

Zion Lutheran Church
Arlington, MN

May Newsletter

May 2023

Church Address:
814 W. Brooks St, PO Box 371
Arlington MN 55307
Phone: 507.964-5454
Email: zion.elca.814@gmail.com

Worship Schedule

May 7—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Confirmation
9:00am
Holy Communion
"In My Father's House"

May 14—Sixth Sunday of Easter

9:00am
Holy Communion
"Come, Holy Spirit"

May 21—Seventh Sunday of Easter

9:00am
"Unified for Kingdom Work"

May 28—Day of Pentecost

9:00am
"The Overflowing Spirit"



Chattin' It Up...

- The River of Life
- Board of Stewardship
- Zion History
- Five Themes Leader-Wise Hears
- Thank You

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Note from Pastor Gretchen

Friends in Christ,

Thank you for the call to serve as your pastor! I enjoyed meeting the call committee and getting to know Zion through your Ministry Site Profile. I look forward to meeting and getting to know you all as we share in ministry in the days ahead.

After Easter, my husband John and I spent the week at Whitewater State Park. We left a snow piled yard in Waconia, fished in 80–85-degree days, and returned to a yard of brown grass. After cleaning up our gear, I was eager to cut back the perennials from last year and get the garden started. But the clouds rolled in and it started to rain. By Sunday the yard was full of snow! It was winter, then summer, then winter again, all in one week! I had to laugh at the abundance!

So, I made some soup, and will wait to garden on another day.

God provides such abundance! Like the abundant snow and abundant heat, God has given Zion abundant gifts for ministry. The Spirit is at work, guiding Zion into the work God is already doing in and among us. As I write this, work has begun on the new office and restroom on the main floor. A generous donation is making possible some new audio improvements in worship. Both are tangible ways Zion is trusting God's abundance, stewarding the resources we have been entrusted with, extending hospitality to members and guests.

In May, there will be opportunities to celebrate and bless the abundant work God has begun. Zion will celebrate and bless the Confirmation students. You will also celebrate and bless the ministry shared with Pastor Evelyn Dahlke. I will join the celebration to bless the ministry that God is calling us into as I lead worship with you for the first time on May 21st. I look forward to the ways God will provide abundance in our ministry together!

Joy and Peace,

Pastor Gretchen Pierskalla



DATES TO MARK ON YOUR CALENDAR

SUNDAY, MAY 14—Pr. Evelyn's last service—Farewell in the Fellowship Room

MONDAY, MAY 15—Pr. Gretchen Pierskalla will begin at Zion

SUNDAY, JUNE 11—Pr. Gretchen's Installation—Service and Reception

*"Praise God for the blessings he has and is giving us
in the form of these special servants of God."*

Note from Pastor Evelyn

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I write, I am thinking that the time is nearing for me to say “goodbye” to all of you who mean so much to me and whom I have enjoyed doing ministry with for so many months. What comes to mind is a poem I wrote for a dear friend the July before I started seminary. I was shifting my focus to the Twin Cities while she was moving west. We were parting ways. And knowing that, even with the best of intentions to keep up with each other’s lives, communication would probably be only occasional at best. The poem is called “Sweet Parting.”

Sweet Parting

**I cannot say “goodbye”, so final is its sound.
It signifies an ending
to a friendship I have found.**

**I cannot say “farewell”, it means that we will part.
And how can I take leave of one
I hold within my heart.**

**I cannot say “adieu” though sweet its sound may be,
It manifests an end with one
who means the world to me.**

**So I will say “God’s speed” in everything you do.
For when I live in heaven’s realm,
I know you’ll be there too.**

What makes it most difficult for me in parting is that I tend to “love” people. By that I mean that I hold them deep in my heart. How do you leave those you hold in your heart? The best answer to that question is that you continue to hold them in your heart. And that is what I will do with all of you at Zion. You are truly my sisters and brothers in Christ. In our own ways we will continue to spread the love of God, each in our own areas of the world. And I know you are entering a new adventure with someone you will learn to love and do ministry with. That makes my heart glad.

May God be with you on your new journey. And may he bless it with abundant grace just as God has blessed our journey together.

God’s speed,
Pastor Evelyn



The River of Life

The Red River of the North, in the north-central U.S. and central Canada, takes countless twists and turns. A close-up aerial photo or map shows its frequent sideswipes and U-turns. One could cross the river several times without changing direction while hiking or biking along the border between Minnesota and North Dakota. You might wonder at points if it has completely turned back south — which raises another point: While most rivers flow south, the Red River flows north.

Sometimes life meanders, but that doesn't mean we're off course. Sometimes we seem to be going in the opposite direction of most people, but that doesn't mean we're not headed the right way. Sometimes it feels like it takes us a long time to make progress, but that doesn't mean we're not moving. We might just be taking in more of life's scenery! Follow your own unique trajectory, letting God, the creator of all rivers and all life, serve as the current that moves you ever onward.

