

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church & School

711 & 805 W 5th St., Neillsville, WI 54456

Member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

*“I am the Good Shepherd.
I also have other sheep...
I must bring them also,
and
they will listen to my voice.”*

Easter 4/Good Shepherd Sunday

Mission Fest

April 21 & 23, 2024

"Welcome Visitors & Members!"

To those who are visiting us for the first time, we extend our sincere welcome; to our friends who know us we renew our welcome; to those who seek a church home we invite you to be part of our family and enjoy fellowship with our Savior.

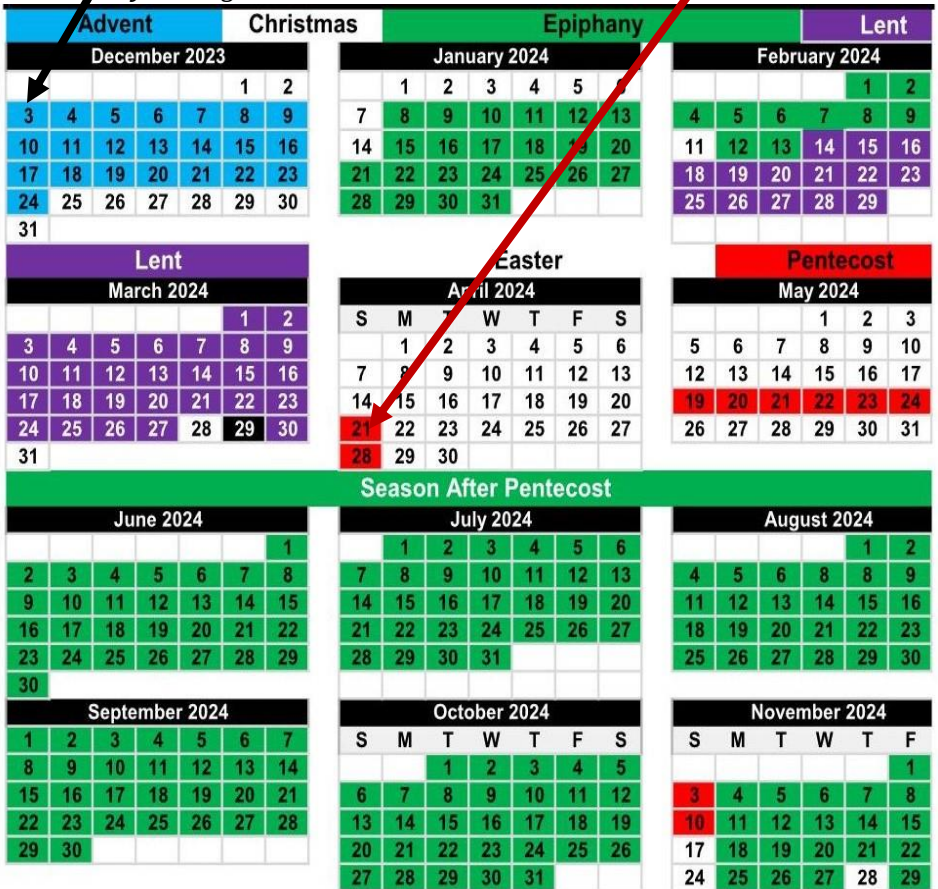
For further assistance in worship and information on our church, please see the back cover.

Easter: St. Paul writes, "Christ has *indeed* been raised from the dead". The resurrection is not legend. It really happened. Easter is not just a holiday. Easter is history. The reality is: Jesus is exactly what he claimed to be—the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, and Jesus' resurrection proves that "all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The reality of the resurrection does not just change our future, but the way we look at life now.

