

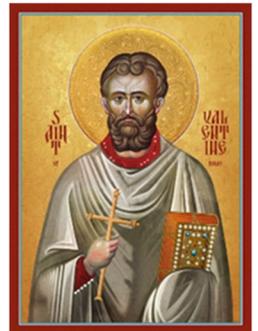


St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN  
February, 2023 *Fortress*

## Will You Be God's Valentine?

This month we will celebrate the holiday referred to as Valentine's Day. It is a time when we show others that we love them and care for them. Small gifts of cards, candy, and flowers are part of the tradition.

But do you know the origins of this holiday? It started out as a day to celebrate a Christian hero, not romantic love. According to the history books, Valentine was a 3rd century Christian preacher who lived near Rome. At this time the Roman Emperor Claudius II was ordering all young men not to marry. He thought they made better soldiers if they were single. So no man could marry until he was too old to serve in the military. Worse still, he also commanded that all people worship the false gods of Rome.



But Valentine refused. Following Peter's lead in Acts 5:29, he insisted, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" And so Valentine was arrested for performing Christian marriages and preaching that there was only one true God – the God of the Bible.

Valentine knew that no man – even the king – had the right to stop Christians from marrying (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). You see, while Romans 13:1-7 tells us that we are to respect and obey our leaders, Acts 5:29 tells us that when man's law contradicts God's law, we should obey God. And that's what Valentine did ignoring the king's orders. So Claudius commanded Valentine's arrest.

While in prison, many Christians threw little notes of encouragement through Valentine's prison window. These were the first "valentines." But in the end, Claudius had Valentine beheaded for his faith. It was because he loved the Lord and his fellow humans so much that he was willing to risk his life to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

How about us? Are willing to risk persecution for sharing the love of Jesus? I don't just mean giving them candy or cute little notes in the mailbox. But how well do we show love in action even to those who are nearest and dearest to us? The phrase "love one another" is found 19 times in the New Testament. This idea is so important to Jesus, that on the night he was betrayed, he said this was the new command he wanted his disciples to know and follow was to love one another.

John points out that a genuine love is more than just words on a piece of paper or on a candy heart. It's love in action: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18) And Paul showed us what it looks like: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Sadly, we're not always very loving. We love ourselves more than we love others. And we love ourselves more than we love God. And we deserve to lose God's love for it. In fact, in truth, we never deserved to have God's love in the first place. But, unlovable as we are in the way we love ourselves first, God loved us anyway. In fact, "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) Wow! "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 3:1)

And now, we can't help but respond! Now "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) And we love not just in words or speech, but in action! We look for ways to serve our spouses, our kids, our parents, our coworkers, our neighbors, even complete strangers. And we not only serve them, but we especially share the truth with them; the truth of God's great love for us that they too might know that there is only one true God – the God of the Bible, the God of love. For this is what love does!

So whether you have a special someone to celebrate Valentines' Day with or not, look for ways to go out of your way to show love to others, not just with cards, candies, and flowers, but lives of service to others in thanks to God for his great love that rescued you!

Your servant in Christ,  
Pastor Guenther

## February Sermon Texts

February 5	1 Peter 2:9-12	Who Do You Think You Are?
February 12	2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27	Create in Me a Pure Heart
February 19	2 Peter 1:16-21	Eye Witnesses Gave Their Inspired Testimony
February 22	John 11	His Final Steps ... Led to a Tomb
February 26	Romans 5:12-19	Jesus Made It Right

**Bible Classes meet in the Church Basement**  
**The class can also be found online at [bit.ly/SJBibleClass](https://bit.ly/SJBibleClass)**

Sundays at 9:30 am	Book of Job - February 5 & 12 Book of Philippians - February 19 & 26	Pastor Jeff Bovee 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 Screwtape Letters</i>	Pastor Rob Guenther

## Council Digest

The Church Council met on January 17. A summary of reports and actions from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

### Membership Changes.

These include those made at the Jan. 24 voters' meeting.

