



HIGHLIGHTS

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Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

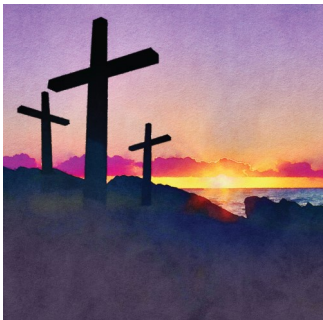
**Tuesday, February 13
5:00 p.m. —7:00 p.m.**

It's pancake and sausage time again! Our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper will be Tuesday, February 13th from 5 PM



til 7 PM. Freewill donation, all you can eat, how can you go wrong?

Volunteers Needed! Any men that are able to help that evening, please contact Hank Huntzman (402- 297-1264) or Garry Hillman (402-265-3511). This is a Thrivent Action Team



Dear Church,

It is with the sincerest and utmost gratitude that JoDee and I thank you for the time away and your most generous Christmas gift. Our time in Europe was wonderful and, for those who are interested, we hope to be able to share some highlights with you soon.

For me, it was the second time I have spent some hours in the German town of Wittenberg, where the Reformation began with Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-five Thesis. As I remarked to JoDee, even though my time has been relatively short in Wittenberg, it always feel sa bit like home to me. A large part of that would have to do with my formation as a pastor, for I spent my first time in Wittenberg with a dozen seminary colleagues, exploring the history and theol-

ogy of the Reformation. We often stayed up late into the night, discussing what we had seen and heard, what we had read, telling stories, sermonizing.

Leaving Wittenberg this time around, remembering that time five years ago and thinking where it has all landed me, here in this home that is North Branch, I was all the more excited to return home and see you all again. It was a refreshing reminder of all that has been and all that is to come in our life of ministry together. The reminder being: the Church, the Body of Christ, is always being made new. And what new opportunities are there in store for us here at North Branch?

Indeed, part of our participation in the Nebraska Synod's Vitality Initiative for Congregations (VIC) is helping lead us to just what new thing the Lord has in store for us. We are God's Church, after all, and equipped for God's mission. In looking at the future, we are also examining our past, deeply and forthrightly. Where we have been is very likely to have an impact on where we shall go.

In the days and months ahead, you may be someone to whom our VIC team will be reaching out. We are seeking to undertake a series of wide-ranging interviews, learning your own histories of North Branch and hearing your ideas about what the Body of Christ in this place might look like. This will be an exercise in memory and imagination. We look forward to what more will be revealed in the conversations. It has the air, for me, of those nights in Wittenberg when a bunch of future pastors looked at the vast history of what had come before us and imagined what God would have in store for us in God's desired future. We hope to surround this process with similar excitement and engagement. What is God up to in our place, in our lives? Is it a new ministry? A new educational opportunity?

A new program opening the world and ministry to more people in our congregation and community? Knowing that our future of sin forgiven and eternal life is insured by Jesus's cross, God has given us space to dream, to imagine, to take flight in the future of God's mission as God's Church. God invites you into this imagination, too. I look forward to what the conversations ahead will bring.

God's peace to you, now and always!

Adam

Council Corner

Highlights/ December 2023 Meeting

Old Business

- Update on Nominating Committee.
- The Nominating Committee has the nominees that will be considered at the next Annual Meeting.

New Business

- Reviewed the Proposed Annual Budget for 2024.

Board Reports

Pastor's Report:

- Living Nativity set for December 17
- Pastor Adam and JoDee on vacation December 28 thru January 8.
- One service Christmas Day & New Year's Eve

Christian Education:

- All Christmas activities for the kids were noted.

Worship & Music

- Would like to replace the candles on the Altar and the Plexiglas.

Property Board

- Planning on washing the church siding.
- Cleaning duct works in the parsonage.
- Proposed building for storage
- Improving efforts to control mice on the property.

Deacons

- Church Administrator position filled by Mrs. Rachel Hamling.
- December 17th, Deacons and Church Council will bag candy and fruit.

A complete set of minutes is available on the kiosk in the narthex.