Today is Easter 4. Our focus today: Resurrection Reality: A risen Savior makes for a Good Shepherd

The church year begins here 2023

We are Here



935 All Glory Be to God on High CW 21



1 All glo - ry be to God on high and thanks for all his
2 We praise and laud and wor - ship you; we give you thanks for -
3 O Je - sus Christ, the on - ly Son, be - got - ten of the
4 O Ho - ly Spir - it, our de - light and source of con - so -



fa - vor; no harm can touch or ter - ri - fy a child of
ev - er, O Fa - ther, for your rule is true and just and
Fa - ther, your sav - ing death has made us one with God and
la - tion, pro - tect us from the dev - il's might thro' Je - sus,



God for - ev - er. God shows his good and gra - cious will and
chang - es nev - er. With bound-less pow'r, your might - y reign ful -
with each oth - er. O Lamb of God, to you on high in
our sal - va - tion, who by his death up - on a tree has



grants his peace, the world to fill; all strife at last has end - ed.
fills what - ev - er you or - dain; Lord, grant us ev - 'ry bless - ing!
our dis - tress we sin - ners cry: have mer - cy on us, a - men!
res - cued us from mis - er - y: to this we hold for - ev - er.

Text: tr. Lutheran Service Book, 2006; Nicolaus Decius, c. 1485–after 1546

Tune: attr. Nicolaus Decius, c. 1485–after 1546

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Tune: Public domain

Service of The Word CW 93

- M:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.
- C:** **And also with you.**

CONFESSION OF SINS

- M:** We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.
- C:** **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting in Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**
- M:** God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.
- C:** **Amen.**
- M:** In the peace of forgiveness, let us praise the Lord.

481:2,4 Alleluia! Let Praises Ring CW 21



2 Al - le - lu - ia! Let prais-es ring! Un - to the Lamb of
4 Al - le - lu - ia! Let prais-es ring! Un - to our tri - une



God we sing, in whom we are e - lect - ed.
God we sing; blest be his name for - ev - er!



He bought his Church with his own blood, he cleansed her
With an - gel hosts let us a - dore and sing his



in that bless - ed flood and as his bride se - lect - ed.
prais - es more and more for all his grace and fa - vor.



Ho - ly, ho - ly is our un - ion and com - mun - ion;
Sing - ing, ring - ing: ho - ly, ho - ly, God is ho - ly;



his be - friend - ing gives us joy and peace un - end - ing.
spread the sto - ry of our God, the Lord of glo - ry!

Text: tr. The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941, alt.; Geistreiches Gesang-Buch, Darmstadt, 1698, abr.

Tune: Philipp Nicolai, 1556-1608

Text and tune: Public domain

PRAYER OF THE DAY

M: O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



THE WORD

First Lesson: Acts 20:28-32

²⁸“Always keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. ²⁹I know that after my departure savage wolves, who will not spare the flock, will come in among you. ³⁰Even from your own group men will rise up, twisting the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be always on the alert! Remember that for three years, night and day, I never stopped warning each one of you with tears. ³²“And now I entrust you to God and to the word of his grace, which has power to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Psalm 23

CW 21 Psalter

Refrain

The LORD is my shep - herd,
I shall not be in want.

Tone

The LORD is my / shepherd,
I lack / nothing.
He makes me lie down in green / pastures,
he leads me beside quiet / waters,
he refreshes / my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his / name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no / evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they / comfort me.

The LORD is my / shepherd,

I lack / nothing.

He makes me lie down in green / pastures,

he leads me beside quiet / waters,

he refreshes / my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his / name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no / evil,

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they / comfort me.

Refrain

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my / enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup / overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days / of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for- / ever.

Glory be to the Father and / to the Son

and to the Holy / Spirit,

as it was in the be- / ginning,

is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain

Tune: Dale A. Witte

Setting: Dale A. Witte

Music: © 2002 Northwestern Publishing House. Used by permission: OneLicense no. 716538

Second Lesson: 1 John 4:1-6

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and is already in the world. ⁴You are from God, dear children, and you have overcome the false prophets, because the one in you is greater than the one in the world. ⁵They are from the world. That is why they speak from a worldly perspective and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God. The one who knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. That is how we can distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Verse of the Day: John 10:14

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia!



C: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!



These words are writ - ten that we may be - lieve that



Je - sus is the Christ, the Son of God.



Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!

Gospel Lesson: John 10:11-18

¹¹"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired man, who is not a shepherd, does not own the sheep. He sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. ¹³Because he works for money, he does not care about the sheep.

¹⁴"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me ¹⁵(just as the Father knows me and I know the Father). And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again. This is the commission I received from my Father.

C: Praise be to you, O Christ!

