on tuition. Since the 2019-20 school year, we have made some significant changes to our faculty, moving from a part-time to full-time Student Learning Coordinator and adding a faculty member in the lower grades, investing in current and ongoing improvements in our curriculum, and now incorporating back into our budget 4.5 FTE paraprofessional positions. The BOCD has set the tuition for the 2024-25 school year as follows:

Partner Tuition (1st Child) - \$2,025

Non-Partner Tuition (Each Child) - \$4,794.75

Partner Tuition is available to families who are current members at St. Paul's, New Ulm; St. John's, New Ulm; or St. John's, Sleepy Eye. Non-Partner Tuition is available to all other families. Partner Families can apply for tuition assistance. The form can be downloaded from our school's website, <https://school.splnewulm.org/admissions/>.

Pete Markgraf, Principal

Council Digest

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

Administrative Items

Ministrations

Transfers In

Nadine (Li Wei); Ben Duan from SALEM (South Asia Lutheran Evangelical Mission)

Transfer Out

Marshall Mohror to Christ the Lord Lutheran Church, Brookfield, WI

Adult Confirmation

Lori Stevensen

Release

Renee Block

Pastoral Acts

A. Baptism

2 Mar Kinsley Rae Mielke

B. Funeral

24 Feb Sharon Gilman

President's Report. Thanks to Wayne Wels and Paul Willems, who completed the financial review of St John's 2023 financial books. The books are in order. Also, Wayne shared that after many years of doing the audit, he will not be involved with it in the future. Thank you, Wayne, for your many years of service!

Board of Youth and Education. The WELS Youth Rally will take place in Colorado this summer. We are beginning to coordinate with St. Paul's for travel to the rally and other mission trips. For past youth rallies, we were able to assist parents with some of the expenses, but are not planning to for this rally. The cost for the rally is \$410 and the travel costs may be around \$100. Some members have expressed interest in helping with the travel costs outside of the St. John's budget. Please speak to BoYE member Jon Hermanson for further details.

- Sunday morning Bible study at the end of this spring semester is on the principles of Lutheran worship, beginning after Easter.
- Annual soccer camp on June 3-6 at the MLC soccer pitch.

Board of Evangelism. Chair Zahrt reported that the Easter banners are up in the entryway. These banners have been up for a few weeks now during Lent. Banners have been put up for Christmas and Easter for a couple of years now, so it was a good test for the durability of our initial concept. The BoEV is evaluating the banners as a whole. They are appreciated by the greater majority of members and the public, but there are some legitimate concerns we want to address. Chairman Jesse Zahrt is ready to receive input.

Stewardship. Evidence of Jesus' grace in the lives of our members is viewed in a way through our revenue picture. This past February, we had a positive revenue picture (\$23,200) vs. February 2023. A large % of members have increased offerings since last fall. So, "let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Trustees. Chairman Sam Hunter reported three items of note:

1. Following a February Council discussion regarding safety during Bible Class, we located the AED and remounted the device on a wall visible within the fellowship hall.
2. Work was done to get a television in the baby/family room so that the service can be streamed visually for those needing the space.
3. Kitchen Microwave Shelving has been lowered. It was initially installed at a taller height, making it difficult for those working in the room to transfer hot materials above normal reaching levels.

Campus Facility Task Force. The group updated the Council on the sanctuary renovation timeline: Sanctuary chairs will be delivered over the next 6-10 weeks

1. Sanctuary will be painted the first week in May
2. Flooring delivery is planned for late May
3. Chancel side rooms and closets will need to be cleared in late May/right before work begins in June
4. Pew fabric and pew pad delivery is planned for early June
 - ◊ Flooring, pew fabric, and pew pad will need to be stored for a few weeks before renovation, potentially in the new narthex or basement

K-12 Educational Assistance. The council approved redesignating \$790 from an endowment distribution from 2 years ago. The money was not designated yet. This year the endowment committee had recommended that the current 2023 distribution be directed toward this fund.

Future meetings:

The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 16, at 7:00 p.m.

The next quarterly voters' meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 23, at 7:00 p.m.