In the Lives of our Members

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|-----------------|
| 2 | Ella Lundstrom | 25 | Brad Danielson |
| 2 | Jacob Scharpe | 26 | Jessica Pautsch |
| 2 | Gracie Straub | 28 | Wendy Pederson |
| 2 | Joe Prasad | | |
| 4 | Lucas Beneke | | |
| 4 | Ida Johnson | | |
| 4 | Kevin Biermann | | |
| 7 | Jim Scharpe | | |
| 9 | Tim Haggenmiller | | |
| 11 | Kate Bergs | | |
| 13 | Rhoda Woehler | | |
| 15 | Mary Trocke | | |
| 15 | Cooper Heeren | | |
| 16 | Brett Beneke | | |
| 17 | Sophia Straub | | |
| 19 | Gary Revier | | |



- | | |
|--------------|------------------------|
| May 14, 1971 | Dale & Jan Wark |
| May 22, 1976 | Kevin & Peg Kamps |
| May 24, 1969 | Francis & Janet Rowe |
| May 25, 1985 | Larry Patricia Klunder |



Hold up in prayer....

- Christy Hebeisen in her battle with cancer
- Lowell Tritabaugh brother-in-law of Janet Rowe
- Jenna Dobner family friend of Kamps family. Battling a rare lung disease
- Glen Lueders brother of Ginny Parrow, battling cancer
- Dilshad Perani—family friend of Kamps family. Battling rare chronic disease.
- Cindy Hebeisen—she begins treatment for nodules on her lungs.



Remember Our Homebound Members

- | | |
|---|--|
| <u>Harmony River Living Ctr</u>
Ginny Parrow | <u>At home in Arlington</u> |
| <u>Good Samaritan/Arlington</u>
Lyle Woehler | <u>Fairview Assisted Living</u>
Bert Pederson |
| <u>At home in Silver Lake</u>
Luverne Bergs | <u>Golden Hearts</u>
Gary Revier |



Zion Lutheran Church
Church Council Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 12, 2023

The regular monthly meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by President Kevin Biermann.

Attendance:

President: Kevin Biermann	Deacon: Nick Schiroo	Bd Worship & Music: Peg Kamps
Vice President: Larry Gieseke	Trustee: Jerry Ebersviller	Pastor: Pr. Evelyn Dahlke
Secretary: Roseann Nagel	Bd/Education: Kari Schauer	
Treasurer: Joe Prasad	Bd/Stewardship: ABSENT	Ofc Sec: Stacy Haggenmiller
Others present: Jon Bleick, Territory Manager, Nuvera		

Regional Manager, Jon Bleick, presented the options available through Nuvera fiber internet, which will be available in Arlington in the September/December timeframe. Jon and Roseann met and looked at the building and ran speed tests throughout the building. He states our current Mediacom upload speed is very good and download speed is in the adequate range for our purposes. We would not have to make changes based upon our current upload/download speeds but Nuvera's download speed would put us in a better place to eliminate the buffering that sometimes occurs when streaming.

The written Nuvera proposal is for 36 months using current internal network routers and boosters with 100Mbps fiber internet. The proposal includes one-time charges and monthly recurring charges, excluding phone service. Nuvera can provide VoIP phone service and gave a verbal proposal. The monthly fee for the first phone would be \$29.99 (secretary office) and \$9.99 (pastor office) for the second line. There was discussion as to whether it would be necessary to have the basement phone. To keep a second phone number in the basement would be an additional \$29.99 per month.

Roseann and Joe were assigned to review the current Mediacom contract and the Nuvera proposal for comparison and report back to the council.

Devotions were given by Pr Evelyn.

Secretary's Report: Minutes for March 8 council meeting, March 15 Facilities Committee meeting and the March 19 Special Council meeting were emailed and available at meeting. **Motion by L Gieseke, seconded by P Kamps to approve meeting minutes. Motion passed by voice vote.**

Treasurer's Report: March Profit and Loss financial statements and revised January through March Profit and Loss financial statements (to reflect new line item for bathroom project monies separated from memorial line item) were emailed, available at meeting **and review by Council. Motion by P Kamps, seconded by L Gieseke to approve the February and revised January/March reports as submitted. Motion passed by voice vote.**

Pastor's Report: Pr. Evelyn presented a verbal recap of the past month. Pleased to report that she made it through Easter and everything went smoothly. The first Sunday in May will be Confirmation. A busy Sunday will be coming up on May 14 with recognition of HS Graduates, recognition of Sunday School Teachers and recognition of Bobette Schauer as Zion organist for 50 years. Visits/calls to individuals and hospital call. Amazed by the attendance of 120 on Easter Sunday!

Pr. Evelyn's recent W2 from Zion did not breakdown the housing allowance out of her salary. This was discovered when her taxes were being completed for tax year 2022. Therefore, she requested that her housing allowance be reflected for 2023. Pr. Evelyn requested that a motion be placed on record to reflect that the \$13,000 housing allowance be noted as such so she receives appropriate tax credit for the housing portion of her total salary compensation package.

