



# THE Branch

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

NOVEMBER 2023

## HIGHLIGHTS

<b>Council Corner</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Giving Opportunities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leader's Spotlight</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Church News &amp; Events</b>	<b>3-4</b>
<b>Stewardship Updates</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Synod "Go And..."</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Advent Devotional &amp; Bible Studies</b>	<b>6</b>



Dear Church,

An old coach of mine once said: "Ninety percent of life is just showing up." And how you show up, Church!

If you have been receiving this newsletter for a while, then you know what kind of place North Branch is. It is a place where gratitude is overflowing, where service to neighbor is unending, where the promises of God are reflected in every word, gesture, act, and encounter. It is a place where all one needs to do is ask and the answer comes flowing back in love and compassion, in prayer or praise, sympathy or empathy, or even in sweat and money. This past month has shown us all what God has wrought

in this place, just by showing up.

Faced with two large funerals—for Brad Berner on Oct. 20 and for Verneel Noerrlinger on Oct. 21—so many people stepped to the front to help the families in a time of great grief. Visitors to our church at both funerals were moved by the overwhelming display of this compassion—wondering where all this food and service came from. All I could say was the truth about who you are: "That's the Body of Christ in motion in this place, just showing up."

At this moment, we have a funeral survey out gauging the talent and time of the congregation and already, we are seeing exactly what we expected: just about everybody at North Branch is able and interested in helping to serve or make food for funeral luncheons or assist in funeral worship.

In last month's newsletter, when we broke the news of a budget shortfall, so many of you—and many of you, anonymously!—delved deeper into your giving and we are making headway on meeting that deficit.

For nearly 150 years now, that's how this congregation has been meeting and serving its neighbors, here in the congregation and in the wider community. This is a place where people are truly excited to serve, to see their siblings in Christ on Sunday morning and throughout the week, to engage with the wider world as the Body of Christ.

There is—as there always has been—something special going on here at North Branch. The movement of the Holy Spirit to animate this Body of Christ continues to blow like the ever-present wind here on this hill. And we want you—all of you reading this newsletter—to be a part of it. I encountered several people this week who approached me with downcast eyes and frowns who said it had been some time since they'd last been in church. My answer is always the same, the answer I'm sure all of you would also give: you are always welcome here without shame, without reservation, without judgment. Just come. Just show up.

If you're reading this newsletter and it's been "a hot minute" since you were last here at church, we all want you to know that whenever and however you come through the doors here, you will be received with nothing but joy and excitement. If you haven't been to a Bible study in some time, you can drop into any one of the studies we have going on, anytime, and we'll be so delighted to have you. Just come. Just show up.

Just show up. You might be surprised by what more comes.

Shalom!

**Come Give Thanks**  
**Wed., Nov. 22 at 7:00 p.m.**



Our Thanksgiving Eve Worship with Holy Communion celebration will set the tone for a blessed, fulfilling Thanksgiving Day. Be sure to attend. The Thanksgiving Eve offering will go to our local food pantries.

### Church Directories Have Arrived!

All families/individuals who took a picture or submitted a picture will receive a copy, find yours with your name on it in the Church Narthex.

There is a limited supply of extra copies. For those who did not take or submit a photo there are extras available upon request, contact the Church Office.



## Highlights / September 2023 Meeting Old Business

- o The Cass County Fair Stand made enough to pay for the building and supplies. The money leftover will be used to fund the stand for 2024.

### New Business

- o Received bids to fix the driveway in front of the church.

### Board Reports

#### Pastor's Report:

- o The Vitality Initiative for Congregations will meet with the Synod for 18 months. There are 8 people from our congregation on the committee.
- o Funeral Committee met and is assessing future needs and volunteers for funeral planning.

#### Education

- o Confirmation and reception will be on Oct. 29.

#### Youth and Family

- o Trunk or Treat to be held again this year.

A complete set of the minutes is available at the kiosk in the Narthex.



## Giving Opportunities

### 2nd Mile Giving

Project	Estimated Cost	To Date
Global Health Ministries	On Going	\$20,645
Peru Missionaries	On Going	\$17,566
2nd Mile / Shed	\$20,000	\$9,531

### Treasurer's Report —

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

Received through Sept. 30: \$149,386.25  
 Expenses through Sept. 30: \$160,018.89  
 Budgeted through Sept. 30: \$174,031.58

September offering was enough to cover the month's expenses and slightly decrease our shortfall. Please prayerfully consider what you can provide towards our current fund, as the shortfall as of Sept. 30 is \$10,632.64.

### 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.



## Vice President

By: Jeff Panko



*Colossians 3:17*

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

As we enter the time of year when we reflect on all the things we are thankful for, what we have been given, and start to give back, there is much to be thankful for in our church.

