



# THE Branch

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

OCTOBER 2023

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### Affirmation of Baptism, Oct. 29

Five intrepid North Branch youth will undergo the rite of Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation) Sunday, Oct. 29 at the 10:30 a.m. worship service. We look forward to celebrating with Maddox, Izzy, Tristan, Cale, and Hadyn with a reception between worship services in the Parish Hall, starting at 9 a.m.

At that time, the confirmands will present their faith-sharing projects and give a brief description of what they've done. Please come and celebrate our young people in this significant moment in their faith journeys!



*As a reminder, Oct. 29 is also Reformation Sunday so be sure to wear red!*



Dear Church,

I thank my God every time I remember you, knowing the Holy Spirit has brought us together for such a time as this!

Over the next few months and years, you may be hearing even more about how the Spirit is leading us to be the Body of Christ to one another and to our wider community. This past month, a group of North Branch members have been invited into a Nebraska Synod program called the Vitality Initiative for Congregations (VIC). Over the next two years, we will be meeting monthly with churches around our Synod and pondering how and where God is calling us next.

God's mission has a church, **not** God's church has a mission. And in that spirit, the VIC is going to help us, as a thriving, giving, rural church, to listen to the Spirit's guiding and leading. How is God using this church to further God's mission? During the first meeting of the cohort of nine churches from throughout the Synod, we were asked to think about, if we were the Nation of Israel just released from bondage in Egypt, where would we be in our journey to the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey?

My answer is that we are about halfway through walking on the dry land of the parted Red Sea. With a new pastor and new opportunities like the Cass County Fair Stand, a growing youth and education program, and a congregation attracting more families—we are marveling at these walls of water that God has pushed to either side of us and giving thanks for seeing this day. And, we are also excited about what wonders are to be found on our successful crossing.

In the weeks and months ahead, you will be hearing more about the VIC, and we will be seeking your prayers, meditation, and input as we all listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, pulling us into the Body of Christ, and animating our journey to a Promised Land overflowing with love of neighbor and service. In the meantime, I ask your prayers for the VIC team: Morgan Brunsting, Justin & Marci Gartner, Chuck Gubbels, Teresa Lorensen, Jill Nosal, and Josh & Amanda Stubbendick. Thanks to all for their service!

We look forward to this experience as our church—which has been abundantly blessed—passes on our blessings to other churches, our community, and also learns where we go from here.

This month, we look forward to welcoming new members with informational and orientational meetings on Oct. 8 & 15, and a reception of new members in worship on Oct. 22—more information inside!

Also, we rejoice with our confirmands who will receive the rite of affirmation of baptism on Oct. 29: Hadyn Berner, Tristan Sisco, Cale Stephenson, Izzy Stubbendick, and Maddox Stubbendick. More information on confirmation activities is on this page.

As this harvest season is upon us, may God be with all the farmers and agricultural workers in our community. Help us to share in this bounty that is the Lord's, and to lift up all those in need. Keep the laborers of the fields safe, O Lord, and bring us together for a great Thanksgiving!  
Amen & Shalom,



## Highlights / August 2023 Meeting

### New Business

- o Air Conditioner repairs were partially covered under warranty
- o Three new ovens were donated and replaced in the Parish Hall

### Board Reports

#### Pastor's Report:

- o Confirmation to be held Oct. 29

#### Treasurer

- o Parsonage repair funding is complete
- o July offering was short from expenses

#### Education

- o Rally Sunday on Sept. 10 along with Bible Blessing

#### Witness & Fellowship

- o Will be ordering sweatshirts for this fall

#### Worship & Music

- o Preparing for two worship services starting Sept. 10

#### Stewardship & Social Ministry

- o Coat drive to take place in Oct.
- o Thanksgiving food drive will begin in Oct.

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

## Giving Opportunities

2nd Mile Giving		
Project	Estimated Cost	To Date
Global Health Ministries	On Going	\$20,420
Peru Missionaries	On Going	\$17,481
2nd Mile / Shed	\$20,000	\$9,261

### Treasurer's Report —

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

Received through Aug. 31: \$130,552.98  
 Expenses through Aug. 31: \$142,217.07  
 Budgeted through Aug. 31: \$154,694.74

Offerings given to the general fund continue to fall short of expenses each month, creating a growing shortfall, which is \$11,664 as of Aug. 31.

### 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.



## President

*By: Josh Stubbendick*



It has been an exciting year in our church this year! So far in 2023 we have celebrated one year with Pastor Adam and family, we had our largest VBS ever, and successfully served lots of pies at the Cass County Fair. We have a lot of exciting things happening and I'm looking forward to seeing where God leads us in this next year.

You may have noticed in the bulletin or in the newsletter that our expenses have been outpacing our giving in 2023. We've had a lot happening over the last year or two that has contributed to more expenses. We've called a full-time pastor, have an active Sunday School program, and many other things happening in our church. As of our last council meeting, we have about a \$12,000 deficit between giving and expenses in our current fund. Unfortunately, this deficit has continued to grow each month in 2023. In our discussions at council, it has been brought to our attention that with so many newer and younger members it would be good to go over what each category on the offering envelopes means. You'll notice that there are three categories on our envelopes. Far left is Current, middle is Benevolence, and the right column is for designated giving. Below is a summary of what each of those categories means:

**Current:** This is giving that stays within our church and goes to our "current" account that is used to pay expenses for the church.