The image shows a single line of musical notation on a five-line staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is common time (C). The melody consists of the following notes: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. A slur is placed under the first three notes (G, A, B). The staff ends with a double bar line.

552 *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* CW 21



1 The King of love my shep - herd is, whose
2 Where streams of liv - ing wa - ter flow, my
3 Per - verse and fool - ish oft I strayed, but
4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill with



good - ness fails me nev - er; I noth - ing lack if
Sav - ior gent - ly leads me, and where the ver - dant
yet in love he sought me and on his shoul - der
you, dear Lord, be - side me, your rod and staff my



I am his, and he is mine for - ev - er.
pas - tures grow, with food ce - les - tial feeds me.
gent - ly laid and home, re - joic - ing, brought me.
com - fort still, your cross be - fore to guide me.

- 5 You spread a table in my sight,
a banquet here bestowing;
your oil of welcome, my delight;
my cup is overflowing!
- 6 And so through all the length of days
your goodness fails me never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise
within your house forever!

Text: Henry W. Baker, 1821–1877, alt.

Tune: Irish, 18th cent.

Text and tune: Public domain

SERMON TEXT: John 10:11-18

IN ALL THINGS, DEPEND ON THE GOOD SHEPHERD!

- 1. He provides blessings for your needs.**
- 2. He sends servants for his church.**

APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

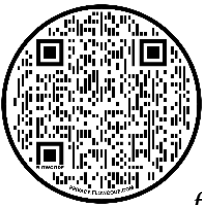
The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

**and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
almighty.**

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**



OFFERING & WELS CONNECTION--*The members of St. John's have joined together to do the Lord's work in this community and around the world. Guests need not feel obligated to participate in this offering which supports our ministry, but please use this QR code to fill out a short form giving us a digital record of your*

attendance.

Visitors can also sign our guest register in the entryway by the drinking fountain.

PRAYER

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another. Serve the Lord with gladness.
The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.



C: A - men. A - men. A - men.

551 Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep CW 21



1 Je - sus, shep - herd of the sheep, who your
2 In your prom - ise firm we stand, none can
3 By your blood our souls were bought, by your
4 Fa - ther, draw us to your Son; we with
5 We, in robes of glo - ry dressed, join th'as -



Fa - ther's flock does keep, safe we wake and
take us from your hand; speak— we hear— at
life sal - va - tion wrought; by your light our
joy will fol - low on till the work of
sem - bly of the blest, gath - ered to e -



safe we sleep, guard - ed still by you.
your com - mand, we will fol - low you.
feet are taught, Lord, to fol - low you.
grace is done, there to live with you.
ter - nal rest in the fold with you.

Text: Henry Cook, 1788–1868, alt.

Tune: Friedrich Fillitz, 1804–1876

Text and tune: Public domain

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This Week at St. John's: Apr 21, 2024

SERVING US TODAY

Greeters: Lynda Urban & Tonia Urban

Ushers: Team 3-Dick Urban's team

Altar Guild: Pat Strangfeld

Donating Bulletins: Ken & Jean Goetz for Ken's 90th birthday on April 9th

Donating April Website: Henry & Julie Berry

SERVING US NEXT SUNDAY

Greeters: Marilyn Shaw & Alice Glinski

Ushers: Team 4-Rex Roehl's team

Altar Guild: Judy Quicker

~OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW & SERVE~

TODAY

9:00 AM Mission Fest Worship Service

10:00-12:00 Fundrive Item Dropoff

10:15 AM Mission Fest Presentation

No Sunday School or Bible Class

11:00 AM Picnic Lunch

Youth Group Bake Sale

Fundrive Item Dropoff

MON-SAT

TUESDAY

6:00 PM Worship Service

WEDNESDAY

8:20 AM Chapel

3:45 PM Confirmation Class

THURSDAY

6:30 PM Choir

FRIDAY

6:00 PM Science Fair

NEXT SUNDAY

9:00 AM Confirmation Worship Service

Gr. 4-8 sing

10:15 AM Sunday School & Bible Class

Worship the Lord with Gladness:

Last Sunday: 118

Tuesday: 2

Worship with Our Care of God's Wealth:

Thankoffering Given Last Sunday:

\$8,007.30 (Home); \$482.00 (Missions)

Needed per week for Home: \$8,400.00.

