



THE Branch

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

May 2024

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Dear Church,
 Recently, I listened to an eight-part podcast titled "The Unmarked Graveyard: Stories from Hart Island." The podcast told the story of New York City's "potters' field" on Hart Island in Long Island Sound, just off the coast of the Bronx. Hart Island is the final resting place of more than one million people who either could not otherwise afford burial, could not be identified at the time of death, or who had no next of kin to claim the body. The cemetery on Hart Island is also mobilized in times of emergency, such as the 1919 Spanish flu pandemic, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, and more than two thousand people were buried on Hart Island during the 2020

Covid pandemic.

Burials on the island are simple. Bodies are placed in pine coffins and stacked five deep in trenches. There are no headstones, only concrete posts marking sections. The burial records are fairly meticulous, stretching back to the first interments of soldiers during the American Civil War. Only in the last year, however, has the public been granted access to Hart Island, and even then, only in a limited capacity to go to a loved one's burial section.

It sounds like a sad story—a million created, beloved souls resting there, many known only to God. Sadder still is the thought that, in life, many of the people buried on Hart Island certainly had a rough go of it: that addiction, homelessness, mental illness, despair overwhelmed them to the point that they died alone, isolated, unwanted, or believing themselves to be unworthy of love, compassion, support. For we who believe in the resurrection life, who have been given faith to know those million on Hart Island are desired by God for eternal life, how might that change our outlook on beloved community? For we who do not grieve as others because we have the certainty of resurrection, how might we think about the lives, even hear the testimony of those buried on Hart Island? How will we greet them, and they us, in the life of the world to come?

Would it move us with compassion to work as the resurrected Body of Christ that we are to see that this life might more closely resemble the life of the world to come—where all are fed, clothed, housed, and seated around the celebration of the unending feast, Jesus at the center? When we think of the day when we shall all be arrayed around Christ's table, made new, of course we will all be welcomed. How can we be just as welcoming as a church with that guaranteed future, to those who so desperately need to eat, to be housed, to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ?

As our Vitality Initiative cohort enters into a new phase—thinking about our neighbors and our community, these are questions we are encouraging everyone to think about, and we will be having more conversations about just this in the near future. But it's always something we as Christians have at the top of our minds. God's peace be with you, now and always!

Shalom,



Memorial Day, Monday, May 27

Flags will be displayed at the North Branch Cemetery

Volunteers are needed to raise the flags at our cemetery.

Flags will be raised Friday, May 24 at 4 p.m.. (rain date Sat. at 8 a.m.)

Flags will be lowered on Monday, May 27 at 8p. (rain date Tue. at 8p)

There will not be a ceremony at the cemetery.



Council Corner

Highlights/ April 2024 Meeting

New Business

- Motion to extend \$500 from Helping Hands to assist residents in need was approved.

Board Reports

Pastor's Report:

- There were 6 new Communicants on Maundy Thursday and they will continue on with training to assist during church services.
- Deacon Timothy Siburg will speak about Stewardship on September 15th.

Christian Education:

- Discussed different options for 1st Communion reception and plans for VBS are underway.

Worship & Music:

- May 26th is the start of one service on Sundays.
- Finding solutions to help fulfill the needs of worship assistants on Sunday mornings.

Property Board:

- Received two bids for mowing.
- Working on sewer line
- Proposing a future grounds clean-up date
- Discussed spraying for bagworms.

Board of Deacons:

- Sabbatical Policy approved
- Discussion of emailing monthly newsletter was well-received.

Youth & Family

- VBS Picnic was discussed to have all families bring a side-dish and main course provided.
- Summer pool party was mentioned along with plans for Halloween that would include a bonfire and hayrack ride.

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

The Little Red Wagon

May: Elmwood Food Pantry Requests

Canned fruit, green beans and assorted jams and jellies.

Reminder: please be sure to check the expiration dates.



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.



Leader's Spotlight



By Renee Nolte

Are you looking for ways to grow in your faith through our church community?

Want to get to know other church members better? Feeling like volunteering might be a way for you to feel more fulfilled, to reach out in love? (Did you catch our mission statement in there?) Here are some ideas:

There are so many opportunities to get involved. You can learn about our various boards by reading the annual report, published each January. Pick up a copy in the Narthex and think about your talents and interests and on which board you might like to serve. Visit with the board directors and members, and with our Vice President, Jeff Panko, who will be looking for your help on a board come fall. Contact Amanda Stubbendick if you can assist in the education of our youth. We also have a men's group (flapjack flipper and handyman), a women's group (cooks/bakers and sewers/quilters), and the OSJ youth group (involvement and fun). All these groups offer wonderful outreach opportunities.

