

ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH MESSENGER

CALLED TO WORSHIP / COMMITTED TO SERVE / CONNECTED IN FAITH

February 2022

A monthly Publication of
St. John Lutheran Church

Worship Schedule

Saturday night
worship at 6:00 p.m.
In Gathering Area

Sunday Worship 8:00 a.m.
In Person Worship or Watch
Live on Facebook

9:15 a.m. Worship Service

9:15 a.m. Sunday School

Pastor

Pastor Mark Johnson

Office Staff

Rae Fimon
Audrey Zellman

Treasurer

Robin Fink

Custodians

Curt & Cheryl Johnson

Organist

Eileen Hanlon

Accompanist

Sheila Schmidt

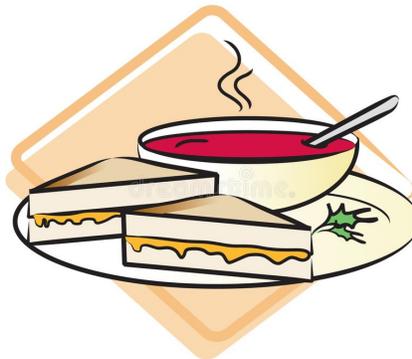
148 S. Chestnut St.
Belle Plaine, MN 56011

952-873-6492
office@stjohnbelleplaine.org
Web: stjohnbelleplaine.org



Ash Wednesday Service
March 2, 2022
6:30 p.m.

Lenten Services
Wednesday Evenings
March 9 thru April 6, 2022
6:30 p.m.



We will be having a
Soup and Sandwich Meal
During the Lenten Season
Serving starts at 5:30 p.m.

Watch for the menus in next
months newsletter.

From Pastor Mark

Ps. 131: But I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at it's mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul

Ps. 46:10: Be still, and know that I am God...

I Kings 19:12 ...And after the fire a sound of sheer silence. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his mantle about his face...

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils...

Contemplative Prayer. What is it? When we think about prayer, we often have the idea that prayer is talking to God. And it certainly is that. I know that, sometimes, when I am praying with someone and ask if they would like to pray it is not too uncommon to hear, "I don't really know how." And I respond by saying, "Just talk to God as you would a friend. And you can be completely honest, because God already knows what is on your heart. And sometimes, that can be hurt and frustration and disappointment and anger. And it is O.K. to express those things as well. This is why I love the Psalms so much. They contain the full range of human emotion and expression, from the highest praise and adoration to the deepest despair and frustration. And the beautiful thing is if it's in our Bible and the Psalmist can say it and cry out to God and question and even complain, why can't we? God is big enough to take it. And God invites us to be open and honest with him and with where we are at in life. And, the good news is, God loves us anyway, right where we are, with the feelings we have right now, with all of our questions and doubts and uncertainties. God still loves us. And always will love us. God will love us, as the old hymn writer put it, with a love that will not let us go, no matter what, ever. And that is good news. That is very good news, indeed.

So, Contemplative Prayer. What is it? Well, if prayer is like talking to a friend, the other side of that is listening. While it is good to have a friend we can tell everything to, and share our deepest joys and our most earnest longings and our innermost thoughts, it is also good to be able to rest in the presence of a friend without anything having to be spoken and to know that we are held and loved in an abiding presence that goes beyond anything we can put into words.

We live in a busy world. And we live with busy thoughts. And more times than not our thoughts can be out in the future, consumed and anxious and even fretful about what hasn't happened yet. One elderly person was heard to say, "Some of the worst things in my life never happened!" Or, on the other hand, our thoughts can often be in the past, dwelling on and even brooding over things that are done. Rarely are we fully present to the present moment. I know that there are times when I am headed out the door and I give my wife a hug and I take a few steps toward leaving and I catch myself and come back and say, "Wait a minute. I need another hug. I was a ghost there. My body was present but my mind was someplace else. And I want to be here now, in your arms, with you in this moment, and feel your hug as it's happening to me."

This is where our body is a gift. While our minds are often wandering out in anticipation of the future or in reflection on things past, our body is stuck right here and now. Our body can't time travel. Our body is stuck in the good, old gift of this present moment while it is happening. And it is here that our body can be a great gift and guide to us as we seek to come into the Lord's presence in quietness in this present moment.