I know I am thankful for the youth and how much energy they show. The youth and their leaders have been expanding their roles and involvement in the church. Thank you.

As the year has progressed and our needs have changed, we have had many people step up in various roles to fulfill those needs. Thank you.

During this time of year we have the opportunity to donate to the food drive and help others enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal with their families. Many of you will donate to these food needs. Thank you.

As the Christmas season approaches there will be families who need our help to purchase presents for their family, and many of you will give generously and shop for them. Thank you.

There are so many ways to give and help others during this time and throughout the year. Through these opportunities we can share our thanks by giving.

We all have our own unique ways in which we can give and show our thanks. Showing appreciation and thankfulness is always loved by those who receive it and can be so meaningful to those who give. No matter how you show your thanks during this time, it will be valued. Thank you.



### Update Contact Information

Do you need to update your contact information? If you've been missing the emails or calls from the church we probably don't have your correct information. Please update your contact information with the Church Office, [office@firstlutheranavoca.org](mailto:office@firstlutheranavoca.org) or 402-275-3300.





## Church News and Events

### A Note of Thanks

#### Thank you, Tom Brammier!

Many thanks to Tom Brammier, who built for us a very handy table rack that resides in the Parish Hall utility closet. The rack has already come in handy for a number of occasions and we look forward to its use for many years to come. Thank you, Tom, for your talent and time!

#### Thanks to Steve Schutz!

Thank you, Steve, for your help in taking down old trees and branches in the north grove. We are grateful you put your talents and arborist education to work for us here at North Branch! The grove was ready to go for Trunk or Treat.



### Upcoming Events

#### All Saints Sunday is Nov. 5

All Saints Sunday will be celebrated in the worship services on Nov. 5. We celebrate our sainthood that begins when we are received into God's kingdom of grace in Holy Baptism and that is fulfilled when the Lord takes us to Himself in heaven.



We will memorialize the following members of First Lutheran who entered eternal rest in the past church year: Paul Kirchhoff, Jonna (Emshoff) Hubbard, Hank Dettmer, Allen Hauschild, Louise Bauer, Verneel Noerrlinger, and Brad Berner.

We will also celebrate the sainthood of the following who were baptized in the past year: Lydia Stubbendick, Evelyn and Emmett Schliefert, Waylon Henne, Clara and Wesley Nutzman, Nora Behling, Korver Fischer, and Theo Buchholz.

#### Women's Group Baked Potato Bar & Bake Sale, Nov. 12



The Women of the Church will be hosting a Baked Potato Bar and Bake Sale on Sunday, Nov. 12 from 10:00am-12:30pm. Come and enjoy a baked potato with all your favorite toppings and grab some baked goods to take with you. Enjoy great fellowship as we support this fundraiser for the Women of the Church. There will be a free-will donation taken for the baked potato bar that will go toward all the ways the Women's Group supports our church and community.

### Updates

#### New Members

Welcome to our new members Randy & Donna Mehlin of Weeping Water and Justin, Morgan, Dawson, & Leah Nolte of Nehawka.

#### Wedding

Congratulations to Shayeton Knake and Micki Vice who were married at First Lutheran on Saturday, Sept. 9.

#### Funerals

*Our sympathies to the families and friends who have recently lost a loved one.*

Brad Berner (64) died on Oct. 16 and was laid to rest on Oct. 20.

Verneel Noerrlinger (85) died on Oct. 15 and was laid to rest on Oct. 21.

#### OSJ Installation

The Order of Saint John (OSJ) members were installed and commissioned at both services on Oct 22.



#### Women of the Church - Outreach Committee Meeting, Nov. 19

The Outreach Committee of the Women of the Church will host a short meeting on Sunday, Nov. 19 at 9:15 a.m. for the purpose of year-end fund disbursements. We invite all women to join us in the Parish Hall for fellowship and refreshments. Hope to see you there!



#### Girls Night Out - Meal Prep, Nov. 19

On Sunday, Nov. 19 we will be hosting another freezer meal party at the Parish Hall. If you're interested in joining us for girl time and a chance to stock your freezer, let Amanda Stubbendick or Marci Gartner know. More information to come!!





## College Student Goodie Boxes

### Pick up during Thanksgiving Break Services

Please have your donations to the designated box in the Church Narthex by 10 am **Sunday, Nov. 19.**

The Women of the Church will assemble goodie boxes to send to our **11** college students. Contributions of candy, gum, school supplies, and other goodies for the boxes are needed.

Families of College Students, we plan to have these boxes available for pick up during the Thanksgiving Eve or Sunday worship services that weekend.

For any that need to be mailed, you may also help by giving a cash donation to help defray postage costs.