Sunday morning worship could use your help with ushering, reading the lessons, serving communion, and bearing the gifts of the communion elements. Usher guidelines are posted in the narthex, or just team up with someone who has done it before to get comfortable with it. Sign up online or by paper. Contact Jill Nosal with any questions. You can also sign up to bring flowers for the altar. These can be from your garden or ordered from a florist. Flowers can be given for any celebration or remembrance or maybe just because. Sign up on the flower chart and contact Rachel in the church office so she can put your announcement in the Sunday Worship Bulletin, as we would all like to share in your joy!

If you are able, consider assisting with funerals by serving the food, or setting up and taking down chairs and tables. Team up with someone to tackle a spring clean-up project around the property.

There are some really great bible study opportunities every week to help you enrich your faith alongside fellow Christians. Check the monthly calendar for times. And when you pray, be sure to include this small but mighty church in your supplications and thanksgivings.

These are just a few things that come to mind. If you look around, you will surely spot more ways you can lend a hand and become enriched in the process. That's what a thriving, growing, Christian community is all about!

Sunday, May 26, 9 a.m. Summer Worship Begins



Church News and Events

Congratulations to our High School Graduates!

Eva Brammeier
Cassidy Calloway
Ty William Gorton
Reese Stubbendick
Kadyn Sisco



The 2024 Endowment Committee awards Grants to our students

This year, 12 Endowment Grants have been awarded for the 2024-2025

School year. Through dividends paid over the last year on the General Endowment Fund, we are able to award \$600 (\$300 per semester) to each of the 12 students. The Koester Grant is available to a graduating high school senior planning to attend a Lutheran college in Nebraska. This year, the Koester Grant has been awarded to Kadyn Sisco who will be attending Concordia University in Seward. The Grant is for \$5,000.

The list of applicants are as follows:

College Students

Sawyer Brammeier
Jenna Knake
Tucker Crownover
Bailey Boitnott
Lilly Windhorst
Brandon Cavanaugh
Mallory Mueller

High School Students

Cassidy Calloway
Ty Gorton
Reese Stubbendick
Kadyn Sisco
Eva Brammeier



Pictures taken at our Easter services by Deacon, Gary Wockenfuss.



Summer Worship Time starting, May 26!

May 26, our summer worship time will kick in. Beginning that Sunday, we will go down to a single worship service at 9 a.m., which will continue until Rally Sunday, Sept.8.

Zoom Summer Bible Study Book Club! Join us as we start, May 23 8:00 p.m. by reading *Radical* by David Platt, on how American Culture affects the way we see our Christian Faith for good/bad. This will encourage us to dig into these ideas to give us a truly Biblical perspective!

Church News and Events

Vitality Initiative for Congregations Many thanks to those who have shared stories and helped create the video for our first leg of the Vitality Initiative here at North Branch! In the next phase, after we have been pondering who we are as a church, we are thinking about our neighbors. Who makes up the community around us? We are a diverse group! At last look, we have 17 different towns or cities on our postal rolls, and we have young people attending from six different school districts. We cast a wide footprint here at North Branch, perhaps one of the widest in the Nebraska Synod. Going forward, we want to explore what it means to have membership so spread out—what challenges and what opportunities we might have with that diversity. And North Branch has a pretty good foothold in those communities, helping to provide food, clothing, and other assistance. We will continue to be asking you all to participate and provide feedback on identifying our neighbors and how we can best serve them as the Body of Christ.



Bible Studies Continue!

Our Thursday evening study looking at the Book of Acts continues at **5:30 p.m.** Join us for this rip-roaring adventure through one of the Bible's most exciting—if least talked about books. Acts is the story of the very earliest days of the Church, after Jesus's resurrection and ascension.

Come and have a look at how "The Way" of Jesus spread! **Sunday mornings between worship services at 9:30 a.m.**, our congregational catechism class also continues to meet. We are exploring the book A Lutheran Toolkit by Ken Sundet Jones. All are welcome!

Our Men's Group is also still meeting at 7:30 a.m. on Thursday mornings. We usually do a word study in the Hebrew Bible and get down to some good conversations about what God is up to in our lives and the life of the world.

The Midmonth, Midday, Midweek Bible Study is also going strong. We will meet again on **April 30 at 1 p.m.**, and then set our May date at that time. Join us as we are currently looking at different aspects of Creation and how they speak to us of God and God's design.



Ascension Day Worship, May 8 We will celebrate Jesus's Ascension with our siblings in Christ from St. John's in Otoe and Luther Memorial in Syracuse on **Wednesday, May 8,**

at 7 p.m. This is one day earlier than the Ascension festival, but it just works better for all our church members, given coming graduations and other celebrations. Luther Memorial in Syracuse will host this year's Ascension Day worship service. All are welcome!

Youth and Family Events



Please join us Sunday May 5th between services to say thank you and to fellowship together as we wrap up another wonderful year of Christian Education! We would like to invite the congregation to join us in thanking the teachers and volunteers that make Sunday School possible.