Contemplative prayer, in essence, is simply this; resting in the presence of God in the present moment. The Bible speaks of God as the One in whom "we live and move and have our being." Our breath is an anchor that is often used to get in touch with the present moment. Our breath is always happening in the present moment. Breath is a very spiritual principal. In Hebrew, the same word, 'ru'ah,' is used for breath, wind and spirit. In the beginning, God formed a human from the dust of the ground and "breathed the breath of life" into that human, and that person stood up and became a living being.

Breath, then, is seen as a principal of life and spirit in the Bible. And simply sitting quietly and bringing our minds into an awareness of our breath as it is happening is a way to calm and still ourselves and center ourselves in the present moment. And, if we connect an awareness of God's presence to our breath, knowing that God dwells in the deepest part of ourselves, it can be helpful to quiet us and bring us down into a place of depth within ourselves where God is always present.

Now, of course, if we try this, we quickly find that our thoughts are ever present. We can't simply turn them off. They wander into our heads unbidden. Old fears. Anxieties. Remembrances. Joys. Pain. A whole train of thinking. What do we do when we are sitting quietly and our thoughts begin to churn and pull us away from the present?

We simply notice our thought and quietly return our awareness to our breathing. We don't judge ourselves for having "failed" because this isn't about grading ourselves and, besides, judging ourselves is just another thought itself. Best to just notice the thought, and even say, "Oh, hello old worry," and let it drift right on through. Don't feed into it. Don't chase after it. Even if it is a good thought and something we want to remember. This is not the time and place for it. Let it go.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Our minds are chronically restless. Our minds are not used to sitting still. They often pull in one direction or another. The tail wags the dog. So it takes time and patience and cultivation to begin to experience the fruits of contemplative prayer.

One way of centering ourselves and anchoring to our breath is to tie a quiet word to each breath. For example, with each inhalation saying "Trust" and with each exhalation saying "Release." I trust, with each breath, in the abiding presence of God holding me in this moment. And I release, with each breath, the anxieties and fears within me into God's hands. Quietly, with each breath, going deeper into trusting and releasing myself into God's presence.

Time takes on a different quality. A thirty minute television program seems to shoot by pretty quickly. Time in silence slows way down. Ten minutes may seem like half an hour. It's interesting how elastic time is to the quality of our experience.

The Bible passages at the beginning of this article form a backdrop to some of things I'm writing about here. From Genesis, we have the creation story of God breathing the breath of spirit into us. Elijah, in I Kings, has fled in fear for his life to Mount Sinai and there encounters storm and fire and earthquake. And after all these flashy things comes a sound of sheer silence. And then, Elijah hides his face and comes to the door of the cave he is in. In the stillness, he encounters the presence of God.

And, of course, the good old Psalms speak of stilling our soul, like a child resting in it's mother's presence, full and sated with the quiet oneness with it's mother. "Be still, and know that I am God..."

Life is busy. Our minds are busy. Our thoughts are busy. And, sometimes, they can get the best of us and wear us out. Times of quiet, times of contemplative prayer, times of prayer that is listening, being aware, anchoring to the gift of our breath and body, resting in the Lord's presence, "in whom we live and move and have our being" can have the restful effect of stepping off of the merry-go-round of ceaseless thinking, taking a break from the endless chain of thoughts that live up in our heads and giving us the gift of quietness and peace.

So, as we enter a new year, may you have Mary and Martha in your life. We need Martha, the busy sister, the one who puts her nose to the grindstone and gets things done. There is most certainly a place for Martha in our world and she is a blessing. But we also need balance. We need Mary too. We need times to simply sit quietly at the Lord's feet and bathe our spirits in his presence. Sometimes that means talking to him. St. Paul writes in Philippians 4: "Be anxious in nothing. The Lord is near. But in everything, by prayer and petition, together with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, that passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Absolutely. There is a place for offering up to the Lord our joys and thanksgivings and our needs and concerns, for letting our prayers go into God's hands, for trusting that God is there and is holding us and will not let us go. And then, there is also a place, as Paul writes in Romans 8, for those "sighs that are too deep for words," those things that go beyond our ability to say. Here we follow Mary. We sit in quiet, unspeaking adoration. We simply rest in God's presence, sinking below the surface waves of thoughts and feelings and words to the deep, quiet place within where the spirit of God dwells in our innermost being; the still point in the turning world.

