

# Visionotes

St. John's Lutheran Church  
February 2024



## **34 Women on Retreat**

A weekend filled with community,  
encouragement, and stillness

## **All Things Lent — p. 6-7**

Service times, small groups and more!

## **Feature: Living Through Lent — p. 9-10**

Ideas for how to mark Lent in your own life.

## **"Volunteer Excellence for \$100." — p. 12**

## **Holy Community Opportunity — p. 14**

Hearts for Prayer

## **2024 Noisy Offering: Hygiene Kits — p. 28**

## **Lutherdale Retreats and Summer Camp — p. 29**



# We are the church — together.

**Worship in the Sanctuary:** Saturdays at 5pm & Sundays at 9am  
**Livestream Worship on YouTube:** Sundays at 9am  
**Weekly Online Worship** at [www.StJohns-LC.org](http://www.StJohns-LC.org)  
**Church Office:** 608-882-4044, Mon-Thurs, 8am-4pm

## St. John's Staff

|                               |                   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Pastor                        | Matthew Pook      |
| Pastor of Congregational Care | Jerry Tews        |
| Office Manager                | Chris Cole        |
| Community Life Coordinator    | Becca Pook        |
| Children's Ministry Director  | Callie Jones      |
| Financial Director            | Deb Herbers       |
| Music Director                | Sharon Magee      |
| Custodian                     | Emily Schmitzer   |
| Ministry Coordinator          | Carolyn Butts     |
| Communication Coordinator     | Alyse Miller      |
| Nursery                       | Mikayla Samuelson |
| Little Fish Preschool Teacher | Melissa Blake     |

## 2024 Church Council

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| President                      | Jeff Updike         |
| Vice President/Mutual Ministry | Julie Creek-Hessler |
| Secretary/Fellowship           | Keith Miller        |
| Treasurer                      | Brandon Mohrbacher  |
| Building and Grounds           | Sean Mangold        |
| Memorials                      | Dan Millin          |
| Music and Worship              | Rena Smith          |
| Life and Growth                | Kaye Crocker        |
| Parish Education               | Bethany Steindl     |
| Social Concerns                | Debbe Topel         |
| Stewardship                    | Eric Peterson       |
| Youth Ministry                 | Erika Stoker        |
| Youth Representative           | Jack Burton         |

### Mission Endowment & Scholarship Fund Committee:

Rhonda Crans, David Karr, Jenna Mangold,  
Lynda Moseley, Jonathan Schalow

### Mutual Ministry Committee:

Jeanna Blume, Wanda King, Ann Legris,  
Joy Olson, Gordy Miller, Glenace Smelcer

# Why the Sending ?

*20th (and final!) in a series of “why” questions about what we do as a church, particularly during worship*

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Over a lifetime of attending and leading events with the church, I have become very accustomed to every meeting concluding with a prayer. For instance, when our council meets, we finish with a quick review, upcoming events, and the Lord's Prayer. When Thursday Bible study ends, I wrap up the conversation and lead us in prayer. When a confirmation session is over, we share a closing ritual with prayers and a blessing. The intentional conclusion of our shared time together as the church sends us out with courage and hope, empowered to live our faith.

Church meetings are not the only meetings I attend these days. I also volunteer on other local committees. I do this to try to live my calling as a neighbor and local citizen, which has led me to serve with city government and community groups. Usually these meetings are well-run and effective. The facilitator or chairperson calls us to order and leads us through an agenda. Usually our time is well-spent. But I'm always left unsettled at the end. Always. I want more than “meeting adjourned” or “that's it, see you later.” I want to commend our work to God's hands. I want to be commissioned to live differently based on what just happened together. I want to be blessed.

This is precisely what the “Sending” of a worship service seeks to do. In the “Sending,” we commend ourselves to God's hands. We are commissioned to live differently based on our time of worship. And we are blessed by God for the unknown journey ahead.

“Sending” is the fourth and final movement of our worship services, the culmination of “Gathering,” “Word,” and “Meal.” In the “Gathering,” we come together to renew our relationships with God and one another. Next we are nourished by the “Word” of the Gospel and the “Meal” of Holy Communion. Finally, we are sent out to love and serve the Lord and our neighbors. We go with God's blessing and the power of the Holy Spirit. It's by far the shortest of the four movements, but it makes all the difference. The “Sending” declares that our time together mattered.

We see this worship pattern in Jesus' ministry with his disciples. Jesus invited regular, ordinary, beloved people to gather with him and follow him. They shared life together. They talked theology, they read scripture, they sang hymns, and they ate meals together. Then Jesus sent them out to do God's work. He sent them out with power and purpose.

In the middle of his public ministry, Jesus intentionally sent his disciples out on a mission. He sent them not alone, but "two by two" (See Mark 6 and Luke 10). Before he sent them, Jesus gave them clear instructions on what to take and what to say. Jesus blessed them and gave them authority to preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick. And they did! The disciples preached of God's love and impacted people's lives far and wide. They returned to Jesus with joy and shared all that God had done through them. And Jesus was "full of joy" (Luke 10:21) for all they had done.

This wasn't the only time Jesus sent out his followers. After he rose from the dead, Jesus commissioned his followers (including us) to carry on his ministry. He gathered his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, and they worshipped him. (I imagine they also asked Jesus a lot of questions.) At the end of their time together, Jesus said, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). All the time they spent together led them to this point. This is what Jesus had prepared them to do, to go and invite people of all nations and cultures to be students of Jesus, to wash them in the love of God, and to walk with them in faith. This intentional sending out changed the world forever.