Motion by P Kamps, seconded by J Ebersviller to include the breakdown of \$13,000 Housing Allowance paid to Pr. Evelyn Dahlke (as part of total wage and salary allocation) be reflected as "Housing Allowance" in her 2023 W2 form. Motion passed by voice vote.

Pr. Evelyn expressed how much she enjoyed her life during the time she has been here and also feels some wonderful things are occurring in this congregation. She looks forward to meeting Pr. Gretchen and feels the momentum will be carried forward.

Board of Deacons: N Schiroo – did not meet

Board of Stewardship: Lyle Rud/Absent – called in report: will have a short meeting after the special congregational meeting on April 12 – working on a "clean up" date – will be taking on the hunger jar responsibility

Board of Trustees: J Ebersviller – did parking lot striping – finished repairing accordion door between fellowship room and sanctuary – hooked up sump pump at bottom of ramp and monitoring it – replaced cracked sanitizing chemical supply tube on dishwasher so sanitation of dishes occurs – replaced 45 year old thermostat in basement dining area and monitoring heat in that area as well as in the NW restrooms – replaced damaged rain downspouts – Larry Gieseke has agreed to have a key for church so that Trustees would have back up for unlocking in morning. Cindy Hebeisen continues to lock the church each evening.

Board of Worship and Music: P Kamps – did not meet next meeting is set for next Wednesday (April 19)

Board of Education: K Schauer – planning Sunday School appreciation on May 14 as well as gifts for confirmation students and graduates

Standing Committees

Facilities Committee: R Nagel – have not received proposal on mixer/amplifier from Dostal yet.

Décor Committee: L Gieseke/absent – no report

Constitution/ByLaws: R Nagel -- Committee is meeting and have currently completed a read through of the entire constitution—current and proposed. The resulting typed draft needs to be reviewed by the committee. By Laws have not yet been drafted.

Safety/Security Policy(s): Tabled indefinitely, committee needs to be appointed.

Old Business

Special Congregational Meeting for Bathroom/Office project on April 16 -- Agenda will be available before meeting – Pres. Biermann has contacted the Arlington State Bank and the temporary line of credit Zion established for the technology project can be reopened for a construction loan. Interest rate is between six and eight percent.

Peg Kamps will make three cakes for May 14 coffee hour when we celebrate Pr. Evelyn's last day at Zion/Sunday School/Graduates/Bobette's 50 years of serving Zion as organist.

New Business

June 11 Installation of Pr. Gretchen Pierskalla will be conducted by Pr. Heather Culuris from the Synod office. ZCW will be asked if they would be willing to plan a brunch for after the church service

The Board of Music and Worship has received a comment that the Sunday hymn selections are too unfamiliar. After discussion, it was determined that the Board of Music and Worship is an elected board and they work with the pastor and organist for selections. The Council respects their decisions and trusts the selections made by them are appropriate.

Next council meeting will be Wednesday, May 10, 2023 at 5:00 pm.

Motion by P Kamps, seconded by J Ebersviller to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed by voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

Roseann Nagel
Council Secretary

Approved: WILL BE APPROVED AT NEXT COUNCIL MEETING

DRAFT — NOT APPROVED

Zion Special Congregational Meeting
Sunday, April 16, 2023

The meeting was called to order by President Biermann at 9:04 am. MOTION made by Tim Michaelis and Seconded by Scott Bergs to recess until regular church service completed. Motion passed by voice vote.

Meeting was reconvened by President Biermann at conclusion of church service.

AGENDA: Main Floor Handicap Bathroom and Secretary Office Project

Facilities committee member Roseann Nagel presented the project with a PowerPoint presentation and advisory member Tim Haggemiller explained the plans and outlined the construction process. The proposal of the Facilities Committee is \$30,000 to cover construction, office equipment/furnishings and contingency funding.

\$16,327 has currently been donated to a main floor handicapped bathroom—a portion of these funds are from the Scharpe families and remainder are memorials/donations to date that have been specifically earmarked for a bathroom project by the donors. \$5,000 of current undesignated memorial funds could be transferred to the project and the remaining funding would come from future donations.

A construction loan for immediate, short-term dollars is available, as needed, from the Arlington State Bank at a six to eight percent interest rate. It was noted that we may not need to utilize construction loan dollars as we have a portion of the necessary dollars already in a fund and we anticipate donations toward the project.

President Biermann led more discussion and presented the thought of the Council to add \$3,000 to the proposal of the Facilities Committee as an additional financial cushion. Alternative temporary funding options were also suggested.

MOTION was made by Jane Scharpe and seconded by Larry Schiroo to proceed with the main floor handicapped bathroom/secretary office project at an anticipated cost of \$30,000 to cover the proposed project. A written ballot vote resulted in 56 yes and 1 no. Motion passed.

President Biermann called for a motion to adjourn. MOTION to adjourn the special congregational meeting was made by Wayne Werner and seconded by Scott Bergs. Motion passed by voice vote.