Peace be with you - Pastor Mark

Unapproved St. John Lutheran Church Council Minutes
January 13, 2022

President Albert Koepp called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

Present:

X	Pastor Mark	X	Matt Stier	X	Albert Koepp	X	Wendy Theis
X	Angie Kahle	X	Robin Fink	X	Jen Nagorski		Sue Koenig
X	Chris Zellman	X	Steve Kelm		Ben Aust	X	Chris Schultz
X	Curt Johnson	X	Anne Herrmann				

Opening Devotions:

Pastor Mark shared a passage from Luke chapter 5 and an opening prayer.

Approval of Minutes:

Members of Council reviewed the minutes from the December 16, 2021 Council Meeting. Motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the meeting minutes from December. Motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the agenda for January 13, 2022..

Pastor Mark's Report:

We celebrated three Christmas Eve services this year, at 3:00, 5:00 and 7:00 p.m., with the choir singing at the two earlier services, and the attendance, while a little down from pre-pandemic levels, was quite good. We enjoyed a quiet week after the festivities and will now be beginning our new Sunday morning worship schedule with services at 8:00 and 9:15 a.m. and coffee time in between. I am looking forward to our new Sunday schedule. Live streaming of services resumes on January 9 after a brief hiatus for our volunteers.

We had an adult leaders meeting for Connect and Confirmation, discussing the year in review and looking forward to the year ahead. Things are going very well. We are working our way through the Bible this year, finishing up with the Old Testament and about to begin in the New Testament. Looking ahead, we made plans for a FMSC service project at the end of January and discussed the upcoming Lenten Season, including worship attendance with an adult mentor and worksheet. We also began discussion on hosting the upcoming Soup & Sandwich Suppers. In addition, information was also shared about Confirmation Camp this Summer for our seventh graders.

The office is very busy these days with preparations being made for the upcoming Annual Meeting on January 23, including gathering reports and information, finishing up financial reports, printing, assembly and mailing. One of our Confirmation small groups is planning to assemble the reports this year in preparation for mailing.

We continue to meet regularly as a staff for weekly calendar reviews and to discuss any pertinent items that are relevant for us all to be aware of, assigning tasks and following up on details, as needed. Monthly, we continue to meet with Curt and Cheryl to assure that we are aligned and coordinated on our building use needs for the coming month with such things as making sure doors are open, heat, table arrangements and other considerations, as needed. Between these regular meeting times we have a standing policy of being in communication with each other as events arise so we can all be informed in real time of them.

Regular and ongoing items include staff communication and coordination, congregational communication and correspondence, preparation and follow through for teaching and preaching, baptisms, weddings and funerals, visitation, etc. It has been a busy past year and I look forward to a blessed and productive year ahead as we continue to work together in our shared ministry.

Staff Reports:

Custodial:

Curt reported the needed furnace parts have not yet arrived and the rebates for the LED lighting have been applied for.

Treasurer:

Robin walked through the annual reports, confirmed the "Keep 'Em Dry" account has been closed out, and answered questions from Council members.

Transfers:

No Transfers in or out this month.

Ongoing Business:

Strategic Planning was tabled at this time.

Loan Repayment was tabled at this time.

New Business:

Annual Meeting

The Agenda for the Annual Meeting was reviewed.

Council members must attend the Annual meeting.

Coffee Hour will be hosted by the Council.

Ministry Team Updates:

Stewardship Committee - nothing new to report.

Buildings and Grounds Committee - the diseased trees have been removed with the remaining trees being trimmed.

Personnel Committee - nothing new to report.

Children's Ministry Team - nothing new to report.

Small Group/Faith Formation Committee - nothing new to report.

Worship and Music Committee - nothing new to report.

Technology and Communications Committee - nothing new to report.

Motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn at 7:48 p.m. Meeting was adjourned followed by the Lord's prayer.

Respectfully Submitted,
Anne Herrmann, Secretary



February Children's Ministry Update

We started January with lessons on "Simeon and Anna." In Luke 2: 22-38, Simeon and Anna were faithful Jews who had waited all their lives for the Messiah. At the Temple, they recognized Jesus as the Promised One. We learned how Jesus is a gift from God and He follows through with his promises. The last Sunday in January and in the month of February, children will learn all about the "Woman at the Well" and the "Wedding at Cana."

Thank you to all the Sunday School teachers who volunteered to keep our children entertained in the youth room during the annual meeting on January 23rd, so that parents and other teachers were able to attend. In place of regular Sunday School classes, the children enjoyed crafts, a movie, and a snack during the meeting.