Giving Online

If you would like the convenience of giving online you can do so by using the website: <https://onrealm.org/firstlutheranavoca/Give> or Text

NORTHBRANCH to 73256 or Scan the QR code.



Coat & Mitten Drive

The Stewardship Board will continue to hold a coat and mitten drive throughout the winter months for the local missions. Gently used items for men, women, and youth are in great need this time of year. There is a container in the Narthex to place your donations. Items will be delivered to the mission on an ongoing basis as they are received. Items needed:

- Hats
- Scarves
- Mittens & Gloves
- Coats
- Sweatshirts
- Heavy Socks

**WINTER
GOAT DRIVE**

Leader's Spotlight

Youth & Family Ministry

By: Allison Hein



As we enter a brand-new year, I write this spotlight article surrounding Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5-6 "Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths". We are all beginning a new year with good intentions to make it the best one yet. Last year may have been a great year, a challenging year, or a year just filled with ups and downs. One thing is for sure though and that is God is here with us and helping direct our paths if we allow him. Personally, I have had a year of ups and downs. I have had dear friends lose loved ones, I have watched friends and family members deal with illnesses, I have helped friends and family members welcome new babies and announce pregnancies, and many other life changing events. One thing that I can say about all of these events and ever-changing paths that happened throughout the year is that during all of it I leaned heavily into the Lord and trusted where he was leading myself and my loved ones. It is easy to doubt when you go through tough times and that is when we need to lay down our trust the most. I have learned that people, and events in our lives are no accident, but paths carefully planned out for us with the help of God and we need only to trust Him. "Life can get really hard, but God does not waste anything, not even the bad things" (Quote from the movie I'm Not Ashamed). This movie quote, along with many friends and family members have opened my eyes this past year. It is so easy to talk to God when everything is going "our way" but when things go "wrong" in our lives we tend to shut Him out. I have learned that speaking to God on the daily no matter the circumstance has helped me understand the path that is being led for me and has calmed my trust into Him permanently. Now I see the events and people put before me are part of this path and when I feel doubt and disappointment or trust and contentment I try to equally and consistently speak to God and trust His will for me. So, as you begin to make resolutions/goals for the new year I challenge you to reflect on these questions...

How does disappointment with God and hope in God overlap for you? Have you put your full trust in Him? How will you continue to strengthen your relationship with God this year?



Financial Updates

2nd Mile Giving

Project	Estimated Cost	To Date
Global Health Ministries	On Going	\$20,870
Peru Missionaries	On Going	\$17,906
2nd Mile / Shed	\$20,000	\$9,681

Treasurer's Report -

Current Fund (Pastor and Administration, Office, Building, Education, Worship)

Received through December 31: \$209,585.30
 Expenses through December 31: \$212,432.96
 Budgeted through December 31: \$232,042.11

December offering was not enough to cover the month's expenses. The shortfall for the year is \$2,847.66.



Immanuel Vision Foundation Grant

Have you noticed the new signage at the church and Parish Hall? Pastor David Bucco applied for a

\$1,000.00 grant with Immanuel Vision Foundation in 2019 for 'welcoming folks to Christ and being hospitable to their needs'. Thankfully, we received the grant and were able to purchase interior church and parish hall signage directing people to Church Sanctuary, Sunday School rooms, bathrooms, and 'wobble room'. The signage by the entrance to the Parish Hall was completed with Barb Hillman's direction. Sturdier name tags are available now in the narthex. Seasonal Welcome Banners have been placed in the narthex for our enjoyment. Last of all, a shelf was purchased for toys in the wobble room, along with children's books, puzzles, and wooden vehicles for the little ones for some quiet time. Thanks to Barb Hillman, Jill Nosal, and JoDee Klinker for the wonderful ideas and celebrating First Lutheran Church's ministry.

Immanuel Vision Foundation Grant Committee

Bible Studies

Faith and Film series continues in February

Feb. 15 & 22—Silence (2016), based on the novel by Shusako Endo and directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver, and Liam Neeson. The film tells the story of Jesuit priests in 17th century Japan, when Christianity was outlawed. It's almost three hours long, so we'll divide our watching between two sessions.