CHURCH NEWS

Spring Mission Fest: Our spring Mission Festival is today. Professor Jacob Behnken, Dean of Chapel and Professor of Music at Martin Luther College, is our guest preacher and will be giving a presentation on MLC after the worship service in the gym. We thank him for being with us and look forward to hearing his message to us.

Our Day Camp staff will be providing a picnic-type lunch after the presentation (hamburgers, hotdogs and extras). We hope many of you can stay and enjoy learning more about MLC and also enjoy extra fellowship with each other.

To give everyone a chance to enjoy the presentation, there will be no Sunday School or Bible Class today.

Bake Sale: Our Youth Group is having a bake sale today. Proceeds will go toward costs for attending the International Youth Rally this June in Colorado. Enjoy the opportunity to pick up something yummy and donate to a good cause!

FUNDrive Item Collection: You can drop off your items for the FUNDrive collection starting today 10:00-noon. A trailer is here in the parking lot, along with volunteers to assist you. We will be collecting items all week; please see below for more details.

FUNDrive: Clear your clutter for a cause! Please bring your bags and covered boxes of unwanted household items to the collection trailer in the St. John's Lutheran School parking lot. Regular collection times are:

Sunday, April 21 from 10:00-12:00

Monday, April 22, through Friday, April 26, 7:30 a.m. - 8:15 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Friday, April 26 from 4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 27 from 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Proceeds help make our original school bathrooms handicap accessible!

If anyone is need of large garbage bags, we have some extras available in the church entryway, as well as extra sheets giving details on the item collection and drop off.

We Are Collecting Clothes

men's, women's, & children's clothes, coats, shoes, scarves, handbags, wallets, fashion accessories, belts, backpacks, etc.

Household Textiles

bedding, comforters, blankets, sheets, towels, linen, tablecloths, curtains, pillows, etc.

Small Household Goods

kitchen items (such as pots/pans, dishes, silverware, glasses, serving pieces and hand-held appliances), home decorative items, knick-knacks, toys, games, and small electronics

Books & Media

*paperback, magazines, hard cover - all genres; *media needs to be boxed separately *no encyclopedias or text books*

Please use bags for clothes and textiles and tightly pack boxes of small household goods. Separate books from household goods and media. All items must be clean and in sellable condition.

Boxes: *If anyone is in need of cardboard boxes to pack items for the FUNDrive, we have empty boxes both here at church and at school. If you are in need of boxes, please talk to our church custodians or Linda Biebert, or stop at school during the school day.*

Tuesday Worship: *If you know someone who isn't able to attend worship today, remind them about our Tuesday evening service, which is held at 6:00 p.m.*

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU: St. John's Outreach Survey: *Fellow members who we see regularly, fellow members who we sadly have not seen for some time, friends who are visiting our church, or families who are using our elementary school and early learning center, we want to hear from you and value your input in this short survey. Thanks for participating!*

To access this short survey go to the link:

<https://shorturl.at/jlZH4> or scan the QR code.



Several hard copies of the survey are on the table in the entryway for those who do not have computer or cell phone access.

LIGHTS: *The LIGHTS meeting, which was canceled this past week, has been rescheduled for Monday, May 6th.*

Science Fair: *Our Science Fair will be held this Friday, April 26, at 6:00 p.m. in the school gym. Grades K-8 will be participating. All are invited to come and view the students' projects.*

Confirmation Sunday: *Two of our 8th graders will be confirmed during the worship service next Sunday, April 28: Mason Anding and Seth Kaiser. Grades 4-8 will be singing during that worship service as well.*

Bulletin Board: *Is there someone who would like to take over updating the bulletin board by the drinking fountain in the church entryway? Call or see Pat Strangfeld if interested, as she has some supplies you might want to use.*

Call Returned: *"Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ at St. John's,*

Four weeks ago, Megan and I received calls to teach at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Beverly Hills, FL and to be their principal. As we once again go through this deliberating process to see where we can serve best, according to our gifts and talents, we are humbled that God uses us to do such an important task of spreading His Word.