The end of our worship gatherings might be brief, but it changes the world, if only in small ways. I hate to imagine a worship service without the "Sending." We are sent with God's blessing to be a blessing to the world. We are sent with a song for the journey ahead. We are sent with a commission to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord." We often say, "thanks be to God," but we could also say, "let's do it!" Then out we go, with power and purpose, as a holy community, never alone.

In Christ,



*"And remember, I am with you always,  
to the end of the age."*

— Jesus (Matthew 28:20)

# REACHING UP: WORSHIP & PRAYER

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## *How to Live: A 6-Week Series for Lent on Happiness, Meaning, & Community*



## **Lent 2024 HOW TO LIVE**

With Happiness, Meaning,  
& Community

In the sixth century, an Italian monk by the name of Benedict of Nursia wrote a “Rule” for how his faith community at the monastery would live. In doing so, Benedict laid the foundation for the worldwide Order of Saint Benedict (OSB), which is alive and well today, with thousands of monks and nuns, and hundreds of monasteries. The Rule of St. Benedict has endured for 1,500 years because it is a faithful and compelling way to live the Gospel of Jesus in almost any time and place. According to renowned author and Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, “it is still one of the preeminent spiritual treatises, a veritable guarantee of the good life.” The Rule leads us on a journey to cultivate a meaningful life. The six pillars of Benedictine spirituality are 1) community, 2) simplicity, 3) humility, 4) hospitality, 5) gratitude, and 6) praise. Together they invite us deeper into living in God’s ways, not just at a monastery, but right where we are. **Over the six weeks of Lent, St. John’s will be reading “How To Live” by Judith Valente, coordinated with weekly worship and small groups.** In 22 short chapters, full of examples and anecdotes, Valente examines the Rule of St. Benedict for following Jesus in today’s world. The Rule of St. Benedict teaches the way of Jesus, which is the way to truly live.

- February 3 & 4... Mark 5:21-43 (Jairus’ Daughter Healed)
  - What Did Jesus Do? Week 5 - He revived!
  - Special Music: Classic Children’s Songs
  - Kids Against Hunger Meal Packing at 10:15am Sunday
- February 10 & 11... Mark 8:27--9:8 (Transfiguration)
  - What Did Jesus Do? Week 6 - He alarmed!
  - Lord’s Prayer Milestone for Second Graders
- February 14... Mark 9:30-37 (Passion Prediction)
  - Ash Wednesday Worship at 8:00am and 7:00pm
- February 17 & 18... Mark 10:17-31 (First Last and Last First)
  - How To Live - Week 1
- February 24 & 25... Mark 10:32-52 (Bartimaeus Healed)
  - How To Live - Week 2

### **MORNING PRAYER SERVICE, TUESDAYS @8:30**

St. John’s Prayer Chapel; a 20-minute service of prayer

You are invited. All are welcome.

# The Season of Lent: February 14 - March 30

## What is Lent?

Lent is a season when the Church reflects on the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. The colors in worship turn to purple, and the music shifts to a minor key of mourning. It is a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for Easter. It is a time of self-examination, a time to focus on our relationship with God.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 14 and ends on Holy Saturday, March 30.



## Lent 2024 HOW TO LIVE

With Happiness, Meaning,  
& Community

## Ash Wednesday Services

February 14  
8am & 7pm

St. John's  
Sanctuary

Livestream  
7pm

## Fasting in Lent

Christians often participate in Lent by taking on a spiritual practice or discipline, as a form of a "fast." The intention is to focus on Christ and his sacrifice for us. Some may break an unhealthy habit by giving up sweets or soda. Others might start a healthy habit, give to charity, join a small group, or try a new prayer activity. Consider what you might "give up" or do differently to set apart these forty days of Lent. (See pg. 11-12 for ideas from others.)

*"We are but dust, and to dust we shall return."*



## Generosity in Lent

All gifts at the Lenten suppers and offering at Midweek worship will benefit Lutheran Social Services, which offers vital services in the areas of addictions, restorative justice, behavioral health, children and families, housing and aging, persons with disabilities, urban ministries, and rural outreach.

## Lenten Midweek Meals

Sometimes it's just nice to not have to plan and prepare supper. And sometimes it's nice to eat with people that aren't your "regular" diners. St. John's is hosting midweek supper meals on Wednesdays in Lent.

**Fellowship Hall will be buzzing 5:30-6:30pm with friends and family.**

For a suggested donation of \$7.00, each meal includes a main dish, side, fruit, and dessert; gluten-free options are available on request.

- February 21 — TBD
- February 28 — Mexican
- March 6 — Asian
- March 13 — Italian
- March 20 — Ham + Scalloped Potatoes



## Lenten Midweek Worship: Wednesdays at 7pm

Each week in Lent St. John's gathers together on Wednesday evenings for a 30-minute, reflective service. You are invited to be filled with the music of Holden Evening Prayer and listen to stories from St. John's siblings on how to live. **Add 7:00pm to your calendars Wednesdays, February 21 – March 20 to experience God in a calm, reflective way.**

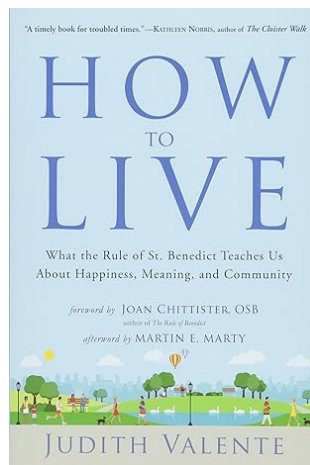
## Lenten Small Groups

Have you participated in a small group before? Lent is a great, short-term opportunity to check it out. **For 5 weeks, St. John's will meet in small groups for an hour at different times.**

Discover which group will work for your schedule, and commit to this Holy Community and Spiritual Growth this reflective season:

- Saturdays at 3:45pm
- Sundays at 10:15am
- Sundays at 7pm
- Wednesdays at 6pm

Sign ups are available in the Gathering Area, or call the church office to join a group. If these times don't work for you, invited some friends to make a group of your own.