Upcoming Dates: Sunday, February 20th: NO CLASS

Connect Update

Connect classes met twice in the month of January and learned about Kings. Our Reading was 1 Samuel 8:4-22. With such a large group of kids in Connect, we have decided to break into 3 smaller groups and rotate through the bible lesson, an activity and small group time. It is going very well having smaller more focused groups. Wednesday, January 26th was our 2nd service project at Feed My Starving Children. Thank you to the parents that volunteered to chaperone. If you have not attended with your child yet, please consider volunteering next time. It is a fun and rewarding experience with our youth at St. John!

Connect will meet every Wednesday through the month of February and will NOT meet on Ash Wednesday, March 2nd through Easter. In place of regular classes, students are expected to attend the Wednesday Evening Lenten Services with their family and/or classmates and fill out family worship sheets. There will be no regular class or pizza for Connect students during the season of Lent (March 2nd - April 13th). We will resume classes on April 20th. Remember that Lenten service worship sheets **DO NOT** count towards sermon notes. Students are still expected to regularly attend Saturday or Sunday services and submit sermon notes. Each Connect student should have 10 sermon notes completed by the end of this year's classes on May 4th.

Peace,
The Children's Ministry Team

February 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 11 Lutheran Home Service 1:30pm Kingsway Service	2 5:30pm Pizza 6 pm Connect/Confirmation 6:30pm Adult Choir	3	4	5 6 pm Worship Service
6 8 & 9:15 Worship Services 9:15 Sunday School 2pm Girl Scouts	7 6:30pm Boy Scouts	8	9 12 pm High School Student Council meeting 5:30pm Pizza 6 pm Connect/Confirmation 6:30pm Adult Choir	10	11	12 3 pm Wedding 6 pm Worship Service
13 8 & 9:15 Worship Services 9:15 Sunday School 8:50 Council Executive meeting	14 6:30pm Boy Scouts	15	16 5:30pm Pizza 6 pm Connect/Confirmation 6:30pm Adult Choir	17 6:30pm Church Council	18	19 6 pm Worship Service
20 8 & 9:15 Worship Services	21 6:30pm Boy Scouts	22	23 5:30pm Pizza 6 pm Connect 6 pm Confirmation Service Project 6:30pm Adult Choir	24	25	26 2 pm Wedding 6 pm Worship Service
27 8 & 9:15 Worship Services 9:15 Sunday School	28 6:30pm Boy Scouts					



February 6, 2022 Ushers	
8:00 Service	9:15 Service
Marc & Mindy Chevalier Andy Steinhagen Bruce Koepp Tammy Koepp	Chris & Annette Moylan Mike & Zach Olson Jason & Trevor Gruhn Steve Schroeder

February 27 & March 6, 2022 Ushers	
8:00 Service	9:15 Service
Brent Schwichtenberg Greg Schwichtenberg Juls Robbins	David & Sara Bungarden Louis Longhenry Ron & Dianne Rasmussen

February 13 & 20, 2022 Ushers	
8:00 Service	9:15 Service
Albert Koepp Dorothy Koepp Kevin Koepp Matt Stier Bruce Volek Tim Carlson Josh Koepp	Arvin & Midge Bessel Lee Sauter Bob Fairbanks Greg Rosario Daron Anderson

Acolytes for February 8:00 Service		
February 6	Abby Lawler	Driana Schultz
February 13	Luke Schultz	Bennet Balk
February 20	Luke Schultz	Bennet Balk
February 27	Allison Blake	Olivia Jeurissen

Wednesday Night Kitchen Helpers		
February 2	Aaron Leonard	David Bungarden
February 9	Amanda Berg	Linda Jeurissen
February 16	Rachel Kelm	Stephanie Paulson
February 23 Connect only	Trevor Carstens	Quinn Streich

Wednesday Night Gathering Area Helpers		
February 2	Andrea Gerres	Heather Kes
February 9		
February 16	Trevor Carstens	
February 23 Connect only		

In Memory

Memorials were given to the Building Fund and General Fund in memory of Elmer Koepp, Maureen Busse, Larry Malz, and Michele Fischer by Family and Friends.

CALLED TO SERVE THROUGH OUR GIVING	
Offering Received the week of	
December 30– January 5	January 6-12
General Fund—\$8,607	General Fund—\$4,058
Building Fund—\$2,957	Building Fund—\$1,075
January 13-19	January 20-26
General Fund—\$4,125	General Fund— \$956
Building Fund—\$980	Building Fund- \$320