If you are a mom, you have a mom, or you just like muffins we hope you'll join us on **Sunday May 12th** between services to celebrate the moms and mother figures in our lives and our congregation.



We are going to have fun that is OUT OF THIS WORLD at VBS this summer! This program is open to all youth in our community ages 3-12. This is a great opportunity to invite your friends

and neighbors to join us at church. We will play games, do science experiments, experience Bible stories and sing songs that help us learn how we can shine the light of Jesus in the world! Register online by using the QR code, registration closes May 15th. We are asking for a \$10 donation per child to help cover the cost of lunch but not required to be able to attend. We can't wait to see you there!



Help Needed with VBS!

Are you looking for ways to help with VBS? THANK YOU! Our amazing VBS program wouldn't be possible each year without our generous church family. There are 3 big ways you can

help us prepare...

1. PRAY! Check the VBS table in the Narthex for specific prayer requests or just pray for us, the Holy Spirit knows what we need
2. DONATE! We have a list of supplies we need to help VBS go off without a hitch, we have an Amazon wish list (https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/279MS9ZZ303FM?ref=wl_share) there will be a list of items on the VBS table in the Narthex or we always welcome monetary donations to help cover costs of materials and food.
3. VOLUNTEER! We are still looking for a couple of volunteers to join us for the week of VBS if you want to join us for the fun please reach out to Amanda Stubbendick. THANK YOU! VBS wouldn't be possible without your prayers and support.

Home Sweet Home

After being in Lima for two months surrounding Derek's birth, we were all happy to get back to our own house. We did show The Jesus Film to the whole village the week of Easter. It isn't available in their specific language dialect but there is one that is close enough for them to understand. Most of them had never seen a movie before and we know that their hearts were impacted by what they did see. Milton and Jonathan (below) have been sharing bible stories along with our co-worker Joel. Over the past year, we have seen incredible change in Milton's life and immense spiritual growth. He has taken on a leadership role in the church preaching and now he is sharing the gospel in other villages. THIS is what gets us excited and THIS is why we are here! All glory to God!



Jared preached on Easter Sunday, He explained in detail the crucifixion. As he was talking, the people were completely silent and no one made a sound.



A Note of Thanks

We'd like to thank everyone for the special offering given during the recent Lenten and Easter services. These funds have been designated by our Stewardship board to two of our local schools, Elmwood-Murdock and Weeping Water. Because of your generosity, we are able to donate nearly \$700 to each school to help reduce their outstanding lunch balances for local families!

Mr. Knippelmeyer, superintendent at Elmwood-Murdock, said at the end of the school year they will review delinquent lunch accounts and determine where the money is most needed. This includes children who qualify for free and reduced lunch, but still have a remaining balance and also families who are experiencing a hardship in the community.

Mr. Reiman, superintendent at Weeping Water public school, added that this money will be very helpful for their nutritional services program and support many families in need.

Please watch for future special offering opportunities as we'd like to also give money to Syracuse, Conestoga, and Eagle schools to assist with their delinquent lunch funds.

God's blessing to each of you from the Board of Stewardship and Social Ministry

We wish to thank our church family for all you have done for us throughout the past year.

Pastor Klinker for all of his prayers and visits. At the time of Ralph's passing for all of the prayers, memorials, flowers, cards and food. The women of the church for taking care of the lunch served after the service. All was very much appreciated. Don't know what we would do without all of you.

Again, we thank you!

Linda Brockhoff, Mark, Steve, and Brian

Thank you, ALL, who made and served each of us a beautiful, tasteful Easter breakfast! You did an outstanding job!

Margaret Stubbendick

Thank you, thank you, to all who donated to the winter clothing drive, you have been a blessing to many! Your generosity included 442 articles of winter gear and clothing, some of which were 108 coats and 81 stocking caps for children!

First Lutheran Stewardship Committee



Giving Opportunities

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	\$9,731

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

Received through March 31: \$58,858.91

Expenses through March 31: \$53,079.62

Budgeted through March 31: \$59,513.30

Thank you for your ongoing, thoughtful giving.

GO AND...

What does it mean to be church? The Holy Spirit is moving and blowing through, with, and for God's people. To Go and... means we pray, listen, share our story, serve with neighbors, ask, be honest, be present, rest, have the conversation, be intentional, tell the story, and be the church. Everybody has something to offer - Let's Go!

Questions to Consider:

- If you overheard someone talking in the grocery store about your congregation/ministry site, what do you hope people are saying?
- Use your imagination! What is your big dream for your congregation? (No limits!)
- What gifts, talents, and expertise do you hold and how can you share?
- I am going to Go and be church by _____.

Prayer: Holy God who gathers and sends us, we give you thanks for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Equip us, give us language to proclaim the Good News, and empower us to GO forth into the world. Amen

Suggested Song: Go to the World (ACS 991)

Learn More at www.nebraskasynod.org

BE CHURCH