



THE *Branch*

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

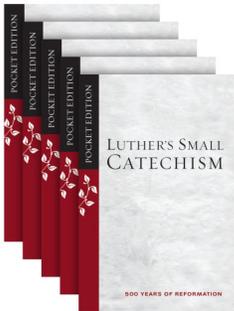
March 2023

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Congregational Catechism class OR if less intimidating: Adult Faith Formation.
Between worship services - 9:30 a.m., on Sunday, Feb. 26, through April 2.

Whatever we call it, I hope it's not at all intimidating, but that it might be a fun and Spirit-driven opportunity for us to return to what many of us likely knew by rote a few moons ago. We will take Luther's *Small Catechism*, along with Daniel Erlander's *Baptized We Live* as our main texts, and we will explore together the broader ideas and maybe a few of the finer points of the great heritage that is ours in the Lutheran tradition of theology. And I promise: no memory work! Just come with your questions, insights, ponderings, and let's look together.



Siblings in Christ,

Grace to you, and peace, as we enter humbly into this season of Lent. Lent is typically the time when we think about giving something up—chocolate, pop, TV, donuts. What if, this Lent, however, you opened yourself to the possibility of picking something up? Perhaps a spiritual practice like morning and/or evening prayer, which can be found between pages 295-331 of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*? Or a Bible study? Or the Sunday morning adult catechism class? Lent is a time not only for

penitence and simplicity, but also an opportunity to deepen your worship, your theology, your reading and praying life. Lent is an invitation to ponder this God who gives us promises that come in the cross—forgiveness of sins and eternal life—and to know that these promises are for you: God's chosen, God's elect.

Lent is a time when, yes, we ponder these mysteries, and it is also a time when we hear God speaking over and over again the promises of resurrection, of newness of life. From the ashes of Ash Wednesday, God, in Christ Jesus, is pleased to bring you, too, from the dead, and into God's wonderful light.

Toward this end of hearing again and again the promises of God, a few new Bible studies are rolling out this month. Amanda Stubbendick is journeying through Proverbs and I will lead a group looking at a companion book, Ecclesiastes. I encourage you to give either or both a roll. Our congregational catechism class on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m., will also provide some fun and refreshing remembrances of confirmation class gone by. We will also be worshiping and breaking bread together on Wednesday evenings from March 2 through March 30. Wednesday evening worship will begin at 5:30 p.m., with supper following at 6 p.m.

Looking ahead to Holy Week, we will have our usual Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunrise and Easter morning worship services. And, this year, let's try a new worship opportunity: a Saturday evening Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil is one of the oldest liturgies in the Christian Church and, in the earliest days of the Church, it was traditionally the time when new Christians (called catechumens), were baptized. In keeping with that

tradition, we are hoping to baptize a few new members of the Body of Christ on April 8. Stay tuned for more information on Easter Vigil.

As I write this, I am just preparing to drop off a whole passel of quilts made by our dedicated quilters at the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. It has been a difficult winter for the Oglala people on the Reservation and these quilts can often make a difference between life and death. The work of our quilters, the work of those who are out making and delivering meals, who are bringing the Word of God to the homebound—these continue to be wonderful works of Christ in this place, North Branch. As a matter of course—as a matter of faith—you are out there living not for yourselves, but for your neighbor. God be praised.

Shalom,
Pastor Adam

Council Corner

January 2023 Meeting

Old Business

Motion was made that the Fair Stand Committee have a line item in the Budget. The Fair Stand Committee will create guidelines as to how it will be operated. A motion was made that the Treasurer move \$5,000 from the Emergency Fund to the Fair Stand Committee, motion was seconded and carried.

Board Reports

Property: The insurance for the church was recently renewed, it has gone up some and the total is now \$15,000

Pastor's Report

19 Pastoral visits, five Tuesday meditations, nine First Communicants, New member welcome class - five new members.



Spring Forward March 12



Leader's Spotlight

Council President

by Josh Stubbendick



We're coming up on one of my favorite times of year as someone who enjoys being outdoors and seeing all of the different parts of God's creation. Farmers will be back in the field soon and the spring migration will be in full swing. From snow geese to tiny little warblers, all

kinds of birds will soon make the long journey back north to begin nesting. Last weekend I took the kids down to the Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge to see the snow geese, there were over 1 million! It is a pretty amazing site to see. Spring is always a time of renewing, from green grass and budding trees to planting crops and baby animals we see new life appearing. The days are becoming longer and we look forward to warm weather and more sunshine. I love seeing the earth renewed during this time.