Roseann Nagel
Council Secretary

Approved:

March Giving

	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Parking</u> <u>Lot</u>	<u>Food</u> <u>Shelf</u>	<u>Hunger Jar</u>	<u>Upstairs</u> <u>Restroom</u>	<u>LSS</u>	<u>World Hunger</u>
3-1-23 (Lent)	31			\$26.00	\$125.00		
3/5/2023	59		\$62.00	\$161.31			\$12.00
3-8-23 (Lent)	30		\$128.00	\$3.93			
3/12/2023	52			\$67.00			
3/15/2023 (Lent)	33			\$25.95			
3/19/2023	53	\$5.00	\$100.00	\$13.00		\$25.00	\$125.00
3-22-23 (Lent)	37			\$16.00			
3/26/2023	52		\$12.00	\$46.00			\$12.00
3/29/2023(Lent)	34			\$5.00			

Memorial Fund - \$89 - In Honor of Bea Tews' Birthday (Upstairs Restroom)

Memorial Fund - \$50 - In Memory of Arnie Tews (Food Shelf)

Memorial Fund - \$50 - In Memory of Dan Carlson (Upstairs Restroom)



Zion Lutheran Church services can be viewed on:

Facebook at

Zion Lutheran Church

YouTube at

www.youtube.com

Search: Zion ELCA Arlington MN

www.zionarlington.org

Rev. Evelyn Dahlke

651-592-2638

pastorevelyn@yahoo.com

Pr. Evelyn will have office hours on

Wednesdays from 1-4pm or by appointment.

Please feel free to call, text or email at any time.

Zion Church Women

May Bible Study Group

Tuesday Circle

May 2—9am
Church

Wednesday Circle

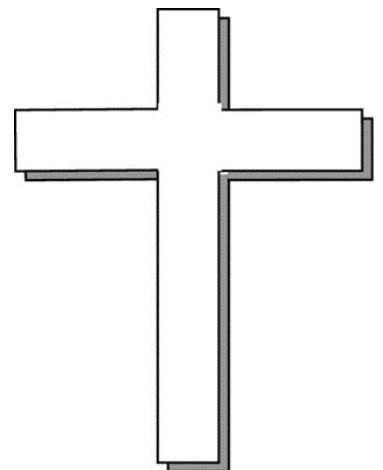
May 3—1:30p
Church



Enjoy the fun, fellowship, and time to be Inspired at Bible Camp this summer!

Zion Lutheran Church women want to encourage our youth and Sunday School to children to consider the adventure and faith growing experience of Bible Camping this Summer. Information about programs and dates at Green Lake Bible Camp will soon be available to help you plan your adventure.

The ladies of ZCW will give \$200 to each camper who goes to Green Lake or another ELCA Lutheran Bible Camp this year. So consider this as a part of your summer adventures.



Zion Lutheran Church
Women of the ELCA
Wednesday, April 19, 2023 at 7 pm

President Pam Schiroo called the meeting to order. We began with some "Words of Wisdom" from Pastor Evelyn. She urged us to be patient and supportive of our new pastor, as she will have new ideas and has had experiences which may be different than ours.

Secretary's report was read and approved as corrected. (The new members were divided into the Tuesday and Wednesday circles not the Tuesday and Thursday circles.)

The Treasurer's report was given by Lorraine Mielke. We have a current balance of \$6,070.71. The report stands approved as read and will be placed on file.

The Tuesday Circle sponsored a music event for Good Samaritan Center residents. They have one planned for Golden Hearts, also. They served the Carlson funeral.

The Wednesday Circle is assembling layettes for Lutheran World Relief in the summer. They purchased confirmation gifts and cards for the four confirmands.

Mission Action, Community, and Growth reported 76 pound of food to foodshare. There were 143 quilts made or purchased for church use. 101 were taken to LWR, 5 to the graduates, 1 to the Maranatha Church, 2 went to the Ridgeview Foundation, 5 to Red Cross/ Social Services, 6 to DAV, 9 were donated to Mary's Place, a Woman's Shelter and 14 were sold to members of the congregation. The confirmation class also created a quilt. It will be displayed on Confirmation Sunday and then distributed locally.

Our old business started with a quilt for the auction at Green Lake Bible Camp. Bea Tews, has graciously donated a Grandma's flower garden pattern quilt, that has a history with her family, to be used for the Green Lake Auction. Pastor Evelyn will also be donating a crib sized quilt to be sent to the auction. Jackie Alsleben will fill out the forms for the quilts and Diane Ebersviller will deliver them to Green Lake. The auction is in mid-July. You should consider attending-it is a wonderful event. Brenda will send a thank you note to Bea for her donation. We decided not to send an additional monetary gift to Green Lake above and beyond the quilt.

Graduates will be honored on May 14 with the gift of their quilt. Quilts will be placed on their shoulders and graduates will be asked to share a bit of their future plans.