*Please keep in mind that the boxes are 6 in. x 6 in.*

Donation ideas:

- Popcorn
- Gum
- Beef Sticks
- Nuts
- Candy Bars
- Suckers
- Hard Candy
- Pens
- Fruit Snacks
- Post-its
- Tootsie Rolls
- Hot Chocolate Packets
- Coffee/Cappuccino Packets



## Online Signup for Worship Assistants Coming Soon

Be on the lookout for an online version of our signup sheet for Worship Assistants. We will still have a paper version sitting out 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. You will also notice that there are more options to participate in our worship service. We are adding Gift Bearers for wine and bread. The people who signup for these spots, their only task is to bring forward the wine and bread when the ushers bring forth the offering. Thank you for your willingness to help us with our worship service.

Sign up to  
**SERVE**

## Survey Time: Funeral Service Assistants

If you have an email address on file with the church, you should have received an email with a link to a brief survey gauging where our congregational talents and willingness to help serve are for funeral luncheons. Please complete the survey as you are able. If you didn't receive the link, there is a paper copy available at the church as well or you can contact the Church Office to get the link. You only need to complete the paper copy or the electronic version. Thank you!

**TAKE THE  
SURVEY**

A blue poster for an Immanuel Christmas Event. At the top is a large yellow eight-pointed star. Below it, the word 'Immanuel' is written in a white cursive font. Underneath that, in a smaller white font, is 'God is with us'. Below that, 'Christmas Event' is written in a white serif font. Then 'Sunday Dec. 17th' is written in a white serif font. Finally, '11:45am-1:00pm' is written in a white serif font. At the bottom of the poster is a yellow manger with a scalloped top edge.

## Save the Date - Christmas Event, Dec. 17

Soon we will be celebrating the birth of our Savior. One of the names we know Jesus by is Immanuel, which means God with us. This year as we travel to Bethlehem we'll get to discover the ways Jesus, was and is Immanuel. Come join us Sunday, Dec. 17 from 11:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall for this fun and meaningful Christmas experience!

## Youth Milestones Program

The education board will be introducing milestones for our youth beginning in January. These milestones will help our youth build a strong foundation for their faith and it will provide support for families to fulfill the baptismal promises you made as you walk this journey with your youth. We hope these milestones will provide fun and meaningful opportunities for you as a family to have conversations about your faith. Please be on the look out for more information.



# A Season of Thanks & Giving

## A Note from the Stewardship Board

Jesus reminds us to always serve others and here at First Lutheran, we are so blessed to be part of such an amazingly giving congregation. It's obvious we love to serve!



With the holiday season quickly approaching, this is our time to continue to serve by helping our community with items they need. The Stewardship committee would like to ask for your continued support by filling the Christmas Express to help families with their holiday meals. The local food pantries have expressed how appreciative they are of our continued outpouring of support, so the offering from the Thanksgiving Eve service has been designated to our local food pantries this year.

*1 Peter 4:10—Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

## Food Pantry Donations

As the food pantries begin preparing for Thanksgiving, the Syracuse and Elmwood food pantries are looking for food or monetary donations to help provide a Thanksgiving meal to families in need. Please consider adding a few of these items to your shopping cart to make a donation. Donations are needed by **Sunday, Nov. 12**. Food needs include:



- Green Beans
- Cream of Mushroom Soup
- Dry Milk
- Boxed Stuffing Mix
- Chicken Broth
- Instant Mashed Potatoes
- Chicken Broth
- Canned Sweet Potatoes
- Marshmallows
- Canned Pumpkin
- Evaporated Milk
- Canned Cranberry Sauce

Monetary donations for grocery gift certificates and the purchase of perishable items and turkeys are also needed.

## Thanksgiving Eve Special Offering

The offering taken during the Thanksgiving Eve worship service will go directly to our area food pantries (Syracuse and Elmwood).

## Coat & Mitten Drive

The Stewardship Board will be holding 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
- Coats
- Scarves
- Sweatshirts
- Mittens & Gloves
- Heavy Socks



## All Aboard the Christmas Express!! Arrives Sunday, Nov. 12!

This Christmas season, we are collecting for the Good Samaritan Home, the food pantries, and also supporting local families in need.



We will be working with Tabitha's Thread to help make Christmas special for youth in Cass and Otoe Counties. They provide clothes, toys and a stocking filled with goodies. Your donations will be greatly appreciated. The train chugs down the track on **Sunday, Dec. 3 after services**. So please deliver your donated items to the train cars before it leaves the station.

To support a child with a gift, here is what you do:

- 1) Take a tag off the tree in the Narthex
- 2) Purchase the suggested gift
- 3) Securely fasten the tag to the UNWRAPPED gift
- 4) Return the tagged gift to the train car on or before the morning of **Sunday, Dec. 3**.