The good Lord always has a purpose for what he is doing and His timing is not always what we expect. Having calls this late in the school year meant that one congregation would be left scrambling for what to do at the end of the call season, which is today [last Sunday]. While we talked to many people in both congregations two things became clear to us- there are amazing outreach opportunities for us to potentially be a part of in Florida and there are amazing outreach opportunities for us to be a part of here in Neillsville. We often times take the little things for granted around here. Both congregations are being blessed tremendously by the Holy Spirit and more people continue to be brought to faith through the hearing of God's Word. This call was a chance for Megan and I to take a breath and appreciate that here.

We have decided to return the calls to be teacher and principal at St. Paul's and will continue to serve the Lord here in Neillsville alongside all of you.

I want to thank everyone for the comments that have been made to both Megan and myself throughout this process. Please continue to keep us in your prayers while we carry out God's work according to His will here at St. John's with all of you.

May God continue to bless His ministry in every place. To Him be ALL the glory!

*Thankfully Serving in Christ,"
Mike and Megan Allard*

ELC Position Open: *Our Learning Center is still looking for someone to fill an opening beginning this summer. Summer hours are very flexible. By next September we will be needing a full-time aide to work in the Toddler Room with ages 1-3. Must be at least 18 years old, organized, a good communicator, and ready to share Jesus's love with little ones! Previous experience working with children is great but not required. Please consider this for yourself or those whom you know. Stop by the school office or contact Megan Allard 715-937-7535 or preschool@stjohnsneillville.com if interested.*



Math Bowl: *Congratulations to our Math Bowl team! They took first place at the Math Bowl at St. Mark of Eau Claire on Friday, April 12. Team members were: Natalie Boon, Noah Wilke, Carter Hannasch, and Jesse*

Backaus. Noah also took first place in the individual competition. Great job kids!!



Pine Car Derby: Thank you to everyone who participated in the Pioneer Pine Car Derby and chili cook-off. Congratulations to: Caleb Anderson-1st place; Kenaniah Thell-2nd place; Wren Thell-3rd place; fastest looking car-Atticus Thell; most realistic car-Jordyn Allard; best designed

car-Addie Allard. Congratulations also to the Allards for the winning chili-chocolate chili!



Student of the Week: The student of the week is Jackson Schruth. Jackson is in 7th Grade. He has been working hard all year and has shown great improvement in setting a good example for his classmates, gets his work done on time, and usually has that work done well.

Congratulations Jackson!

Ascension Day Worship: Our Ascension Day worship service will be a joint service with Immanuel, Globe and St. John's, Christie. The service will be held here. (Offerings given in your special Ascension Day envelopes will be split evenly between home and missions.)

Time Change: We have been hearing, especially from families with young children, that a 6:00 evening worship service time would work better than 7:00. After approval from our church council members, Pastor Wilke, and our Altar Guild leader (about the supper), we have decided to move the Ascension supper time to 5:00, with the worship service at 6:00.

We thought this would be a good way to test the time change. We will discuss this at our semi-annual meeting in July, and if voters are in approval, we will plan to have all evening services (Lent, Ascension) at 6:00 p.m. going forward, with the meals beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Hospitalized: Jane Zank has returned home. Let's keep her in our prayers.

Intramural Softball: Students in grades 4th-8th will be playing each other during the afternoon recesses throughout the weeks until the end of the year. Remind your child to bring his/her glove. Thanks to Pastor Wilke for setting this up and being our umpire.

Music, Lit, & Skit Night-5/16: Our annual Music & Literature Appreciation Night will be held on Thursday, May 16th, at 6:00 p.m. in the main part of the church.

What kind of show will it be? We would like to have singers, piano players, and other instrumentalists, but we'd also like to broaden the show to involve people who may not be musically inclined. We are also looking for people who may want to read an excerpt from a favorite book, or read a poem they've written, or act out a skit...The list is endless. There are no "prizes" involved; we just want to share our God-given talents with each other and have a fun evening.

Graduation Sunday-5/19: Students in grades K-8 will be singing for our Graduation worship service on Sunday, May 19th. The service begins at 9:00 a.m. In a special ceremony during the worship service, our 8th graders will be receiving their diplomas.