New business: May 14th is the last day for Pastor Evelyn. Motion by Betty Rud and seconded by Mary Sylwester to present her with \$100 and a thank you card was made and was carried. June 11, 2023 is the Installation Service for Pastor Gretchen. We will have a congregational meal and invite the Maranatha Church to join us. It will be a breakfast/brunch. A motion was made by Betty Rud that the Wednesday Circle serve this meal aided by the congregation with food donations. Motion was seconded by Mary Sylwester and was carried. A committee of: Betty Rud, Pam Schiroo, Lorraine Mielke, Mary Sylwester and Ann Werner will oversee this meal.

The upstairs kitchenette could use a facelift. Ideas included removing the stove, extending the countertop, sliding over the refrigerator, etc. We need to coordinate with the council, and the Décor Committee. Jackie Alsleben and Mary Lietz will look into this. As the construction has begun, this may need to be dealt with quickly.

We will need a slate of officers for elections this September. Offices up for election are Vice-President and Secretary. Outgoing officers will need to find someone to run for their position. Brenda can serve another term as secretary. Cindy Quast will move up to President.

Harvest Dinner Planning meeting will be on Aug 2, 2023 at 7 pm for those on the planning committee. Harvest dinner will be Oct 27, 2023.

We would like to encourage our youth and children to attend Bible Camp at Green Lake this summer. Betty Rud made a motion to have us offer \$200 to campers who choose to go to Green Lake Bible Camp or another ELCA Bible Camp. The motion was seconded by Mary Sylwester and carried. Brenda will contact the Bible Camp for camping schedules and registration information and get an article in the newsletter regarding this support.

Correspondence was shared. We received thank you's from: By His Grace –the group that performed at our Community Christmas Concert, CADA House for our \$165.35 donation and Women of the ELCA for our donation of \$300.

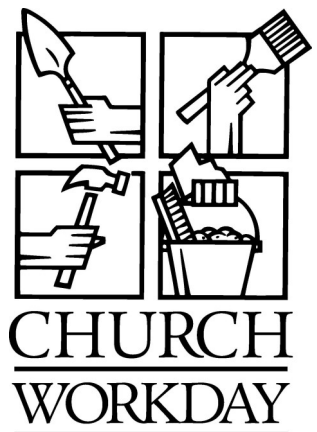
Motion to adjourn was m/s/c. Our next meeting will be Sept 20, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,
Brenda Danielson, Secretary

Board of Stewardship

Clean Up Sunday and Potluck—May 21, 2023

Come to church in your outside working clothes. After the service we will be doing outside clean up at Zion and also at the Zion Cemetery. Please bring your favorite trimming tools, shovels (gopher holes need filling at the cemetery), rakes, leaf blower, etc. Also, bring your favorite dish for potluck lunch after the hard work is done. For those who are not able to help with the outside work, please bring a dish for potluck and join in fellowship. We will plan to eat at noon. In case of inclement weather, we will reschedule to a weekday evening. We will plan to do an inside clean up Sunday after the construction is complete.



Also, the Board of Stewardship decided that the Hunger Jar money collected for the summer will go to the Sibley County Food Share. Our goal is \$1,000.

Zion History

November 28, 1975

Zion Lutheran Church
814 West Brooks
Arlington, Minnesota 55307

Dear Members:

December 7 1975, represents a unique date in the life of Zion Lutheran Church. Time is relative only to the events which happen within its boundaries and to say that one particular day, as opposed to the hundreds in the life of Zion, is more significant than any other might border on the ridiculous.

God's way of working with his people has always been unique - even, ridiculous - yet, He has a way of getting His people together. December 7 might be that particular day that symbolizes all the others. It is on this day that the pride [pride in the finest sense of the word] of the worshipping community of Zion is at its best. It takes trials, fears, mistakes, hopes and dreams to build character of a person as well as the character of a congregation. The members of Zion have gone through the refiner's fire and you and I are fortunate to witness the culmination of all the hopes and dreams. You and I are witnesses to the fact that when the people of God reach way out on the limb, the limb bends, but never breaks. It takes the character of the Christian Community to respond to the needs of people who are way out on a limb. Ten years ago, a vision was put from the minds of Zion's members onto paper and then to brick and concrete of a Church. The agony of decision, the self-doubt of our humanity have been compensated for by the character and pride of a people working with people and working with God and we are witnesses of the past being made into the present. What some people laughed at; scorned; ridiculed has become a symbol of God's Church working in Arlington. To come today without the pride of our history and the heritage of our members, would be to miss the central theme of Zion's mission. Today, we, as members of Zion, are proud because we have perserved the negative and have grabbed the positive. Our limb will not break because God is holding it up.