**Benevolence:** This money is paid to the Synod for administrative expenses and other programs within the Synod.

**Designated:** This column is used to designate your giving to a specific place. This can be used for outreach that we support (i.e. missionaries, Lutheran disaster relief, local food pantries, fair stand, etc.) or for 2<sup>nd</sup> Mile Giving such as our ongoing shed project.

Our church council has been looking closely at our expenses and trying to help lower those any way that we can. Last month we were able to speak with a few vendors to lower monthly bills. We've all been feeling the effects of inflation and higher costs this year. We have always had such a generous congregation that has supported our church. I am asking us all to pray about our church as a whole and our personal giving and see where God moves each of us in the next year.

I am so proud of everything our church has accomplished in the last year and how much outreach we have done in our communities and am looking forward to seeing what God does with our church as we go forward.



## Church News and Events

### A Note of Thanks

I would like to thank everyone for the cards, kind words and best wishes for my *last* retirement. It has been wonderful to serve our church and our Lord over the last 30 years. Thank you, Pastor Adam, for the prayers and blessing during worship, your words were very special. As Garry said that day, there was never a day that I said I wish I didn't have to go to work. Thank you again to all of you.

*In Christ's love, Barb*

### Upcoming Events

#### Car Wash Fundraiser, Oct. 7

The OSJ will be having a car wash fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 7 from 2-6 p.m. in the Church parking lot. This will be a free will donation, with proceeds going to their upcoming mission trip to Puerto Rico.



#### Craft Night, Oct. 15

We will be having a craft night on Sunday, Oct. 15 at 4 p.m. for anyone who would like to make a fun fall craft (see picture). If you are want to participate, please RSVP to Marci Gartner at 402-430-8324 so that we have enough supplies. The cost to participate will be for any supplies, but we will be working to keep that cost under \$10. Join us and feel free to bring a friend as well!



#### Trunk or Treat, Oct. 29



Please join us on Sunday, Oct. 29 following the second service (around 11:45 a.m.) for trunk or treating!

We would love to have as many trunks as possible for the kiddos to visit. Be on the look out for a Sign-up

Genius link or contact Alison Hein.

There will be hotdogs, chips, and drinks to enjoy as well!

### Bible Studies

#### Zoom Bible Study

#### Grateful - Giving Thanks to God in All Things



Join us via Zoom on Thursdays, starting Oct. 26 at 8pm for this 4-week bible study about cultivating gratitude as part of your everyday life.

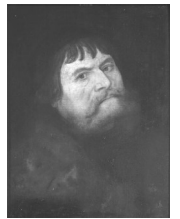
Each week will look at a profile of someone in the Bible with a grateful heart, find teaching from Scripture on gratefulness, focus on a psalm of thanksgiving, and be encouraged to practice gratitude.

Sign up in the Church Narthex or reach out to Amanda Stubbendick.

#### Bible Study

#### The Painter of the Reformation

Martin Luther's theological work was earthshaking, we all know. But in an era when not everyone could read or fully grasp the concepts Luther was writing, how did he get the message across? Enter Lucas Cranach the Elder, a court painter, an apothecary, a mayor of the city of Wittenberg, whose canvases helped bring forward Luther's message to a wider audience.



This study led by Pastor Adam will look at Biblical stories and also Lutheran theology through Cranach's brushstrokes. This study meets on Thursdays until Advent. All you need is a Bible! Join us for a fun and informative visual and textual study on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall.

#### 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 "Baptized, We Live" by Daniel Erlander as our text. See Pastor Adam if you do not yet have the booklet. All are welcome to join!





# More Fair Stand Updates

## Fair Stand Fun Facts

**Our Church is Awesome!!** Our congregation really stepped up and made our first year at the Cass County Fair a success. The building is paid for and we are already looking forward to next year. All of your contributions, whether by way of prayers, making, baking, cooking, grilling, preparing, or serving food, cleaning before or after, monetary donations, volunteering or buying our “left-overs”, all are greatly appreciated!!

**Thrivent Funds** helped the Fair Stand Committee by saving us \$3,250 toward expenses. A big shout out and thank you Thrivent Members!

**Keep Cass County Beautiful** had grant money that helped us use compostable materials such as forks, knives, cups, plates and more. Their final statistics showed 3,050 pounds of recycled and composted material that did not go into the landfill this year. This includes 1,040 lbs. of bottles and cans, 820 lbs. of cardboard, 150 lbs. of glass, 60 lbs. of plastic films and 1,000 lbs. of compost (food waste and compostable dinnerware). By using their program and Thrivent Funds, we were able to help our environment and decrease our compostable material expenses by more than \$1,500.