#### Transfers In

Jacob and Carrie Behnken; William, Amelia, Henry, Matthias from Good Shepherd, Midland, MI  
 Mark and Mary-Jane Maurice from St. John's Lutheran, Wauwatosa, WI

#### Transfers Out

Chuck and Wendy Enter to Trinity Lutheran, Dundee, WI  
 Keri Jackson to Fairview Lutheran, Milwaukee, WI  
 Hannah Mohror to Grace Lutheran, Milwaukee, WI

#### Profession of Faith

Jeff Kiecker

#### Releases

Pam Isaac; Luna

### Financial Updates.

A team of auditors is being sought to review the 2021 financial records. The team would begin work after the voters approved the report at the annual meeting to be held on Tuesday, January 24. The audit work is typically completed in time to provide a report to the voters at the April quarterly meeting.

The financial secretary and treasurer reports, noted with thanks to God that receipts for 2022 totaled over \$1,000,000 for the third straight year. There were some funds short of projections in several areas. Treasurer Micheel reported that all congregational financial obligations for 2022 were met by using Home Operations and Undesignated Funds to cover shortfalls in several areas. We pray for God's generous blessings on us in 2023. Further details are shared in the 2022 Annual Report.

### Reports & Action.

The new Board of Youth and Education Chair, Jon Hermanson reported on planning for the next quarter of Bible study with Pastor Guenther. Additional teachers are needed for Sunday School who can help teach

each week or as able, please speak with Pastor Bovee if interested. Art Camp will be August 8-10, 2023.

The Elders brought a motion to the council to make Staff Minister Jim Dretske's part-time call a permanent one. The motion was subsequently passed by the council and voters. This means that Mr. Dretske will remain in his part-time position. He had been serving on an annual base that was renewed each year. Now he will serve in a permanent position. He continues to serve in a part-time capacity.

The Board of Evangelism Chair, Jesse Zahrt shared updates on plans for tracking and welcoming prospects and new members. Communication and tracking systems are being researched and developed. The evangelism and fellowship events are a part of these efforts so that congregation members can connect to new and prospective members.

The **Iris Box Project** is a new ministry at St. John's. The board of stewardship has established this project. The Iris Boxes are designed to be given to families who have lost a baby through miscarriage or stillbirth. Items included in the box are intended as a source of comfort and a symbol of our love and care. Members are encouraged to pick up a box from the church office to give to a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker, etc. who experiences a miscarriage or stillbirth whether recently or in the past.

The Stewardship Board approved a **Wish List item**: a commissioned chorale concertato on CW23 #861, *Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head* (Reuter), as part of the 75th anniversary observance. The two anniversary services with Communion will be held on Sunday, August 6 at 8:00 and 10:00AM. Those will be the only services that weekend.

The Trustee's Chair, Scott Deters provided an update on the kitchen facilities and other projects. The kitchen remodel so far has included the islands and metal cabinets being taken down, plumbing being updated, and some new walls being installed.

AED units will also be installed. One will be installed outside the kitchen area. The other will be installed in or adjacent to the ushers' room outside the sanctuary.

### **Future Meetings.**

Council meeting - February 21, 2023, at 7 pm

Voters' meeting - April 25, 2023, at 7 pm

Joint council meeting - May 16, 2023, at 6 pm

Jonathan M. Schaefer  
Congregational Chairman

## **Staff Minister**

**Online Church Directory** – The 2023 Edition will hopefully print this month. I will still be available between service during the first two weeks of February to add as many pictures of our members as possible. Look for me between services to take your family picture, otherwise, ask someone to take your picture and send it to me. Any member can submit an updated picture via email to [sm.dretske@stjohnsnewulm.com](mailto:sm.dretske@stjohnsnewulm.com). If anyone has a changed address, phone number, or have children now in college or military, please fill out and update information on sheets available in the new narthex and drop it in the box in the New Narthex. Thank you!