It is in the same breath that we carry our heritage, our pride, our character from yesterday and today into tomorrow. Just as one person never arrives at his zenith, neither does one Church ever arrive to the point where we "have made it". The needs of people are never static, never confined to a specific time and it becomes our responsibility our privilege, to carry out the mission as God's ministers to the larger community around us. That means that there will be many more limbs out ahead, many more agonies and fears and hopes and dreams. Yet, we look into tomorrow and see that God continually creates wonders around us. The wonders of God's people working together, growing together and sharing together allow us the pride in God's accomplishments. Zion, you may be proud of your worshipping community, just as I am proud to be your Pastor.

Sincerely

Rev. Chris Stein, Pastor

Mel Pederson, asked former clergy of first 10 years of Zion to send letters telling of their impressions of Zion while they revisited Zion after their time of service during "10 year Debt Retirement Anniversary 1975".

Pastor Chris Stein was our Pastor from January 1975 to August 1977.

Board of Education

CONFIRMATION CORNER



Class Dates

May 7

9:00am

Confirmation

9th Grade

Hannah Bartlette

Adyson Beneke

Mausten Krueger

8th Grade

Nathan Schauer

Confirmation will take place on Sunday, May 7 at 9:00am. This service will include Holy Communion as well as the rite of Confirmation.



Sunday School Teacher Appreciation will be held on Sunday, May 14.

A special thank you to

Cindy Vazquez

Scott Bergs

Myrna Scharpe

Brenda Danielson



May Bible Readings

May 7 – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 7:55-60 - The martyrdom of Stephen

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2:2-10 - *God's people chosen to proclaim God's mighty acts*

John 14:1-14 - *Christ the way, truth, and life*

May 14 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22-31 - Paul's message to the Athenians

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22 - *The days of Noah, a sign of baptism*

John 14:15-21 - *Christ our advocate*

May 21 – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:6-14 - Jesus' companions at prayer after his departure

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 - *God will sustain and restore those who suffer*

John 17:1-11 - *Christ's prayer for his disciples*

May 28 – Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21 - Filled with the Spirit to tell God's deeds

Numbers 11:24-30 (alternate) - *The Spirit comes upon the elders of Israel*

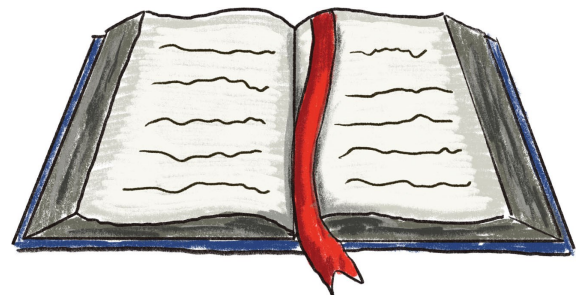
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 - *Varieties of gifts from the same Spirit*

Acts 2:1-21 (alternate) - *Filled with the Spirit to tell God's deeds*

John 20:19-23 - *The Spirit poured out*

John 7:37-39 (alternate) - *The Spirit will provide living water*



Five Themes LeaderWise Hears

And Why They Are the Death of the Church

by Rev. Cindy Halvorson, MDiv, DMin

Note: This article may or may not apply to your context. At the time of its writing, this commentary represents Christian mainline denominational churches in the USA. While each church is unique in its experiences, certain themes have been observed by LeaderWise consultants. We recently had a conversation about our observations. This article is a result of that conversation.

As I sat with yet another group of lay leaders, an older pillar-of-the-congregation persisted with his question. “What is the future of the church? Do you think we will ever get back to what we used to be?” He remembered the sanctuary being full on Sundays while the organ played, the choir sang, and young parents tried to keep their children from squirming in their seats. Yet, time had passed and the numbers had dwindled, both in attendance and finances. Difficult decisions faced this group of lay leaders and the gentleman wanted straight answers. Others on the committee stared at me as the question hung in the air. Their faces showed hopefulness; their eyes showed fear.

While none of us knows what the future will bring, I think people do know that we cannot return to the past. The desire to recreate what has brought joy and fulfillment leads many congregations to chase former experiences and cling to what worked “before.” When the pews don’t fill, anxiety rises and we hear the same themes repeatedly.

1. We need families and children.

Aging congregations believe they need families and children in the pews on Sunday mornings in order to bolster membership, improve finances, and increase the pool of volunteers who do the work of the church. When we ask congregations why they are expressing the need for “families with children,” it becomes evident that, while they believe that families and children benefit by connecting with the Divine, the root desire is based more on concern for the survival of the church than it is for meeting the needs of those families.

If the passion of the congregation is to connect families and children with God, it is necessary to be willing to serve them where they are instead of insisting they come to us at our prescribed time on Sunday morning in the prescribed place of church. Instead, the congregation goes to where the families and children are ... even if they never come to the church. The focus becomes meeting the needs of others rather than trying to get others to meet our needs. *What if the church stopped asking how to get the young families to attend and started asking what the young families need? What might happen if churches shifted energy from recruitment to hands-on ministry? The church would look different; yet, it would be living out Christ’s mission.*

2. We just need a pastor.

We regularly work with congregations who are between pastors. Often, they surmise that calling the “right” pastor will result in increased membership (especially young families), revitalize

mission and ministry, and provide solutions to their challenges. A similar comment expressed by those who currently have a pastor is: "We just need our pastor to do (fill in the blank)." These remarks arise because the congregation expects the pastor to do the ministry of the church.