Last Day of School-5/23: Our last day of school will be **Thursday, May 23. That is a half-day only.** We will have a closing chapel service that morning at 8:20, to which all are invited. We will have a picnic lunch at **11:00**, to which all parents are also invited, and school will dismiss after lunch.

We will be providing hamburgers and hotdogs for lunch. If you are planning on joining us, please bring a dish to pass. Thank you!



New Member: In case you didn't get to meet them last week, here is a picture of our new member, Rachael Lindberg, her husband Travis, and their daughter Ada Mae, who was baptized last Sunday. We welcome them!

Please Keep In Your Prayers: Please keep the family of Luke Harder, who passed away last week, in your prayers. We ask God to comfort the family with His abiding presence and remind them of His precious promises, such as this: **"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.**" (Isaiah 54:10)

WELS Weekly Prayer: Lutheran Schools – Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, you encouraged your disciples to let the children come to you. We praise you that more and more people have continued to seek out Christian education for their children. If it is your will, continue to increase enrollment in our schools. Provide opportunities for pastors, principals, teachers, parents, and all believers to be your witnesses through personal connections and other outreach efforts. For schools where enrollment may not be increasing or where other struggles may arise, give encouragement and hope that our gospel ministry is about faithfully teaching your saving Word to precious souls as you give opportunity. Amen.

Thank you Received: "Dear Friends in Christ, As a congregation you have a lot with which to concern yourself. There are salaries, utilities, and mortgages to be paid. You have worship services to plan, Bible classes to attend, and church activities calling for your participation. Yet, you found a way to provide a generous recent gift of \$88.00. Thank you.

We have come a long way since Christian Life Resources was formed in May of 1983. We have seen the issues explode, morality decline, and lives perpetually at risk. By God's grace the members of St. John's Lutheran Church have insisted on trying to do something about it. Your gift is a testimony to your resolve.

Please continue to pray for the work of Christian Life Resources. Pray for unborn lives to be protected. Pray the preservation of the Christ-centered family. Pray for the preeminence of the Gospel, so that in all these issues, we are always pointing to Christ for salvation.

Thank you so much for your gift. You financially help this ministry, touch countless lives, and demonstrate a partnership that is a great encouragement for all of us on staff.

God bless you.”

*Pastor Robert Fleischmann, National Director
Mrs. Brittany Jahns, Donor Relations Associate*

Please feel free to make use of counseling or other resources provided by Christian Family Solutions. Their website is:

<https://christianfamilysolutions.org/>

April 16, 2024

COP April 2024 meeting summary

The WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) met in April for its spring meeting. Among the items discussed or decided were:

- The COP reviewed the vacancy situation for pastors and teachers. The number of vacancies continues to rise gradually. Assignment days in May will help relieve the situation somewhat, but the problem will continue for the foreseeable future. The COP received a progress report from the Ministerial Recruitment Task Force, which will be making proposals to address the need for more workers.
- The New Teacher Induction Program and the Pastor Partners Program provide mentoring to newly assigned teachers and pastors for the first three years of their service. The cost to congregations has been \$1,000 per year and has not been increased for some time. To more adequately cover the cost of the program, the COP determined that, starting in 2025, the cost will be \$1,500 per worker.
- The COP was informed that a more thorough process for vetting non-MLC-trained teachers has been developed. The process will include evaluations of professional competency, background checks, pastoral recommendations, and district president interviews. Final details are still being determined.
- The COP reviewed the current calling process and made no changes to the current guidelines. The COP will continue discussing this issue at future meetings.
- The COP received a report from the committee planning the synod's 175th anniversary celebration in 2025. The committee has produced a pictorial history of the synod and updated the existing book on the synod's history. It is working on developing special video presentations and providing worship and Bible study resources for a synodwide celebration of the anniversary in the fall of 2025.
- The COP was pleased to learn that 96.7 percent of WELS congregations submitted their statistics for 2023 and 99.1 percent submitted Congregation Mission Offering subscriptions for 2024. The COP is grateful for this high level of participation.
- The COP issued the following divine calls:
 - ▶ Melanie Giddings was called to serve full time as the coordinator of the new synod K-12 religion curriculum.
 - ▶ Ryan Busman was called to serve as a Christian giving counselor for the Western Wisconsin District.
 - ▶ Nathan Cordes was called to serve as a Christian giving counselor for the south Minnesota District, the Nebraska District, and the Dakota-Montana District
- The COP will continue to monitor the issue of congregations that are discussing merging or closing. As a part of the COP's desire that these decisions are

made in an orderly and legal way, the COP is updating the comprehensive guidelines that can help congregations in this process.