## Classic Children's Songs — February 3 & 4

"The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me..." Can you hear the song from your days of Sunday School? Or maybe this is the tune that's stuck in your Kindergartener's head from Faith Corps? If you grew up in a congregation, there are certainly other classic children's songs rattling around in your music memory.

**The weekend of February 3 & 4, St. John's will celebrate these memorable songs during worship.** Soul Troop, which includes children in 3rd-5th grades, will demonstrate their worship leadership. God delights in our praise and worship, whether it's simple children's songs or grandiose choruses in cathedrals. We will sing our hearts out on these beloved and timeless tunes.



## Lord's Prayer Milestone — February 11

Prayer is one of the greatest gifts of God. We have direct access to God in times of trouble and joy. We have Someone to talk to who has promised to hear us and loves to listen. And dare we say, in the stillness, speaks to us as well.

In a milestone experience for 2nd graders and parents, we'll explore the basics of what it is to pray. Then we'll dive into the prayer that Jesus taught us. Where is God's kingdom? What is daily bread? What are trespasses? Why do we say thy? These and other questions will be considered, in order to breathe life into this timeless prayer. Students and families will participate both in worship on Sunday, February 11 at 9am, and in the milestone workshop at 10:15am.

*"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."*

*— Martin Luther, theologian and teacher*





# REACHING WITHIN: SPIRITUAL GROWTH & FRIENDSHIP

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## FEATURE: Living Through Lent

by Becca Pook

Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice when he died on the cross for the world. By no means, there is nothing we give up for Lent to compare. However, we can approach the 40 days of Lent with intentional action. What would you give up or sacrifice for Lent? Or maybe the sacrifice would be time, and you add something to your life. Maybe it's a small group for five weeks. Or maybe you set aside time to sit in stillness each day. Perhaps you worship on Wednesdays through the season. Here are some St. John's siblings and their sacrifices:

**Katlynn Kelley:** "I gave up Girl Scout cookies (which is very difficult as they are delivered in March.) It went well though, and I had a box waiting for me! Another year I gave up Culver's; it was so hard. (I should own a Culver's with how often I have eaten there.) But I made it through."

**Courtney Adams:** "Being raised Catholic, it was no meat on Fridays. I gave up Diet Coke (well, soda in general, but I really liked Diet Coke). I was so excited to drink one on Easter. But after not drinking it for that span of time, I took my first drink and the carbonation was not nearly as enjoyable anymore. Such a disappointment. (I've since acclimated back to enjoying it.) Now I just try to be more mindful during that time of what I can sacrifice and what I can give."

**Kate Cheramy:** "Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I've done both, but more so given up items as that is what I was taught to do. Now, I try to add something to make my life better; that's been the major change over these past 4 years. I used to be really good at giving up meat on Fridays, but now I don't care about that and look forward to being "bad" on those days. LOL; I've also given up candy and soda, which then I went back to. I've added reading the Lenten books through St. John's and the daily passages posted on Facebook, which has lead me to reading more during the year, but that has also gone away. Advent and Lent bring it back to me; small groups also were started (and we continue to meet for book club monthly which has been the absolute highlight of my life with St. John's!!)"

**Kristie Carlsen:** “When I was younger I gave up Mountain Dew, and in my adulthood my dad and I challenged ourselves to attend all Sunday services through Lent — which lead us to being regular church-goers.”

**Ashley Bowman:** “It has gone well. I have done this a lot. Sometimes it has led to lasting change and sometimes not. The one I can think of is going vegetarian for Lent (but not the Catholic way where you eat fish instead of other kinds of meat on Fridays; the Ashley way where you actually don’t eat ANY meat for every day of the week in Lent). I was a vegetarian for many years. I gave up Amazon for Lent in 2021. In 2012, I gave up negative/cynical Facebook statuses.”

**Julie Creek-Hessler:** “Last year I worked on not being judgemental. I work on it every day since.”

**Derek Blume:** “I gave up chocolate last year. It was torture, but I did it.”

**Johann Kleisch:** “I’ve been doing no sweets and no alcohol for a few years now. No alcohol is easy compared to no sweets.”

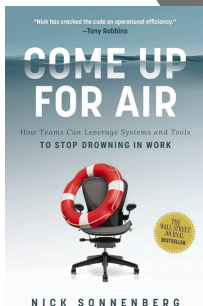
**Bethany Severson:** “Several years ago, I had a very toxic coworker and for Lent I made an effort to say something positive to them every day. It might not seem like a lot, but it was a big effort.”

## Whatcha Reading? with Kristian Finrock



### [Come Up For Air: How Teams Can Leverage Systems and Tools to Stop Drowning in Work](#) by Nick Sonnenberg

“I have read this book twice, and I am listening to it a second time.” Kristian Finrock recommends this motivating book about working together on necessary and efficient methods of work. Specifically, how people spend so much time looking for where things are at. Although it may not directly address faith, Kristian says, “In faith, I think often we spend too much time ‘searching’ instead of just ‘receiving’ that which is already there.” Many people can relate to drowning in work, productivity, or to-do lists. God desires rhythms in our life that include both work and rest. If you are an entrepreneur or small business owner, or maybe you are “drowning in work” in whatever vocation, take a moment and read/listen to this book that focuses people and teams on living — not surviving — in a sea of productivity.