While pastoral leadership can be incredibly helpful, these expectations alleviate the congregation's anxiety by placing the burden on the pastor. The comments reflect the belief that ministry is what the pastor does ... not what the people do. By scapegoating the pastor/pastoral role, the congregation does not need to change. This thinking discourages lay people from discerning God's call to them and empowerment of them, and deprives them of the joy of loving and serving their neighbor. It also puts an undue burden on their pastor. *What if congregation members saw the task of ministry as the responsibility of the church instead of the responsibility of the pastor? What if the church re-focused its sights on the needs of their community and how they, the members, could partner with God in meeting the needs that exist outside the four walls of the church? The structure of the church would look different; yet the church would be living out the commandment to love God and neighbor.*

3. We are a welcoming church.

This statement raises questions: *Welcoming to whom? Welcoming how?* Occasionally, congregations are willing to welcome people who will do things the way they do things and who will agree with them on their thoughts and beliefs without questions or challenges. They rarely understand that their tight-knit congregation that has been worshiping together for years, which they see as a strength, can feel closed and impenetrable to people outside of it. "Old guard" members say they welcome new people in leadership yet continue to make the decisions from behind the scenes. The thoughts and ideas of those who have only been a part of the church for a handful of years are dismissed. Longevity and familiarity matter and new members or attendees feel excluded.

Claiming to be "a welcoming church" implies that if someone doesn't experience the congregation as hospitable, the burden is on the visitor. It's denial at best and gaslighting at worst. Neither is helpful. Both are harmful. According to former U.S. Surgeon General Murthy, "loneliness is an epidemic." [1] *People are longing to be accepted and to belong. What would it look like if churches became radically inclusive? What if people felt valued and accepted when they encountered someone from the church? How can the resources of the church be used to bring healing to the health crisis of loneliness? How could a church building be as easy to walk into as a coffee shop?*

4. We love our building.

Many church buildings are beautiful; some have historical significance. Through the years the stories of sacrifice made by previous generations have been passed down. Memorial gifts, which have helped to maintain, beautify, or enhance portions of the building, were given in honor of loved ones. These sacred buildings have been the places of vows being exchanged, people being baptized, children being cherished, and loved ones being memorialized. These buildings are where so many have gathered for so many years. It's easy to understand why the congregations

cannot see themselves as separate from their building, even as maintenance costs for a space that is often empty stretch already diminished resources.

While the church building has been central to how mainline denominational churches have operated, the mission and ministry to which Christ calls us does not necessitate a building. *How would church be different if the members decentralized their identity from their building? Could the building be seen as a resource to be shared with the community? What if there wasn't a church building at all?*

5. Our church can't die. It just can't.

While the sentiment is understandable, within our universe, a life cycle exists and the church is not immune. There is life and there is death. It's true throughout nature, in our human experience, and within all organizations and nations. While the Divine is eternal, nothing else is, not even our specific understanding of church. Christianity is fundamentally based on the belief that death is never the final word, that God is always working to bring about something new. Society has shifted. Newness is everywhere. We see it every day. We look at the gadget on our wrist to see who called the device in our pocket. We sit at our computers and choose our groceries, enter in several digits from a plastic card in our wallet, knowing we will drive to the store and someone will load the bags of goodies into the trunk of our car, or better yet, deliver them to our doorstep. We utilize our computers and even our phones to work, to worship, and to connect with people down the street and across the globe.

Let me say it again: Society has shifted. Priorities differ from those of former generations. Possibilities that didn't exist only a few years ago abound. Expectations change.

Our world will never be the same as it was.

As humans, and therefore as humanity, we morph; we adjust; we change. This is true of individuals, organizations, and civilizations. The church must shift too. *What makes it so difficult to imagine church happening differently? What are we afraid of losing that blinds us to what we might actually gain?*

What is the future of the church? I don't know. However, as I observe our society with a keen eye on the church, I am convinced that church as we know it has a shelf life. It will expire. It is expiring. As with all loss, there is grief and that grief is painful, maybe even haunting. The sorrow for no longer having what was at one point in history a meaningful way of connecting with God and neighbor needs to be acknowledged and processed. AND, what better place to process grief than with faithful siblings in Christ. The church is set up for that. When we bring our heartache to The Divine, we are more able to love God and neighbor authentically, and we open up space to imagine a new way of being God's people together. A shift in society requires a shift in our focus. Regardless of the beneficial nature of the organization, God never instructed us to perpetuate an institution; rather, we are called to do the following:

- love God and neighbor
- bear one another's burdens
- be good stewards as we care for creation
- walk humbly and act justly

. . . and the list goes on.