OR take a stocking sheet that is in the Narthex and purchase the items listed and return in a bag.

If you have questions please contact Kelly Stephenson at 402-639-1043 or email [kellyannlamb@yahoo.com](mailto:kellyannlamb@yahoo.com).

## Sharing the Holiday Spirit!

Every year, as winter approaches, the excitement around Christmas grows, but for some children, that is not the case. We would like to make Christmas a little more special for area children in Otoe and Cass Counties this year through the Gifts for Kids and Tabitha's Thread organizations.

Our the OSJ plans to go shopping for as many children as possible that are in need on **Sunday, Dec. 10**, and we would love your help in raising funds to support their efforts. You may designate your gift on your offering envelopes, send a separate donation to the Church Office with details, or make a donation in the box in the Narthex. Thank you for helping us with this meaningful opportunity to bring some Christmas to those in need.



## Good Samaritan Center Donations

- Hand & Body Lotion
- Combs & Brushes
- Lap desks
- Easy board games
- Stationery
- Slipper socks with gripper feet
- Greeting cards, any occasion / Postage Stamps
- Walker pocket keepers/wheelchair pocket keeper
- CD's (polka, big band, Christmas)
- Books with different word games
- Shawl or cardigan (no pullover)
- Men's after shave or cologne / ladies perfume
- Sun catchers (that stick to window with suction cup)



## From the Nebraska Synod ELCA

# GO AND...

At the Nebraska Synod Assembly, a year-long focus was launched to "Go And..." Be part of this call to GO. During the Synod Assembly, they taught how to lean

in as God's people called, gathered, and sent to "Go And..." The Synod created a year of intentional themes around this focus.

November's is Go And...*Be Honest*. Engage in honest conversations with those around you. When we are honest with others and honest with ourselves we can have deeper connection in our relationships with others and with God.

# GO AND...

Honesty requires vulnerability, awareness, and a willingness to really listen. Assumptions and half-truths can lead us to misunderstand the situation and story. What does reconciliation mean as we strive to move from places of misunderstanding? God calls us to be honest. Sometimes, that may look like lament and confession, and other times hymns of praise and gratitude.

### Questions to Consider:

- What is a time you didn't tell the whole truth... or were not honest?
- What piece of history should you/could you explore with a lens of honesty?
- In what way are you being dishonest in your life?
- GO and express gratitude by saying thank you to someone who deserves it.

**Prayer:** Reconciling God, we ask for forgiveness for the times we have not reconciled our differences and acknowledged the hurts and wounds we have caused. Amen.

**Suggested Songs:** Amazing Grace (ELW 779) & Be Present at Our Table Lord

Learn More at [www.nebraskasynod.org](http://www.nebraskasynod.org)

BE HONEST

## 2023 Advent/Christmas/Epiphany Devotional: Writer's Needed!

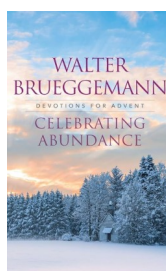
Be on the lookout for a signup for the 2023 North Branch Advent/Christmas/Epiphany Devotional. Last year, we had about 20 members who participated in writing devotions for the Advent season.



This year, Advent is a little shorter, but we will write devotions through Epiphany, Jan. 6. The theme this year will call on memories of Advents and Christmases past. For instance, you might be asked to write about a beloved Christmas gift you got once. Or, a feeling you had looking up into a dark winter sky. Or, a memory you have of a Christmas meal or a snowfall or Christmas caroling. The list will go up soon and we hope you will join us in providing a devotion during the coming season!

## Bible Studies

### Thursday evening Advent Bible Study



The Thursday evening Bible study at 5:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall will turn to an Advent theme on Nov. 30. We will take as our text Walter Brueggemann's *Celebrating Abundance*, a set of studies and devotions for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. The book will be available by Thanksgiving.

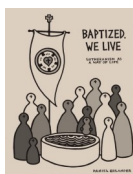
### Thursday Zoom Bible Study Advent - The Weary World Rejoices

Join us via Zoom on Thursdays, starting Nov. 30 at 8pm for this 5-week bible study on Advent, why we celebrate it, and how it fuels our worship of Jesus. Understand the anticipation and waiting the Old Testament world endured. And experience the joy of new life signaled by the coming of Christ, and the way Advent points to the glory of God still to come.



Signup in the Church Narthex or reach out to Amanda Stubbendick if you are interested.

### Congregational Catechism



The all-congregational catechism class led by Pastor Adam takes place between services at 9:30 a.m. in the Church. We will be using the booklet by Daniel Erlander, *Baptized, We Live*, and Ken Sundet Jones's book, *A Lutheran Toolkit*, as our text. See Pastor Adam if you do not yet have either book. 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. All are welcome to join!