Jonathan M. Schaefer
Congregational Chairman

Church Library

We just celebrated Easter on March 31. The month of April will expand on the Easter season. We can meditate more on Easter while reading Roland Bainton's translation of Martin Luther's Easter Book. We have a companion book on Christmas already in the church library. Mr. Bainton took snippets from Luther's sermons on the gospels, concerning Jesus' passion and resurrection. Woodcuts by Virgil Solis are included.

Wanda Brunstetter writes Amish romances. This month we have a trilogy. Each woman in these books has found jars hiding in the barn and basement. They have slips of paper with passages from the Bible or adages. In the first book "The Hope Jar," Michelle pretends to be the granddaughter of an Amish couple, Willis and Mary Ruth. They thought she was their unknown granddaughter, and since Michelle was running away from an abusive life, she accepted. She meets two men. Ezekiel is Amish, and Brad is an English seminary student.

In book 2, "The Forgiving Jar," Sara finds that Michelle has been pretending to be her. She has to learn to forgive, and they become friends. Michelle has to forgive her abusive boyfriend and parents.

In book 3, "The Healing Jar," Lenore who is another granddaughter of Willis and Mary Ruth, is a teacher. She volunteers to babysit for a little baby of Jesse, whose wife died in childbirth. When summer is over, Mary Ruth takes over as the babysitter. Is Jesse the answer for Lenore?

Pastor Timothy Smith of St. Paul's has written another Bible study, this time of 1 and 2 Peter. It is a thorough study. He even quotes some apocrypha passages to add clarity.

This is now a total of 5 books introduced to the church library this month.

Do you or anyone in your family have any books checked out that you forgot to return? Please bring them back so someone else can read them. Thanks.

LeiLani Rahn, church librarian



Women of St. John's

Our April meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 2 at 7 pm in the church basement.

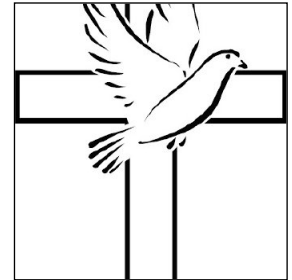
We will have a brief business meeting followed by our Easter craft of mini resurrection gardens.

There is a sign-up sheet on the table in the new narthex to ensure there are enough materials for everyone.



In Loving Memory

<i>Sharon Gilman</i>	Undesignated	\$50
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Stewardship

Creativity! Can you mix charitable giving and creativity? Really!? How does that happen?

Yes, there are creative ways that you can financially support St. John's with our various projects and programs to share God's love with each other and in our community.

Market conditions over the last year have made it very favorable to be creative with your faith-filled giving, especially now. Let's explore two ways:

1. Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Are you 70.5 years old or better? Are you required to take a distribution from your IRA? If you answered 'yes' to either of these questions, then you can receive a wonderful tax benefit by making a charitable gift directly from your IRA to St. John's!

Did your IRA increase in value over the last year? None of us know what the financial markets will do the rest of the year. Perhaps now may be a good time to make a tax-wise charitable gift!

2. Appreciated stock or mutual fund shares. 2023 and the first few months of 2024 have been such a plentiful time in the stock market, generous tax savings may be yours by donating securities that have appreciated in value. Why wait until the end of the year? This sounds like a complicated gift, but we can make this an easy way to give!

Interested in learning more about either of these options? Please contact Mike Thom at Bookkeeper@stjohnsnewulm.com. You can also contact the WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 or at mcg@wels.net.

Over the next several months, we'll explore other avenues of biblical stewardship, such as time, talents, and temple. Until then, God's peace be with you!

Mark Maurice
Stewardship Chairman

Stewardship Thought

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Math is hard. Well, for me math is hard. All the numbers, equations, and rules. On top of that, some geniuses decided to put in letters, integers, and imaginary numbers! No matter how much I think math is hard, it is there every day of my life. Estimating how much gas will cost me this trip, making a monthly budget, “YOU DOOR-DINGED SOMEONE AND IT COST HOW MUCH!” Sometimes when we make a budget, the numbers of the estimated cost do not line up with the actual cost. Simply put, sometimes math just doesn’t ‘math’.