These top five themes hold limiting beliefs and keep the church squarely anchored in the past. Yes, uncertainty about the future abounds; grief for what is past seems more than we can contain. Nevertheless, where we see death, The Life Giver is already at work to bring about new life for God's people and God's church. This isn't the first time God has brought about newness of life (Isaiah 55:8-12; Luke 1:46-55). The Creator is constantly creating and re-creating (Genesis 1 - 2; John 1:1-5). In the midst of these ever-changing times, we can trust that Divine Love is inviting us into a "new thing" (Isaiah 43:19), that "new wine [is being] poured into new wineskins" (Luke 5:36-38), and we are not alone (Matthew 1:23, 28:20b). It is challenging to think in ways we haven't previously thought; yet, it is imperative that God's people ask questions that will launch the church into the future. Questions like:

- What are the needs of the community, and how might the church partner with God in meeting those needs? What other organizations within the community are also concerned about these needs? How can we partner with them?

- In what ways can the church create opportunity to assuage the loneliness epidemic in our society? Who can we talk to in order to find out what might be helpful? Who is not here with us? Where are they and what do they need? What can we learn from where they are choosing to be that will help us be more truly welcoming?

- What would it look like to radically love our neighbor?

I find myself wondering, what if we stop fixating on the future of the church, and instead, commit ourselves within our faith communities to care for the needs of creation, our communities, our country, and our world? Could it be possible that new life is waiting for the church?

May all our wonderings and wanderings lead us home.

[1] Vivek H. Murthy, MD, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020). See also Mary Kay DuChene and Mark Sundby, *A Path to Belonging: Overcoming Clergy Loneliness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022).

With Thankful Hearts

We would like to thank you for your contribution to the Sibley County FoodShare. Your generosity continues to provide emergency assistance to the hungry of Sibley County. We appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Sibley County FoodShare

A heartfelt thank you to the Zion women who helped serve at our son Dan's memorial reception on April 1. Your generous assistance allowed us to focus on our guests.

James & Ann Carlson

Thank you to those who provided goodies for Fellowship Hour in March!

Larry Gieseke
Betty Rud & Gail Hildebrandt
Tina Schauer
Mary Sylwester & Mary Lietz

Together, we are neighbors helping neighbors. Thank you for your generous gift to support the services of Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota (LSS).

Jesse M. Stremcha
Vice President & Chief Development Officer
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota

chosen
JOHN
15:16

a child
of God
ROMANS
8:17

redeemed
GALATIANS
3:13

a new
creation
2 CORINTHIANS
5:17

You

loved
JEREMIAH
31:3

forgiven
1 JOHN
1:9

accepted
ROMANS
15:7

are

who

GOD

precious
ISAIAH
43:4

strong
ISAIAH
40:31

unique
PSALM
139:13

says

you

created for
a purpose
JEREMIAH
29:11

treasured
DEUTERONOMY
14:2

special
EPHESIANS
2:10

are

important
1 PETER
2:9

empowered
PHILIPPIANS
4:13

not
alone
MATTHEW
28:20

protected
PSALM
121:3

May 7, 2023

Ushers: Neil & Lorraine Mielke
Deb Stenzel, Wendy Kube
Greeter: Nancy Mathwig
Acolyte: Jeremiah Vazquez
Reader: Scott Bergs
Organist: Bobette Schauer
A/V Team:
Altar Guild: Jan Giesen & Julie Warweg
Breadmaker: Cindy Hebeisen
Paraments: Julie Warweg

May 2023

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

1 2 3 4 5 6
9a—Tuesday Bible Study
11a—TOPS
1:30p—Wednesday Bible Study
6:30p—Constitution Mtg
SWMN Synodical Convention of Women of the ELCA

May 14, 2023

Ushers: Darrel & Jackie Alsleben
Nancy Mathwig, Larry Klunder
Greeter: Cindy Vazquez
Acolyte: Jack Ruehling
Reader: Starla Schilling
Organist: Bobette Schauer
A/V Team:
Altar Guild: Larry & Pam Schiroo
Breadmaker: Cindy Hebeisen
Paraments: Julie Warweg

7 **Fifth Sunday of Easter—Confirmation**

9a—Worship w/Holy Communion

8 9 10 11 12 13
10:30a—Prayer Shawl
11a—TOPS
5p—Church Council

14

Sixth Sunday of Easter

9a—Worship w/Holy Communion

15 16 17 18 19 20
11a—TOPS
5p—Board of Stewardship

21

Seventh Sunday of Easter

9a—Worship
10a—Clean Up Sunday
12p—Potluck

22 23 24 25 26 27
10:30a—Prayer Shawl
11a—TOPS

May 28, 2023

Ushers: Peg Kamps, Mary Sylwester
Stephanie & Mausten Krueger
Greeter: Jon Hazelwood
Acolyte: Adrian Warzocha
Reader: Brad Danielson
Organist: Bobette Schauer
A/V Team:
Paraments: Julie Warweg

28 **Day of Pentecost**

9a—Worship

29 30 31
11a—TOPS