We are also looking towards Easter during this time, without Christ's death and resurrection where would we be? I think it is fitting that Easter and spring go together, while we see the earth greening up and all of the new life it is a reminder of our new life in Christ that we get to celebrate at Easter. Through Christ's resurrection we are renewed and given new life every day! Even though we are sinful, through God's grace and Christ's resurrection we are made new.

As we begin to see warmer weather and start seeing green grass appearing let that be a reminder that God created you and has given you new life. In Psalm 139 David says "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." We should remember that God uniquely created each of us and we have purpose through Christ. As we look towards warmer days think about what purpose God has for you!



Giving Opportunities

Second Mile Giving

Project	Estimated Cost	Rcvd. to Date
Kiruwani Dispensary	On Going	\$29,560
Rise	On Going	\$ 4,805
Peru Missionaries	On Going	\$ 15,510
2 nd Mile Parsonage Repair	\$17,000	\$13,034.70

Treasurer's Report

Received through January 31: 21,824.09
 Expenses through January 31: 20,500.64
 Budgeted through January 31: 20,485.19

The Coat Drive Continues as long as it's Cold

March may see the end of the cold weather but as long as people continue to drop off donations to the coat drive we'll continue collecting gently used coats and warm clothing. *Young children's, men's (sz. XL+) and women's coats with hoods, and other warm clothing (scarves, mittens and gloves, sweat-shirts, etc.) are in great need.* Thank you to all who have donated thus far. You have shown God's love and provided warmth to those who are in need.

Ways to Give at First Lutheran Church

- Online at firstlutheranavoca.org. Click the eGIVING button at the bottom of website page. Set up one-time or automatically recurring contributions from your checking/savings account or debit/credit card.
- Offering plate at In-Person Worship.
- Mobile app: Search 'Realm Connect' in app store. Download free app and sign in. Tap the Giving icon at the bottom, tap MAKE A GIFT, and follow the prompts. If you don't have an account, contact church office.
- Text NorthBranch and amount of your contribution to 73256. Click link you receive. Follow prompts to give.
- Mail your contribution to First Lutheran Church, 1434 N 30th Rd, Avoca, NE 68307

Youth and Family

Youth Group meeting Wed., March 8 @ 6p.m.

Many thanks to all youth and parents who participated in the Feb. 5 youth ministry introductory meeting. Our next meeting will be **Wednesday, March 8, at 6 p.m.**, following the Lenten midweek worship service. Following worship, you can grab your meal and meet in the room just off the main fellowship hall in the Parish Hall (the one with the accordion door divider).

Again, all youth and parents interested in charting a new course for junior/senior high youth ministry are invited to participate.

Youth Group is Hosting Game Night Sunday March 12th at 5pm.

The Youth Group will be hosting a game night. We will be having food, fun and fellowship and we hope everyone can join us! We will also be collecting donations for Tabitha's Thread, watch the bulletin for a list of needed items, financial donations are also appreciated. We look forward to seeing your competitive spirit on March 12th!



We are excited to celebrate the culmination of the Lenten season with Rise Up with Jesus, a wonderful event about the resurrection of our Lord. We will celebrate Sunday April 2nd from 11:30am to 1pm in the Parish Hall. We would love to share this with our friends, families and communities, so feel free to share an invitation with all.

Offering Funds

Many questions have arisen in regards to the offering funds. We would like to clarify the various funds to aide you in the choices you make each week with your offering envelope or eGiving for First Lutheran Church's missions.

CURRENT FUNDS

This designated money is used for First Lutheran's general expenses including Pastor's salary and pension package (including health care), administrative office expenses, maintenance of our buildings, worship expenses, utility bills, educational materials, and many other miscellaneous operating expenses.

BENEVOLENCE FUNDS

This designated money is shared with our Nebraska Synod ELCA. Mission share with the Nebraska Synod ELCA can: plant and support new and renewing congregations; develop and share new resources, send missionaries around the whole world, support the work of seminaries in raising up new pastors, deacons, and leaders' respond to human need through hunger and disaster ministries; and so much more. Our mission share is divided as follows:

- 54%-Partners at ELCA Churchwide missions here and around the world
- 21%-Nebraska Synod Specific Services and Mission Field Missionaries (Nebraska Mission Field Missionaries, Prison Ministries, Lakota Missions, and other Ethnic Missions)
- 18%-Directly Affiliated Organizations (Human Services, Seminaries, Campus Ministries, Post-Secondary Education, Outdoor Ministries)
- 6%-Nebraska Synod Administrative expense and overhead

Another important piece of the **benevolence** is used by First Lutheran Church to help local organizations (such as Food Pantries, Open Door Mission in Omaha, People's City Mission in Lincoln, Foster Care Closet in Omaha, Mosaic, Lutheran Family Services, Voices of Hope), Redding Peru Mission, Global Missions Water Project, Oaks Indian Mission, Kiruweni Dispensary (a health dispensary in Tanzania), Rise (formerly Defy Venture), Flood & Tornado victims. With yet another portion going to ELCA World Hunger which is a comprehensive program that uses multiple strategies—relief, development, education and advocacy—to address the root causes of hunger and poverty. They respond to neighbors around the corner and around the world. If you wish to donate to any special project, just write the organization name and amount you wish to donate on envelope.