Theological math is just as hard. We believe that there are three persons and yet one God. Huh?! We also believe that Jesus was fully God and fully man. $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$. That math does not add up. What might make even less sense is how and why God treats us as he does. God demands 100% perfection, but all we give is 0% perfection which leads us to hell. We could do nothing to save ourselves. But God is not only a just God; he is also a loving, merciful, and gracious God. He sent his Son to take all of our sins upon himself. Subtract our sins and add them to Jesus. Take Jesus’ righteousness and add it to our account. We are now perfect in God’s eyes because of the sacrifice that Jesus completed for us on the cross. That is math that works to both our benefits. We get heaven, and God gets us.

Each day remember how great God’s love is: that he sent his Son to die for you and for me. His love is priceless. What is our response to this? Simply, love. We show love to God for all that he has blessed us with, both physically and spiritually. Christ’s love is the motivating factor throughout this entire equation. The constant in our new lives as Christians is Christ’s love. How do we show our love for Christ? We show it in whatever way God has blessed you. If it is financially, give with stewardship in mind. If it is construction, offer your time to assist others or the church in building. If it is encouragement, spend time talking with other members. The list could continue. But whatever you do, do it because of Christ’s love. His love will never fail you.

Your servant and brother in Christ,
Ben Haferman
Staff Ministry Intern

Friendly and Smiley People Needed!

Are you looking for a new way to serve at St. John's? Do you appreciate good order in our worship services? Are you comfortable socializing with others? Is it important to you that our worshippers feel welcomed and part of the fabric of our congregation? If any of these describe you, consider serving as an usher or greeter!



Our ushers ensure the good order of our worship services and serve as the front line of evangelism for guests attending St. John's. Duties include welcoming worshippers, collecting the offering, ensuring good flow during the Lord's Supper, and any other duties that ensure good order and hospitality during worship services.

Our greeters ensure each worshipper feels welcome, knows where to go, and can easily find information about St. John's. Greeters are friendly, smiling people!

We are blessed with several generational usher and greeter crews. Consider serving as an usher or greeter with one of your family members!

There is availability on all the greeter crews for each of our services. There is a need for ushers on our Saturday evening crews, with some openings on Sunday crews.

No experience is necessary. Men and males in 7th grade or higher are encouraged to consider serving as an usher. Our greeter program is open to any member of St. John's and youth in confirmation class. For more information, contact Brad Price at deacon@stjohnsnewulm.com or 507-479-9715.

Our Synod at Work

2024 WELS Annual Report: Called to Prepare

We will continue to summarize some of the important information that is contained in this year's WELS Annual Report to members. This month we will begin a two-part series on the section entitled "Called to Prepare." We will look at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary while next month we will focus on Martin Luther College and our two preparatory schools—Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary prepares men to serve in the pastoral ministry by providing them with spiritual, theological, and professional training. Students attend classes for two years, serve as full-time vicars during their third year, and then attend classes and write a thesis in their fourth year. Throughout their time at the seminary, students receive opportunities to serve in a variety of ministries and to experience other cultures to help prepare them for their future calls.

Thirty-nine students graduated on May 26, 2023. The day before, the seminary held its assignment service, where nine of those graduates were assigned to home and world mission fields. After the service, graduates met with their district presidents and with representatives from WELS Home Missions. Four graduates who received a Master of Divinity degree were considered "non-traditional" or second career students.

Following graduation, the seminary provides pastors with opportunities for continued growth through its institute, Grow in Grace. Grow in Grace 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.

In January, the Seminary offers students a two-week learning opportunity known as Winterim. Classes range from special topics presented in the classroom to trips to important biblical locations to time working with home mission congregations. In 2023, the seminary teamed up with WELS Home Missions to organize a church planting course hosted at The Way in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The course was led by home missionaries. Eleven seminarians traveled to Virginia to learn more about starting new churches in places where WELS may not have an established presence.

The Pastoral Studies Institute is a program coordinated by WELS Joint Missions and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary that guides and assists spiritual leaders around the globe through pre-seminary and seminary training. Many of the classes are online and most students take one or two classes at a time since they also work full time.