Feb. 29—Defending Your Life (1991), directed by Albert Brooks and starring Brooks and Meryl Streep. A bit of a palate cleanser after Silence, this comedy takes a look at the afterlife. Its tagline is "The First True Story of What Happens After You Die."

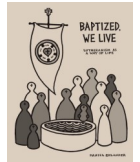
Thursday Zoom Bible Study

No Other Gods: The Unrivaled Pursuit of Christ

Join us via Zoom on Thursdays, starting at 8:00 p.m. for this 8-week session. We will learn to identify the functional gods you may be unknowingly serving and the lies they tell. As you dethrone your modern-day idols you'll be set free for the deeper, more abundant life Jesus came to give you—discovering that Jesus can do what no other god can.

Congregational Catechism

The all-congregational catechism class led by Pastor Adam will continue to take place between services at 9:30 a.m. in the Church, pending any other church activities that day. We will continue using the booklet by Daniel Erlander, *Baptized, We Live*, and Ken Sundet Jones's book, *A Lutheran Toolkit*, as our text. We will examine how the theology of our Lutheran tradition still speaks uniquely to a world that is often overcome by pain, suffering, and doubt



Altar Servers Sign-Up for the Spring

There is now a new altar server schedule available for spring worship at both services. Parents of our OSJ Youth (3rd-12th graders), look for an email from Pastor Adam with the Sign-up Genius link and encourage your child(ren) to participate in this important part of our worship services. If you don't have the link, please contact Pastor Adam or the church office. You can also use the QR code for a direct link to the online signup.



Online Signup for Worship Assistants in February

There is an online version of our signup sheet for Worship Assistants. We still have a paper version in the Narthex for those who prefer that method. We want to create a simple way for everyone to be able to assist with the worship service. Use the QR code or the link in your email to sign-up.





Church News and Events

New Member Information and Orientation sessions, Feb. 4

New to North Branch? We're delighted to have you! If you'd like to know more about our congregation, Lutheranism, or Christianity, join us for new member orientation on Feb. 4, following the 10:30 a.m. worship service (around 11:45 a.m.). For 60-90 minutes, we'll have some casual conversation, a look at Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, and answer any questions you might have about our congregation or tradition.

On Feb. 11, we will receive new members in worship, with a reception at 9:30 a.m. in the Parish Hall.

If you have questions or would like to make a reservation for the sessions (appreciated, just so we can have numbers for the lunch), call the church office at 402-275-3300. We look forward to welcoming you formally at First Lutheran!



WOMEN OF FIRST LUTHERAN "SUNDAY MORNING BREAK" FUNDRAISER

Date: February 4

*Free Will
Donation*

Time: 9am - 11:00 am
Serving scrambled eggs,
fresh fruit, french toast,
sausage, juice & coffee

Location: 1434 N 30th Road, Avoca NE 68307



Ash Wednesday Worship

First Lutheran will commemorate Ash Wednesday with communion worship and *Imposition of Ashes on Wednesday, Feb. 14, at 7 p.m.*

**ASH
WEDNESDAY**

Ashes on the Go

Stop by the North Branch hill between **7 a.m. and 11 a.m. on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14**, if you would like to receive the Imposition of Ashes and a Blessing.

A Note of Thanks

The soup luncheon was a huge success this year despite the cold weather! Thank you to the OSJ members for donating food and helping serve the lunch. Also, thank you to the women of the church for the amazing desserts. We had over 110 people attend and enjoy the event together. Your generosity is much appreciated!

Kelly Stephenson



BATTLE FOR BECKY BENEFIT

FAMILY FRIENDLY FUNDRAISER

- BBQ MEAL
- SILENT/LIVE AUCTION
- FUN GAMES, INCLUDING A CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT!

SAVE THE DATE! MARCH 2ND

Ways to help:

- Thrivent Action Dollar donations to help cover costs
- Youth Volunteers needed to pick up donations
- Youth Volunteers needed to help supervise Cornhole
- Donations of gifts/services needed for auction items
- Volunteers needed to help set up, management, and clean-up

CONTACT MARCI GARTNER (402-430-8324) FOR QUESTIONS OR TO VOLUNTEER!