## February Adult BASIC

Each Sunday at 10:15am St. John's will host an opportunity to learn and grow alongside one another. Grab a mug, a snack, and a friend to grow in faith and connection. Our February lineup:

- **Feb 4:** Kids Against Hunger Food Packing
- **Feb 18:** Lenten Small Groups start and will continue on Sundays through March 24



## Hanging Flower Basket Fundraiser

This summer, July 15-20, St. John's high school youth will go to the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans for a week of worship, service, fellowship, and fun. Pleasant Prairie Greenhouse is generously providing hanging baskets to defray the cost of the event. Whether your porch faces East or West, there is a flower basket to beautify your home just in time for Mother's Day. The 12-inch hanging basket is filled with annual flowers either for sun or shade. Place your order by Thursday, February 29. Each basket is \$35. Checks should be made to St. John's with "Hanging Basket" in the memo line. Or scan St. John's QR code on the right to pay by card. Baskets will be available in time for Mother's Day.



### Our Mission Statement

Reaching Up, Reaching Out, Reaching Within...  
because GOD reaches out to us.

### Our Core Values

Inspiring Worship  
Faithful Service  
Lifelong Spiritual Growth

Uplifting Prayer  
Caring Invitation  
Christ-Centered Friendships

## **Volunteer Appreciation: Mardi Gras Lunch & Team Jeopardy**

On any given week you can find a multitude of servant workers helping to fulfill St. John's mission and ministry. From assembling mailings (including this monthly newsletter) to quilting, from building maintenance to counting our financial offerings, people give their time and energy generously. **On**

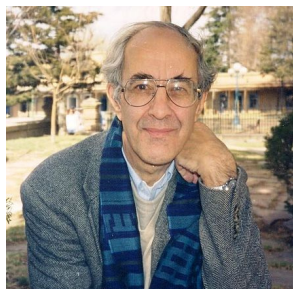
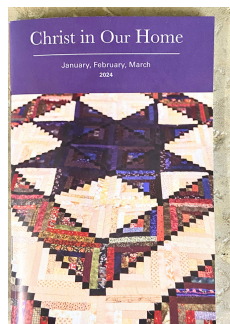
**Tuesday, February 13, 11:30am-1:30pm, all are invited to a Mardi Gras lunch!**

Following our meal, we will recognize our faithful ministry workers who volunteer their time and talents during the weekdays. Then we'll laugh and play as we compete at Team Jeopardy. A Great Time for \$500, Alex! Please RSVP to the church office.



## **Christ in our Home Devotional Books Available**

This daily devotional resource is a great way to read the Scriptures and grow in faith. The current edition (January-March) is available for you in the Gathering Area. Each devotion is written by a variety of writers including a runner, sailor, pastor, blogger, occupational therapist, and pet owner from across the country. Whether alone or with your family, let these one-page readings be a guide for prayer and reflection. Let these moments foster community between you and God.



"O lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen."

— Henri Nouwen

# My Sense of Community

by Sarah Bauer

It has been brought to my attention that it is my ten year anniversary for membership at St. John's. Time does fly! My experiences have been many. I'll touch on a few. Getting to know some members from St. John's and what kind of human beings they were helped me make my decision to belong permanently. I also experienced the community through a few weddings Pastor Matt presided over. Another experience that comes to mind is during the COVID shutdown. The "visit/drop-offs" that I received made me truly feel a part of the church family. Being included and invited by other families to holiday gatherings has been another wonderful experience.

The church community means a safe place for me. It is a body of inclusion, support, and activity. It is also a community that guides my growth on my path with God. Psalm 25 and 139 are two important psalms that encourage my faith.

Being a part of the church family is a very important piece of my life. It keeps me grounded. It brings counsel in troubling times. It is an essential part in the story of my life. Matthew 18:20 "For where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them."



O LORD, you have  
searched me and  
known me.  
Psalm 139:1



## St. John's Welcome Statement

Jesus commands us to love one another. We welcome all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, past misdeeds, socio-economic circumstances, immigration status, or anything that too often divides us. We welcome and celebrate diversity and uniqueness.

**We welcome you.**

# Holy Community Opportunity: Love Through Prayer



Valentine's Day is a cultural phenomenon of love, cards, chocolates, flowers, stuffed toys, balloons, and on and on. However, this year, February 14 lands on a day in the Church that begins the season of Lent: Ash Wednesday. This day is also a day of deep love. It is a day that reminds us of the Love of God and the great need of God's Love in our lives. One of the best things we can do for those we love is to pray for them.

As part of our 2024 theme "Holy Community," St. John's is sharing God's love with members of our church through daily prayer during the 40 days of Lent. In the weeks prior to February 14, grab a few hearts in the Gathering Area. Each heart has household names and contact for whom you will be praying. You can choose someone you know or don't know. Maybe you are thinking that you are not equipped or experienced enough to pray for people. In Romans 8, we read that the Holy Spirit is faithful and will give you the words. **St. John's is "better together" when we pray for each other.** Share God's love through interceding for your St. John's siblings in prayer this Lent.



"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."  
— Romans 8:26

"The power of community to create health is far greater than any physician, clinic, or hospital."  
— Dr. Mark Hyman



# Making Connections: The Skumatz/Sthokal Family

By Heather Skumatz

Our family of four moved to Evansville from Waupaca, Wisconsin in the fall of 2013. It was a leap of faith to buy a home here. We knew no one, and hadn't even heard of Evansville when we began our quest.



After comparing dozens of homes in several smaller Madison metro communities, Evansville seemed to hold the most promise: it wasn't too small (but wasn't too big, either); the city had quiet streets and plenty of dedicated greenspace; the public schools had good ratings; and, most importantly to us, there was a thriving ELCA church with youth programming and a brand-new preschool.