**Time & Talent Surveys** – Many people serve the Lord in abundant ways here at St. John’s. It takes a lot of people to do everything that happens here at St. John’s. **Look at the following Chart of various area of Ministry that are done here at St. John’s.** Are you interested in serving the Lord using your talents in any of the following ways? Fill out the survey so that others know what you are interested in. Have your interests or abilities changed? Fill out the survey every year. The new information will replace the old. This survey does not sign you up for an activity, but it does give others who serve a chance to call you to see if you are interested in serving with them. Please fill survey out **on paper or online.** Thanks, from all who currently serve.

Cards of Caring	Youth Group	Record/Stream Services	Voter Currently Active	MVL Delegate
Visit Homebound	Altar Guild	Ushering	Elders	Church Officers
Oak Hills Volunteers	Kitchen Care	Greeter	Evangelism	SPL Teacher
Serving Meals	Assist Trustee	Youth Assist	Youth & Ed	Cancer Support Group
Member Concern	Church Cleaning	Sunday School Teacher	Stewardship	Basement Wall Hangings
Choir Member	Library	Activities Helper	Trustees	Confirmation Photo Frames
Choir Director	Archives	Bible Class Pres	Finance Committee	Baby Lambs
Instrumentalist	Bulletin Boards	Jesus Cares	Technology	Write CAMM Articles
Accompanist	School Rebates	Mn River Valley Mentor	Endowment	Bible Class
Men of Truth	Outreach	Prison Ministry	Facilities	Worship
Women of SJ	Fellowship	OWLS	Worship Committee	Visiting after Services

Members are encouraged to fill out a new Survey every year.

**Please 1) fill out one of the paper surveys located in the New Narthex; or 2) fill out the electronic survey found at <https://bit.ly/TaTSurvey>**

The **Time & Talent Booklet** is under review and contains an explanation of each area of service. It can be found form at <https://bit.ly/TaTBooklet>. There are paper booklets on the table in the Narthex.

**Church Board Brochures** – There were still a few board vacancies filled in January that the brochures had not been updated yet. Updated two-sided colorful brochures that give information about the responsibilities of those who serve on boards at St. John’s behind the scenes most of the time will become available in the narthex later in February. We are thankful for all the men and women who serve on various boards, committees, or other ministries listed above to do the work of the Lord in various ways.

**Visiting the Homebound** - I continue to have the privilege of joining the pastors in visits to members who are homebound—sharing the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. If you are not on our list to be visited but

would like to be included, please call the church office or me at **507-217-7604** to get on the list. Six volunteers from St. John's help out every other week to bring residents to the chapel service at ***Oak Hills***

***Living Center*** and return them to their rooms after. If you are available from 3:30 until 5:00 on Tuesdays, consider adding your name to the list of helpers. Thank you, Oak Hills Volunteers for your help!

***Streamed/Recorded Services*** – Our online services have been well attended, especially the various Christmas services. You can still view past recorded services by visiting our St. John's YouTube page. Hit the Subscribe button to be notified whenever we have posted a new service. Please fill out a **Quick Response Survey** online to let us know how we are doing and leave a comment. Go to: [\*\*https://bit.ly/SJRecord-Stream\*\*](https://bit.ly/SJRecord-Stream)

Respectfully submitted, Jim Dretske

## **St. Paul's School**

Blessings Continue at St. Paul's School

There are many who support the addition and renovation of St. Paul's Lutheran School. We cannot thank you enough for the contributions you have made. Many planned for what could happen after the dedication in January 2021. Many planned the growth in our preschool. Many planned the safeguards that were put in place to protect the children. Many planned for the upkeep of an aging facility. Could we have planned that we enjoy so many blessings? Our Lord speaks about those who make plans for big results. He says in Proverbs 16: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." v. 3 and, also, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." v. 9

The school and its blessings are no credit to us. We prayed that our efforts would give glory to God. God established our plans. God established our steps. Our God has been gracious to us. God also tells us that we should put our trust in him. He says in Jeremiah, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." v. 11 And how he has! He has given us more than just a building and safety. He has given us the opportunity to share Christ crucified with more children than we have had since 2000.