**It Takes a Village!!** We had tremendous help from so many... ranging from the Methodist Churches in Weeping Water and Elmwood, Cheerleaders, our Youth Group, individuals and families working together, Mick with his trailer, donations for a new refrigerator and 3 new ovens, professional caterers LuAnn and Annette, Pastor Adam and his family, businesses such as Bloom Where You're Planted and Round the Bend Steakhouse, guidance from our vendors/suppliers, and so many more I've probably forgotten to mention (our apologies). To all of you, we are grateful and applaud you.

**We did it!** We are happy to report that we exceeded expectations in sales. After paying for the fair stand and paying our expenses, we had a profit of over \$6,000, which will allow us to prepare for 2024.

Respectfully,  
The Fair Stand Committee

*Alan Brockhoff, Dennis Knake, Cathy Calloway, Diane Reuss, Cindy Drake, and Pastor Adam*



## 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. October's is Go And...Ask. Asking questions might sound like such a simple thing, but it is one of the most important skills in life. Questions also help us engage in meaningful conversations, build trust, and develop relationships. What questions are you seeking to understand this month?

# GO AND...

In a world that is shifting and changing, we have come to recognize the importance of asking good questions. Good questions come from intentional listening and a willingness to engage with the unknown. God, Jesus, prophets, disciples, crowds, and Martin Luther all asked questions. As followers of Jesus, we are called to wrestle with questions, which do not always result in clear answers.

### Questions to Consider:

- What big questions are on your heart and mind?
- What is a question you are afraid to ask?
- What would you add to Martin Luther's 95 Theses?
- What is a 'GO' question as you engage in conversation?

**Prayer:** Knowing God, what are you asking of me? Amen.

**Suggested Song:** Ask the Complicated Questions (ACS 1005)

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

# ASK

## New member information and orientation sessions, Oct. 8 & 15

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 Oct. 8 and 15, following the 10:30 a.m. worship service (around 11:45 a.m.). For 60-90 minutes, we'll have some lunch, casual conversation, a look at Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, and answer any questions you might have about our congregation or tradition.

On Oct. 22, 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!



*gathered together*

"Most of life's great moments — the ones that resonate in our hearts and minds — involve other people,"

writes John C. Maxwell in *Today Matters*.

"Rarely do we experience these times alone. And even when we do, our first inclination is to share them with others."

Maxwell then poses this challenge: "Think back to the most important experiences of your life, the highest highs, the greatest victories, the most daunting obstacles overcome. How many happened to you alone? I bet there are very few.

When you understand that being connected to others is one of life's greatest joys, you realize that life's best comes when you initiate and invest in solid relationships."

## North Branch Facebook Page

As a reminder, the Facebook page for First Lutheran was moved. Please "unlike" and "unfollow" the old page, which was hacked, and go to <https://www.facebook.com/FirstLutheranNorthBranch/> to like and follow the new page. Thank you and sorry for the inconvenience!





# Lutheran World Relief Kits of Care

## A meaningful way to make a difference

In 2022, through the generosity and caring of our brothers and sisters in Christ, members of First Lutheran donated to LWR:

- 30 Personal Care Kits
- 51 School Kits

There were also 121 quilts made and donated to several shelters and LWR.

Let's make it a personal challenge to better these numbers for this year! Now is a good time to make purchases since school supplies sales are now going on as well as frequent bath towel sales.

This project is a great opportunity to count our blessings and share with those who have so little! Please drop off kit supplies in the clear tote located in the Narthex.

**The deadline to donate items is Oct. 22**



## LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF



**Personal Care Kits**  
Provide much-needed self-care and critical germ fighting tools.

**School Kits**  
Equip a child with the supplies they need to keep learning even in a crisis



**Mission Quilts**  
Express love to those who are driven from their homes from disasters or war.

### Personal Care Kits

"When LWR distributes Personal Care Kits, it's often to people who have lost everything. In the wake of an earthquake or having fled from violence as their homes were overtaken, they clasp a towel from a faraway place, with a bar of soap, a toothbrush...and washing up, they know that they have not been forsaken by the world. The simple gesture of giving a Personal Care Kit can give someone the encouragement to start anew, starting with a bath!" What to include:

- 1 light-weight bath-size towel (between 20" x 40" and 52" x 27"), dark color
- 2 bath-size bars of soap
- 1 adult-size toothbrush
- 1 sturdy comb (remove packaging)
- 1 metal nail clippers

### School Kits

"Why school supplies? To the children who receive School Kits, these supplies mean the difference between getting an education or not. Public school is usually free, but in the places where LWR works, even a few required supplies, like pens and paper, may be more than many families can afford. And when parents can only afford to send one of their children to school, girls rarely get priority...yet the education level of mothers has the biggest impact on development." What to include:

- 4 70-sheet notebooks (8" x 10 1/2") No loose-leaf paper
- 1 30-centimeter ruler, or a ruler with centimeters on one side and inches on the other
- 1 pencil sharpener
- 1 pair of blunt scissors
- 5 unsharpened #2 pencils with erasers
- 5 black or blue ballpoint pens (no gel ink)
- 1 box of 16 or 24 crayons
- 1 2 1/2" eraser