We enrolled our older son Alden in 3K, so our introduction to St. John's began in the basement. Casual conversation with other caregivers while we waited for our children to be dismissed turned in to deep friendships by the time our younger son Preston graduated from 4K a few years later. All along, St. John's has been a source of joy and connectedness for each one of us.

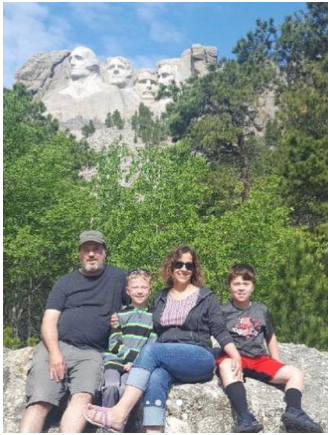
Over the last 10 years, we have enjoyed many of the activities St. John's offers. Our boys are now 12 and 14 and have participated in Chapel Chat, BASIC, Soul Troop, and are currently in Confirmation.

Alden will celebrate his affirmation of baptism milestone in a few months, and Preston will celebrate his in 2025.

It has been a blessing and a thrill to watch our two sons and their peers progress from wiggly toddlers spinning around to “The Hippopotamus Song” (“In the beginning God made the seas, and the forests filled with trees... Hip! Hip! Hip O Potomus! Hip Hip Hooray, God made all of us!!!”) to loading full trays of glassware in the dishwasher as part of the Green Team after Sunday fellowship.

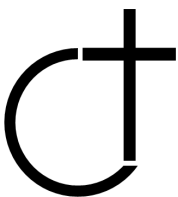


Randy and I have served St. John’s by participating in worship services, Lenten small groups, and retreats. Randy is a group leader for Confirmation and assists with projection. I enjoy serving as an Assisting Minister and reader, and I especially delight in offering a blessing to other parents’ wiggly toddlers during Holy Communion.



Christ-centered friendship is a core value of St. John’s that resonates with all four of us. Our children have literally grown up within the welcoming community of St. John’s. The friendships each of us has made with other members and friends of St. John’s will stay in our hearts for a lifetime. This is our church home!

We have participated in Simply Giving since we joined back in early 2014. Small, regular gifts like our family’s give church leadership the ability to plan expenses around real numbers, not guesses, and help ensure that St John’s will continue to be a lighthouse—or a hippopotamus!?—to all ages.



## Care Circle

The Congregational Care Faith Circle is a confidential gathering open to all who are enduring hardships.  
**Come on Tuesdays, February 13 & 27, 1:00-2:00pm.**

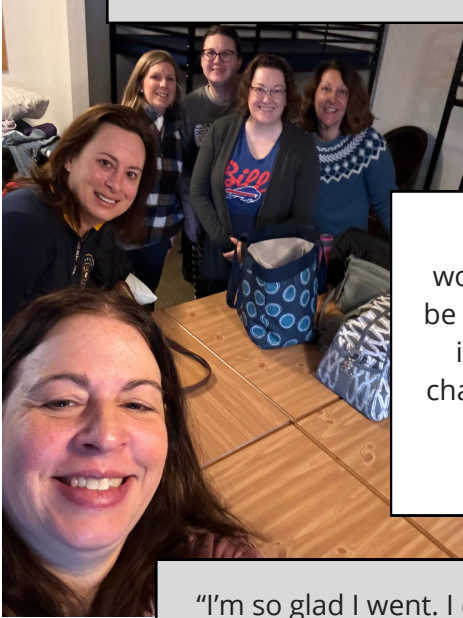


# Women's Retreat Testimonies

"So glad we are able and encouraged as women to grow our faith with God and with others in a safe, loving environment."



"This retreat can be a wonderful reset button. It can be a time of relaxation. For me, it's a bit of both, but also a chance to grow in my faith and bond with my church community."



"I'm so glad I went. I can't express how much Julie, my small group, and the entire group of ladies ministered to my heart and soul. I got to know some amazing women a bit better and am looking forward to mulling over the material in the next few weeks."



"This weekend was the first time I really connected with people I was not as familiar with, as well as formed adult friendships with people I've only known as a child."



# REACHING OUT: SERVICE & INVITATION

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## Council Matters by Keith Miller

On January 15, 2024, the Church Council met for its regular monthly meeting. Sean Mangold brought delicious chocolate chip bars, and I could see why they were first on the agenda. After calling the meeting to order at 7:04 pm, we prayed in triads sharing our highs and lows for the day. Then we listened to Mark 4 concerning Jesus teaching in parables to the crowd. There were so many people that Jesus got into a boat just to have a little space!

Next, the council unanimously approved the December Minutes. Pastor Matt included in his report that the Blue Christmas service and the children's Christmas program were amazing. This year's Saturday, December 23rd Christmas Eve service was well attended: the total for all the Christmas services was 827 people. Mutual Ministry set up a wonderful Christmas party for our hard-working church staff. 50 middle school youth attended an Up All Night on the first Friday of the New Year. Good, crazy fun! The Bluegrass church service was lots of fun as well! The Simply Giving Challenge already has 11 new or increased commitments. The council then discussed Chapter 4 of the book "When Church Stops Working" and the quote with the most impact: "There have been much more difficult times for the church than what we are living through now."

Brandon presented his treasurer's report and said that we had a 2023 surplus of \$19,640.30. Church expenses went up about 5% over the previous year. Overall giving was up 1.5%. A motion was made to move \$3000 of the surplus to the pastor's discretionary fund and move \$16,640.30 of the surplus to capital expenditures. The motion made by Julie and seconded by Erika. It passed unanimously. Next the council took up the reorganization of the church council officers. After nominations and voting, here are the 2024 St. John's Executive Council Members: President: Jeff Updike; Vice-President: Julie Creek-Hessler; Secretary: Keith Miller; & Treasurer: Brandon Mohrbacher. Lastly, a motion to adjourn was made at 8:55 pm and unanimously approved.