- The COP continued its work on the pastoral brief on the doctrine of the roles and men and women. The brief will be released and distributed as soon as it is completed. Similarly, the COP received an update from the committee addressing justice and critical theories.
- The COP discussed a proposal to make some changes to the procedure for nominating and electing synod officers. A final proposal is expected to be discussed at district conventions this summer.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder ☩

Gospel Hands helps for worship

A new website called Gospel Hands is now available from WELS Special Ministries. This resource, produced by the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH), aims to share the gospel and better tell the message of Jesus to all who are deaf.

Gospel Hands provides videos of interpreters demonstrating the signs for more than 700 religious words and concepts, including a contextual sentence and a Scripture reference, if applicable. In addition, each sign is demonstrated from the front and the side. The signs are listed alphabetically and searchable by category.


Gospel Hands is the culmination of a three-year project by the committee. Back in 2003, the MDHH produced a book of religious signs for interpreters called *Sign to the Lord a New Song*. But knowing that a printed book of religious signs is no longer practical, the MDHH utilized the blessings of technology to record sign videos for this new website. Committee members collaborated on choosing the signs and context for each word.

Mrs. Verna Weigand, a religious sign language interpreter and a long-standing member of the MDHH com-

mittee, has been involved in Gospel Hands from the beginning. She is thrilled about this new resource and also appreciates that churches have become more open to using interpreters in worship and providing other resources like words on AV screens, hearing loops, and printed sermons for those with hearing loss. "It's really important that [those with hearing loss] know congregations will assist them and not just say, 'We don't offer that here,'" she says.

Weigand, a member at Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis., notes that Gospel Hands is growing as new resources, like videos of signed worship services, continue to be added. Mrs. Susan Willems, a member at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis., is thrilled about this expanding resource because it helps her and her family members share their faith with her one-year-old nephew, Parker, who has been deaf from birth. "We learn sign language so we can include Parker in every aspect of our family," she says. "You also never know when the opportunity will present itself to share Jesus with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing."

Because it's estimated that 85 to 90 percent of those with hearing loss don't attend church because of a lack of religious resources for them, Rev. Joel Gaertner, director of the Commission on Special Ministries, knows what a valuable faith resource Gospel Hands is. "The work to put together an online religious sign language dictionary demonstrates the dedication of the members of the MDHH committee to provide as many resources as possible to help share the gospel with the deaf and hard of hearing community," he says. "It's wonderful to see how they are using technology to make this website possible."

Learn more at gospelhands.net and find additional resources at wels.net/deaf-and-hard-of-hearing. 

A ministry partnership in Europe

How can WELS best reach and serve all its members across Europe? This question brought together a cohort in Munich, Germany, during the first week of April.

Rev. Joel Gaertner, director of WELS Commission on Special Ministries, and Mr. Paul Wolfgramm, Military Services Committee chairman, traveled to Germany for two weeks over Easter where they visited different places where the chaplaincy does ministry; attended the annual European Easter retreat held by the Military Services European chaplaincy; and also met with Rev. Luke Wolfgramm, Europe team leader; his wife, Jennifer, Europe team integrator; Rev. Rob Weiss, European civilian chaplain; and his wife, Rachel.

The WELS European Chaplaincy has been serving WELS military mem-

bers and civilians across Europe for more than 50 years as a ministry of WELS Military Services, which is part of WELS Special Ministries. More recently, a new opportunity for mission work has emerged. In recent years, many members from WELS' sister churches around the world have been moving to the U.K. In response to this opportunity, WELS World Missions planted a new mission field in the U.K. in 2022. Rev. Michael Hartman was called and Rev. Conifer Berg was assigned to begin serving the group already gathering in London, connect with contacts from other sister church bodies, and launch outreach efforts.