The reality is that God has provided an overflowing abundance of opportunities. We expected more students in preschool. We are running three preschool classrooms as a result of the building expansion. We have three called workers sharing the Savior with nearly 60 students each week. The elementary school is also serving more students. The current enrollment projection means that we will not be accepting any new community students in grades 1-6. God continues to bring us young souls to teach and train. We are thankful for the planning and prayers of so many people. It is time for us to give thanks to the Lord for his goodness. He has given us reason to be grateful!

## St. Paul's School Amazing Race

Racing or not racing in the 7th Annual Amazing Race, there is something for everyone on this amazing day - Sunday, February 5!

We invite all to attend the event at St. Paul's School, which benefits our School Building Project. A taco in a bag meal will be served from 11:30 - 1 pm, with the Race itself starting at 1 pm. You can purchase and decorate your own cupcake or enjoy one of our gourmet cupcakes instead. You may then wish to work off your cupcake by playing some bean bags or one of our organized Lightning basketball games. Stay and watch the exciting finish to the Race, too, as racers start to return to school before 2 pm.

It will be fun for everyone as we encourage fellowship and donations to the Building Project in thanksgiving to God for His goodness to our school.

There is also an auction with great baskets from our elementary school classrooms and more. You will start to see the baskets show up on the online auction soon. The link for the auction is <https://virtualauction.bid/amazingrace2023>.

Praise be to God for blessing us with a beautiful building for Christian education for our children!

## Church Library

February is "love" month. Time to tell our loved ones that we do love them. But we also know that Jesus loves us, all day, every day. And we are thankful.

We have 2 books to introduce this month. In the non-fiction book by Nabeel Qureshi, "No God But One, Allah or Jesus", the author tells his story of being a former Muslim and how he investigates the evidence for Islam or Christianity. It is similar to his search in "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus" (which we introduced in December.) Now he emphasizes the differences. Muslims know about Jesus but they are taught that Jesus is just a prophet, not God. They also believe that Christians have three gods= Father, Son, and Spirit. What is a trinity? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? After years of study, the author is for Christianity, the Bible, and Jesus. I learned a lot about Islam reading this book.

The second book is written for pre-teenagers and is fiction. "Only the Brave" is the first book written by Katie Roiger who lives near Mankato. The character, Victoria, is 12 and has an older brother who is in the military. Her father had been killed in the war only a year earlier. Victoria spends a lot of the summer working for Mr. Poller at his ice cream stand. He is a grouch since his only daughter left. Victoria discovers there is a granddaughter and helps Mr. Poller find her. Victoria determines she has become braver over the summer.

Check your bookshelves for any books that have been checked out and are overdue at the church library. Thanks.

LeiLani Rahn  
Church Librarian

## Women of St. John's

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

Please join us for a presentation by MLC student, Ally Rautenberg, on Apache culture compared to Midwestern culture and what it is like living as a minority in a minority culture. Following her presentation, we will have a brief business meeting that will include voting on our Quarterly Project.

Please join us for an evening of food, fun and fellowship.

## Volunteers Needed

Thank you to all the St. John's member volunteers who offered their time and talent this past year to help out at the NU Emergency Food Shelf for 2022. We have another opportunity to volunteer at the Food Shelf, 1305 S. Valley St., on the 3rd Monday of each month from 11:45 am - 3 pm. Two to three volunteers are needed for the dates referenced below. High school and college students are welcome to volunteer.

June 19, August 21, September 18, November 20

Please consider signing up for a Monday or two. High school and college students are welcome.

Please contact Rita Walters via phone or text at 507-351-8603 or email at [rmwalters@hotmail.com](mailto:rmwalters@hotmail.com) to sign up.

## Our Synod at Work

### Tell

TELL is a program of Multi-Language Productions, training Christian leaders to share the gospel around the world. The TELL Network offers online biblical instruction to people around the world so that they can tell others about Jesus. As part of the program WELS Multi-Language Productions, which oversees the program, partners with WELS sister churches around the world to expand its reach.