# Reaching Out to Our Neighbors

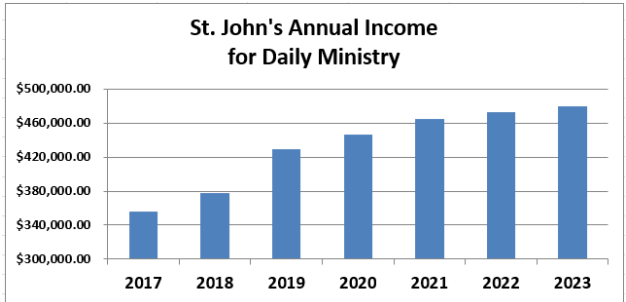
Our grand total of charitable giving for 2023 was **\$109,211!**  
 This is an increase of **\$14,958** over the previous year — our most charitable year ever.

| <u>Amount</u>      | <u>Generosity Recipient</u>            |
|--------------------|--|
| \$1,000.00         | Bethlehem Lutheran Church New Orleans  |
| \$175.00           | Creekside Open Table                   |
| \$660.00           | Earthquake Relief                      |
| \$4,000.00         | ELCA Ammparo—Immigrant Children Relief |
| \$1,830.00         | ELCA Good Gifts—Water Filters          |
| \$3,000.00         | ELCA Missionary Sponsorship            |
| \$6,624.00         | ELCA World Hunger                      |
| \$1,900.00         | Evansville AWARE                       |
| \$3,500.00         | Evansville Ecumenical Care Closet      |
| \$4,000.00         | Evansville Fire Department             |
| \$3,700.00         | Kid’s Against Hunger                   |
| \$1,000.00         | Levi Leonard Kids First                |
| \$1,000.00         | Local Charities                        |
| \$2,700.00         | Lutheran Bible Translators             |
| \$3,000.00         | Lutheran Campus Ministry               |
| \$3,000.00         | Lutheran Disaster Response             |
| \$431.00           | Lutheran Disaster Response-Syria       |
| \$120.00           | Lutheran Disaster Response-Maui        |
| \$2,000.00         | Lutheran Disaster Minnesota Tornados   |
| \$2,000.00         | Lutheran Disaster Vermont Flooding     |
| \$3,475.00         | Lutheran Social Services               |
| \$2,450.00         | Lutheran Social Services—Lenten Meals  |
| \$4,617.00         | Lutheran World Relief                  |
| \$4,000.00         | Lutherdale                             |
| \$253.00           | Madison Jail Ministry                  |
| \$600.00           | Scholarship Support                    |
| \$252.00           | Reconciling in Christ                  |
| \$1,000.00         | Skaalen Auxiliary                      |
| <u>\$46,926.00</u> | South-Central Synod of Wisconsin       |
| \$109,211.00       | Total Giving                           |



## Generosity Abounds

This congregation is full of generous people. We finished 2023 within our budget, thanks to our collective generosity. Praise God! Over the previous year, our offering gifts grew by over



\$6,000 (a 1% increase), and we ended the year with a surplus. Looking ahead to 2024, we hope to grow our offering gifts by \$50,000, for an increase of 10%. This is ambitious, but we believe this generosity is possible. If we step forward together, we will meet the need.

This increase will enable us to fuel our ministries, meet rising costs, and grow our reach with God's love. We are giving our staff well-deserved raises, to express our gratitude and retain their partnership. We are budgeting to host our 4th pastoral intern (\$21,000 for 2024) and will know by mid-March if we have been matched. We are expanding ministries and growing budgets for worship supplies, kitchen supplies, outreach resources, and youth ministry. Administrative expenses and facility costs have increased, so we are planning for those. Finally, we are keeping our commitments to charities far and wide and even growing our benevolence to local charities like AWARE and Lutherdale Bible Camp.



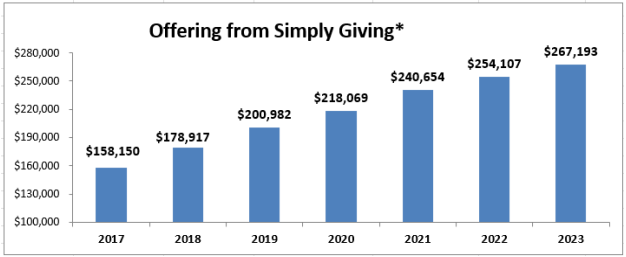
### **A Note from the Financial Director by Deb Herbers**

I am so grateful for this generous congregation! We are able to use that generosity with the gifts given to many of our partners as outlined above. In addition, we are able to provide for needs in our community and worldwide. May we continue to keep our generous spirit and God bless us. Thank you for your continued support this year!

# "24" Simply Giving Challenge for 2024:

## \$100 Grocery Trip

St. John's is a generous congregation, which is evident as we end 2023 financially healthy. One of the reasons our giving



remains strong is because of households who give their offering consistently and intentionally. One easy way to do that is to give automatically using Simply Giving, our electronic funds transfer option. These offerings allow each household to determine a monthly gift that fits their budget and to provide St. John's with a reliable, steady stream of financial support.

You are invited to join the 145 St. John's households who already use *Simply Giving*. **We are looking for 24 households to begin or increase their financial offering through *Simply Giving*.** It's easy to set up, and it helps keep a commitment to generosity. When we reach our goal, we'll have a drawing and the winner will receive \$100 to the Piggly Wiggly!