The representatives from WELS Military Services met with Luke Wolfgramm, the team leader for World Missions in Europe, to discuss how the group of WELS pastors working abroad can best serve all WELS members living across Europe.

Gaertner says, "The biggest thing is making sure that we provide the opportunity to serve as many people as possible in Europe and in England with Word and sacrament."

The group plans on meeting regularly to evaluate how it is working together. Gaertner says, "There's going to be communication between Conifer Berg on the London team and Rob Weiss, the European chaplain, when we find out there's a military person there. They will determine how the spiritual needs of that member can best be met. The big point is we will continue to serve them, but it will be based on where they're located in England—whether the Europe team serves them or is it better for the European chaplain to serve them."

Members in the military and their families are encouraged to go to wels.net/refer to be put in contact with WELS

Military Services. Civilians moving to England can contact Rev. Conifer Berg to notify the ministry team of their desire for Word and sacrament. ☩

Ministry retreats offer opportunities for growth

About 160 pastors and wives met in San Antonio, Texas, April 3–5, for the annual Celebration of Ministry retreats. Hosted by Grow in Grace, the institute for continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., these retreats offer Bible study, workshops, and plenty of opportunities to interact with fellow classmates for pastors celebrating 3, 10, 25, and 35 years since graduating from the seminary.

That interaction is a pivotal part of the retreats. “No one can understand the joys and challenges of ministry and be able to encourage you in that ministry as someone else experiencing the same things,” says Rev. Brad Wordell, director of Grow in Grace.

Rev. Michael and Rachel Hartman, who serve in London and the United Kingdom, attended the retreat as part of the 25-year celebration group. “I very much appreciated the Bible studies directed toward the ministry milestone we were celebrating,” says Rachel. “It was a neat chance to reflect on the past and look to the future, remembering God’s promises and the confidence he gives us in our daily lives to keep moving forward.”

Outside of opening and closing worship, the groups met separately, concentrating on topics that affect them

at that particular time in their ministry. This year, for the first time, they also all gathered for cross-generational, round-table discussions. “The younger generation could hear how the Lord has blessed those who have been in ministry a long time, how he has done his saving work through them, and how he carried them through difficulties,” says Wordell. “Those who are older were also blessed to see the gifts and the zeal of the younger pastors and their wives and to have the peace of knowing that God is continuing to raise up faithful servants for our churches.”

These retreats are just one part of the continuing education offered through Grow in Grace. The institute also provides a formal continuing education program, resources such as articles and newsletters, and a mentoring program for new seminary graduates. “God’s Word doesn’t change, but the world that we live in changes and how ministry gets done changes,” says Wordell. “We want pastors who are continuing to learn and to grow.”

The retreats offer that opportunity, along with a chance to unplug and reflect. “You can see it on their faces that this is a blessing to them,” says Wordell. “It’s an uplifting retreat that sends pastors and their wives back to their congregations with a renewed zeal to do what God has called them to do.”

Learn more about Grow in Grace at wisluthsem.org/grow-in-grace. ☩



To sign up for the e-mail version, visit wels.net/together.

To assist you in worship:

- ✚ Personal listening devices are available for anyone to use. Please talk to the ushers for assistance.
- ✚ Large-print bulletins available in the entryway.
- ✚ Personal Prayers: Red Hymnal (pp. 10-11); Blue Hymnal (inside front cover)
- ✚ Preparation for Lord's Supper: Red Hymnal (p. 156); Blue Hymnal (pp. 295-296)
- ✚ Luther's Small Catechism: Blue Hymnal (pp. 286-293)

We love seeing young children in church as we want families to worship together. We also love to hear children making a "joyful noise to the Lord." If you need some privacy for feeding an infant or changing a diaper, please make use of our parents' room off the north side of the entryway where you can still listen to the service.

Visitors, if you would like to know more about our church or school, please introduce yourself to our pastor. He would be delighted to speak with you and serve you in whatever way he can.

St. John's Lutheran Church & School 711 & 805 W 5th St., Neillsville, WI 54456

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Facebook (school): www.facebook.com/stjohnshornets/

Worship Schedule

Sunday-9:00 a.m. (Year-Round)

Tuesday-6:00 p.m. (After Easter through November)