The eventual goal of TELL is for its students to start churches where WELS does not have a presence—a church multiplying program. Multi-Language Productions is currently working with eight national pastors and church leaders from Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean to develop culturally-appropriate devotions and promotion for the courses for each region. Nathan Seiltz, Multi-Language Productions director, says that these national church bodies also offer support and can provide a sense of belonging to students living in their area. One of the future goals in working with national pastors include having these men serve as mentors as well as online teachers for TELL's students.

Alvien de Guzman, who is pastor at Law and Gospel Lutheran Church (WELS' sister church in the Philippines), is one of the partners in the program. He provides online monthly devotions in English called #TELL Talks for use on social media in Southeast Asia. These devotions complement the TELL program,

which consists of self-led course on the Bible. De Guzman stated: “I pray that through TELL, we will be able to establish a strong, online ministry presence in the Philippines and that through it, we’ll be able to reach a large percentage of the population that we are otherwise unable to reach due to limitations of manpower and other factors.”

Another pastor working with the program is TELL Missionary, Dan Laitinen. Dan is the son of Wayne Laitinen, who served as pastor at St. John’s in New Ulm before retiring. Dan began full-time as the first TELL online missionary at the end of 2019.

With one of the largest Lutheran social media presences in the world (1.5 million Facebook followers and likes) TELL engages viewers from around the globe with devotional videos and content. Each piece encourages them to download the TELL app where they take self-learning Bible studies. Currently there are over 10,000 active users on the TELL app.

After down loading the app, they join live group classes where they learn the Bible and Lutheran catechism with an instructor such as Pastor Dan Laitinen. If possible an in-person visit is made.

Gerald Woodley

## **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.

## **Women of St. John's**

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Please join us for a presentation by MLC student, Ally Rautenberg, on Apache culture compared to Midwestern culture and what it is like living as a minority in a minority culture.

Following her presentation, we will have a brief business meeting that will include voting on our Quarterly Project.

Please join us for an evening of food, fun and fellowship.

Sarah Logston  
WSJ President

## **Cards of Caring**

St. John's Cards of Caring group meets to make cards for our homebound members, Befriend a Mission LWMS families, members 85 years and older and others, as needed.

We welcome anyone ages 7th grade and older including MLC students. No skills are needed. Cards are made using recycled cards and stamp sets. Supplies are furnished. We will be making Valentine and Winter cards.

Our meeting is scheduled for Saturday, February 4th. Come and go as your schedule allows between 9 am and noon.

We meet at 403 N. Minnesota St. (across from the Glockenspiel). This is an opportunity for service to the Lord and fellowship.

Contact Lois Willems with questions at 507-676-1230.

## **LWMS**

Greetings!

A few LWMS (Lutheran Women's Missionary Society) notes for the women (and men!) of our congregation.

First off, we have some new BAMs (Befriend a Mission) to keep our eyes on. Every two years the LWMS circuits are assigned some new missions to learn about, send gifts to, and most importantly, pray for. We have just received our 3 assignments for 2023. They are as follows:

World Mission Field: Asia One Team  
Rev. Mark Zondag  
878 217th St.  
Osceola, WI 54020-4504  
markwzondag@gmail.com

WELS Home Mission:  
Amazing Grace Ev. Lutheran Church  
Rev. Joel T. Prange  
130 7th Ave. W  
Dickinson, ND 58601-5013  
joeltprange@gmail.com

WELS Home Mission:  
Good News Ev. Lutheran Church  
Rev. Jonathan Bauer  
208 Valley View Road  
Mt. Horeb, WI 53572-3361  
pastor@goodnewslc.org

Next, the LWMS convention is only a few short months away in Lacrosse, WI. The dates for that event are June 22-25, 2023. Registration has begun and the early bird pricing will end on April 1. If you are someone who has never attended a convention before, please contact Carrie Schaefer ([carriehieb@yahoo.com](mailto:carriehieb@yahoo.com)) to learn about grant options. You can find registration information at [www.LWMS.org](http://www.LWMS.org).

Please join us at this wonderful opportunity to hear about all the blessings God is showering on the mission fields at home and abroad.

Carrie Schaefer