DESIGNATED GIFTS

This money is used for special offerings including our Second Mile giving opportunities such as the special church projects, and our helping hands fund (used to assist needy families in our community). Simply write on the envelope the project you wish to support.

There are also Special envelopes for Christmas and Easter. The Stewardship committee chooses one or several organizations to receive the money in these envelopes. There will be information in the Branch and weekly bulletin on where the money will be sent.

If you forget your envelope and write a check, your money goes to current expense unless otherwise specified on your memo line and any loose cash received is given to benevolence.

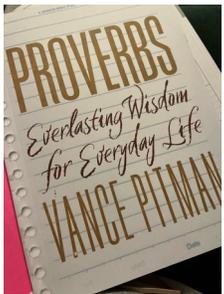
We at First Lutheran Church continue to be very blessed with the offerings we receive, and we hope that you too feel very blessed in supporting our mission work at First Lutheran.



Church News and Events

Women's Spring Gathering March 25

"Let Your Light Shine" is the theme of the 2023 Spring Gathering, the gathering for Southeast Nebraska Conference will be held at Zion Lutheran Church in Pickrell and hosted by area churches. Registration starting at 9:30 a.m. with worship starting at 10:00 a.m. The featured speaker of the day will be Christina Lyons, who has many passions that include Team Mates.



Proverbs Zoom Bible Study

Walk all through the book of wisdom with us Thursday evenings at 8 pm via zoom starting Thursday, March 9th. We will read each chapter of the book of Proverbs and work to apply it to our everyday life.

College Students & High School Seniors Endowment Grant Applications due March 15

The Endowment Fund grant applications for the 2023-2024 school year have been mailed. If for some reason you did not receive one please call the church office immediately. **The deadline to turn in applications is March 15. (No exceptions)**

Thank You!

We were flipping out over Shrove Tuesday pancakes! Thanks to all who turned out to help benefit camperships for youngsters heading to Camp Carol Joy Holling. And thanks to all of our great volunteers for dishing out the truly flippable good stuff!

Pastor Adam

I want to thank all of you so much for the prayers, flowers, cards, visits, food, phone calls and errands run - you truly have been a blessing

God Bless all of you,
Sandy Smith

Prayers of the People

Parker Price and Megan Price (Margaret Stubbendick's granddaughter)...Baby Parker born premature, but gaining weight and strength daily. Prayers of strength and courage for mom, Megan.

Cindy Queen... mother of Beth Jacobson, recovering after an accident.

Linda Brockhoff... recovering from hand surgery.

Nancy Bose... recovering at home.

Michelle Mueller... undergoing cancer treatment.

Tim Peterson... son-in-law of Donna Durrette, recovering from a stroke.

David Hall... father of Amanda Stubbendick, preparing for surgery.

Sandy Smith... recovering from illness at home.

Doris Wiebusch... recovering from a lumbar spine fracture.

Janet Entler... (mother of Marci Gartner) recovering at home.

JoAnn Michel... recovering at home after surgery.

Roxie & Dan Pratt...(Marlene Behling's son-in-law) diagnosed with pancreatic and liver cancer. Undergoing chemo. Pray for Roxie and family as well.

Alan Reed... (Marilyn Kirchhoff's cousin) has brain cancer.

David Dickman...(Mary Jane Carlson's brother) cancer has returned.

Our residents....at Skilled Nursing Facilities.

Change of Address

Jill Nosal

618 Sunrise Ct.

Plattsmouth NE 68048

Praises, Opportunities and Pinches

As a congregation, we are committed to voicing our praises and “not sitting on our pinches”! To be a healthy, faithful community, we need to be open with one another about what we expect in all areas of our life together. If there is anything in our community life that brings you joy or causes you to be concerned, please share your feelings and questions. Thank you for taking the time to communicate about the ways we are doing well in our ministry together at First Lutheran, and areas that need attention.

If you would like a personal response to your praise or pinch, please be sure to sign this form at the bottom

Praises: _____

Opportunities: _____

Pinches: _____

Desired Outcome (Solution): _____

A specific question I would like answered: _____

Name _____ (If you would like a direct response to your Praise, Opportunity, or Pinch)

Please return this form to the Church Office or place in the box in the Narthex

February update: No pinches or praises

The Last Laugh