*To start or update your commitment with Simply Giving, see our website or email our financial director Deb Herbers at [finances@stjohns-lc.org](mailto:finances@stjohns-lc.org).*

### No Venmo? No Worries.

Did you know St. John's has a QR code? That's right! You can quickly make a payment for a retreat or send in the offering you left in your purse on the weekend by scanning this code. You can choose checking or credit card. Mark what it's for in the memo line under the amount (Ex: Lent book). There is a 2.65% fee for cards. Please consider paying through checking or paying the fee. Our generosity goes further when it's towards God's mission and less towards the business fees. St. John's QR code is just one more way to easily share the gifts of God.



# Support For College Students: Call for Applications

College students of St. John's are currently sending us their first semester transcripts, and scholarship awards for the 2023-2024 academic year are set to go out soon. Last spring we named 14 St. John's students as the recipients of scholarships for college and seminary. What a joy to support the development and growth of our St. John's students in higher education!



These scholarships come from three sources:

- The St. John's Congregational Scholarship provides scholarships up to a total of \$2,000 for one year of study, from our offerings.
- The St. John's Endowed Scholarship was established in 2022 through the generosity of John and Janet Bly and the St. John's congregation. The investment began at \$250,000; interest is used for scholarships; additional gifts to principal are always welcome. Selected students will receive awards at a minimum of \$1,000, with the possibility of renewal.
- The Golz Family Scholarship was funded by Carol Golz, a longtime member of St. John's, who donated \$100,000 to be used for scholarships over the next 20 years. These multiple awards of at least \$1,000 are also renewable, as funds are available.

**For high school seniors and others considering higher education, the next application deadline is April 1, 2024.** First-time applicants prepare an essay describing the ways they have been involved with the life of the congregation and how their involvement has affected the choices they make in everyday life.

**Applicants seeking a renewal scholarship,** are asked to write an essay picking at least three of St. John's Core Values and provide specific examples of how they are living those values. **This is due March 15, 2024.**

# Annual Hunger Mission Project — February 4

Kids Against Hunger is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to package and ship highly nutritious, life-saving meals to starving and malnourished children in developing countries and the United States. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about 821 million people in the world, or one in nine face hunger, and one in three suffer from some form of malnutrition in 2021.



Every 10 seconds a child dies (nearly 16,000 every day) because of hunger and related causes. 16.2 million children under 18 in the United States live in households where they are unable to consistently access enough nutritious food necessary for a healthy life. In a few hours, we will package nutritionally-rich meals full of proteins, carbohydrates, and vitamins that are easily digestible – perfect for a malnourished body and mind.



When every package is sealed, we will package enough food to feed 150,000 children. The contents of each meal cost \$0.21, and we'll package 25,000 meals! (To think, the \$7 we spend on a kid's meal at Culver's could feed 33 children.) We'll combine our resources for the \$5,250 needed to pay for the food and shipping.

This is a large event that requires many people. **Come serve on Sunday, February 4, 10:15am-12:45pm.** It will be an experience to live out your faith and make an impact on children "around the world and around the corner."

# Personal Care Kits for Lutheran World Relief



Cleanliness may not actually be next to godliness, but it certainly helps a person feel more human. When families find their homes destroyed, or must flee for their safety, soap and a towel rarely make the cut for what they can carry. Arriving in a refugee camp or other place of safety, they are scared, vulnerable, and dirty from the travel. The simple items included in a Personal Care Kit provide much needed self-care, critical germ fighting, and the chance to regain dignity amidst situations of fear and uncertainty. Last year, St. John's collected 74 personal care kits. **Church, let's strive to make 100 personal care kits to send across the world.**

**During the month of February, we will focus on collecting the following NEW items:**

- Light-weight bath-size towels, (between 20" x 40" and 52" x 27"), dark color recommended
- Bath-size bars of soap, 8-9oz., any brand, in original wrapping
- Adult-size toothbrushes in original wrapping (multi-packs accepted)
- Sturdy combs, remove packaging
- Metal nail clippers, remove packaging



## Stay Connected with St. John's



**Online** at [www.StJohns-LC.org](http://www.StJohns-LC.org)

**On Facebook** at [facebook.com/St-Johns-Lutheran-Church-Evansville-WI-145437998849063/](https://facebook.com/St-Johns-Lutheran-Church-Evansville-WI-145437998849063/)

**With Daily Nudge Text Message Devotions** at [trunc.us/db47CB](https://trunc.us/db47CB)





## **Green Living Tip: Starting a Vegetable Garden**

by Derek Blume



As winter begins to wane, gardeners begin to start thinking about their summer gardens. The Wisconsin growing season is too short to start your entire garden by seed outside. Some crops, such as tomatoes and peppers, need to be started several weeks before it is safe to have them planted outdoors. After some initial setup costs, you can set up a very simple indoor seed-starting station inside your home. Most garden shops will have seeds available starting around the beginning of February. Make sure when looking at the seeds packets that they are marked to be used in the current year. The varieties should be "heirloom" types. Heirloom varieties can often be used for seed saving for the following year.

Next, get a seed-starting soil mix for the seeds to germinate in. Do not use normal potting soil or heavy compost. This mix should be able to retain water well, but is also very light to allow air flow around the seedlings. I use leftover plastic cups or pots from previous years. Ensure there are holes at the bottom to allow excess water to seep out. You can also purchase natural biodegradable pots to use which can be planted directly in the ground.