As mentioned earlier in the column, next month we will continue to look at the section “Called to Prepare” by looking at Martin Luther College and the two preparatory schools.

Gerald Woodley

Staff Minister

Sanctuary Screens – Fifteen people of a variety of ages have been Advancing Slides for services. Although services are filling up in advance at this point for advancing slides, there is still a need to have more assistants to advance slides to keep services consistently filled. A Sign-up sheet is available online at <http://bit.ly/SJSlideAdvance>. Thanks to everyone who has signed up to help. Let me know if you would like to learn more about assisting with slides. Email me at sm.dretske@stjohnsnewulm.com

Usually Pastor Guenther or I set up the computer that controls the slides for services. Steve Balza has also gone through training to help get things set up before services. It would be good to have a couple others that know how to set up for the weekend services. Right now those advancing slides are not expected to set up the computer for weekend services. If you are computer savvy and would be interested to train for helping in this way, please contact me.

2024 Pictorial Directory - If you would like either a small (8x5) or a large (8x11) copy of the 2024 directory, please fill out a Directory Request Card, found in either narthex, include your printed name, indicate the size desired, and place card in the J/C Dretske mailbox. They can also be placed on the Office counter. Go to <http://instantchurchdirectory.com> to download the phone app: **Instant Church Directory**. It is easy to use, just follow online directions.

For Downloading the St. John’s Picture Directory on your phone:

Apple App Store: Get the iPhone / iPad app [here](#) **Google Play Store:** Get the Android app [here](#)

Visiting the Homebound - If you are not on our list to be visited but would like to be included, please call or text me at **507-217-7604** or email me to get on the list.

St. John’s Tech Services - Use the following links or internet address shortcuts to reach our online resources.

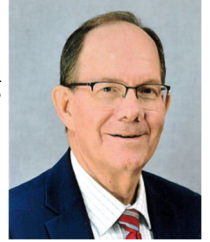
- 1) <https://stjohnsnewulm.com> - Our Website which has recently gone under reconstruction - Looks Great!
- 2) bit.ly/SJNUPodcast to listen again to the pastor’s sermon message.
- 3) bit.ly/SJyoutube - St. John’s YouTube Channel
- 4) bit.ly/SJBibleClass - Online Bible Class sign in with Google Meet

Respectfully submitted, Jim Dretske sm.dretske@stjohnsnewulm.com

Anniversary Service for Steve Thiesfeldt

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."
(1 Peter 4:10)

For 50 years Prof. Steven Thiesfeldt has faithfully administered the gifts he has been given to serve others in a wide variety of Lutheran school ministries. The Lord blessed his ministry in the following schools to encourage and equip generations of Jesus' lambs for lives of service to our Savior.



St. Paul's School Tomah, WI	1974-1977
Salem School Stillwater, MN	1977-1979
St. Matthew's School, Winona, MN	1979-1983
MLPS Prairie du Chein, WI	1983-1995
LPS Watertown, WI	1995-1997
MLC New Ulm, MN	1997-2022
MLS Saginaw, MI	2022-2024

You are cordially invited to celebrate the 50 years of ministry of Prof. Steven Thiesfeldt in a special service of thanksgiving to our Lord on April 28, 2024.

4:00 pm - Worship	MLS Chapel
5:00 pm - Program	MLS Chapel
5:30 pm - Appetizer Meal	MLS Dining Hall

Please RSVP for the meal using the QR code or go to www.mlsem.org/thiesfeldt.
You may also call MLS at 989-793-1910.



If you are unable to attend in person, the service will be live streamed on the Michigan Lutheran Seminary YouTube channel:

(www.youtube.com/c/MichiganLutheranSeminary) beginning at 4:00 EST. Cards and congratulations may be sent to the school c/o Pres. Mark Luetzow or to the Thiesfeldt home at 3220 Wildwood Dr. Saginaw, MI 48603.

Loving and serving Him,
Rev. Mark Luetzow
Michigan Lutheran Seminary, President