Fill the pots with the starting mix, leaving about a half an inch at the top. Add warm water to the mix and add the seeds, planting them at appropriate depths, between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, depending on the see packet directions. Now, the seeds need to germinate. I use plastic wrap over the top of the pots to help them retain moisture. The seeds should be kept warm, around 75 degrees. To do this, I use 48-inch fluorescent workshop lights, both warm bulbs and pure white. I hang the lights approximately 1 inch above the pots. Once the seeds sprout, remove the plastic wrap (and save it for next year). Continue to keep the lights about 1 inch above the seedlings, adjusting the height as they grow. Make sure to let the seedlings rest as well; they need at least 6 hours a day without light.

Maintain moisture in the pots for seedlings to continue to grow and develop a healthy root system. You may need to add some natural fertilizers during the growth of the plants (depending on the starting mix and plant type). Once the plants have reached an appropriate level of maturity (three to four true leaves) and the weather has warmed up enough, you can transplant them into your garden.

## Missionary Moment: Pastor Bridget Gautieri

Thank you so much for your prayers and your continued support of my ministry in Lutherstadt Wittenberg! 2024 will be a very big year for the ELCA Wittenberg Center. To kick off the year, I was officially installed on Friday, January 12th. This was a joyous occasion, and I was grateful to have visitors from several German Church bodies in the region, as well as many local Wittenbergers in attendance. You can take a look at our Facebook page for some photos of the event: @ELCAWittenbergCenter



2024 marks 25 years since the ELCA Wittenberg Center was founded in 1999. We want to celebrate our 25th anniversary in November with an in-person seminar around the theme of accompaniment, the value central to ELCA's Global Mission. As it says on the ELCA Global Mission website: "A lot of mission work historically looked like this: there is God's story, my story and your story. Mission meant me bringing God's story to you. God's story is on my side, and you are on the other side. I'm crossing boundaries to bring God to you." Changing from this historical interpretation to mission work based on the theology and practice of accompaniment and relationship allows us to work with and learn from people and communities all over the world.

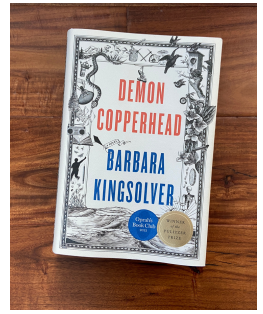
2024 also marks the 500th anniversary of the Peasants' Revolt (Bauernkrieg), also known as the Uprising of the Common Person. We are looking to have a webinar on this in the Spring. This was an important topic in Luther's time, and is very strongly intertwined with the history of the Reformation. Be on the lookout for more details!

It is challenging to have such an eventful year planned as my first full year in this position, when I'm still building relationships. I am still learning about the history of the Center and identifying the wants and needs of the local church and community. I would really appreciate any and all prayers for the work of the Center in 2024, and that God equips and enables me to do this work in love.

Blessings +  
Bridget

## Abbie's Assurances by Abbie Kriebs

I recently finished reading Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver, and let me tell you: it deserved last year's Pulitzer Prize, no question about it. It's a modern retelling of Charles's Dickens's David Copperfield, and while I can shame-facedly admit to you that I, an English major, have never read this particular classic, I can assure you that now I wish I had.



Set in rural Virginia in the early 2000s, the novel is an excoriating look at foster care, classism, and the opioid crisis, all in a neat 560 pages (I would not cut a one). The narrator, Demon, has a voice that's sharp, observant, and at times truly funny. Now that I've spent several sentences singing the book's praises, I will issue a warning: Kingsolver's version is not for sensitive readers.

Weeks after I've finished the book, as I think back on the story and the characters, the misfortunes and the lucky breaks to be found in its pages, there's a common thread that weaves through it: community. The parts of his life that Demon looks back most fondly on are the times when people showed up for him; they're the times where he had a place to belong. People went out of their way to get him what he needed, even though he could give nothing in return. At one point, he's even wearing a jersey, a literal representation of being part of a team, a part of something bigger than himself.

And throughout the book, the absence of a real community is where we see the book take its darkest turns. Neglect permeates sections of the story, often at the hands of adults who don't themselves have a community to rely on. There's also a false community, where Demon feels belonging, but what the community offered him is a mere shadow of the real thing, one where care takes a backseat and connections are based on transactions alone.

Each of us has our own history as it relates to community, the places we did or didn't belong. I can remember a Monday in fourth grade when all the other nine year old girls showed up wearing a special beaded bracelet... and upon seeing me, a friend gasped: "We forgot to invite Abbie." And I can also remember countless times other people have gone out of their way to bring community to me, meals showing up when I needed them, or texts saying "Me, too. It's hard. It gets better."

Community can pull us up, wrap us up, and keep us looking up when we need to. We're better together. In the end, Demon learns that, too.

# CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRIES

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## 2024 Noisy Offering: Hygiene Kits

In 2023, our children's ministries collected money for our Noisy Offering, which was used to purchase water filters through ELCA Good Gifts. Through the generosity of these young hearts, **we were able to purchase 60 water filters!**

For 2024, our Noisy Offering will go towards purchasing hygiene kits through ELCA Good Gifts, which is a separate ministry than the items our church is collecting for the Lutheran World Relief personal care kits. We all know that hand-washing is an important way to stay healthy, but in many communities, critical supplies such as soap, bleach, and even water are scarce. A hygiene kit provides sanitation supplies and education for households, schools, clinics, and other public spaces across the globe.



### Children, Youth & Family (CYF)

#### Calendar Highlights for January 2024:

- February 3rd & 4th — Soul Troop Leads Worship
- February 10th & 11th — Lutherdale Retreat for 3rd-5th Graders
- February 12th — No Faith Corps, Soul Troop, Confirmation, or Sweet Wednesday
- February 16th-18th — High School Quake Retreat
- February 23rd-25th — Lutherdale Retreat for 6th-8th Graders

*Questions about ministries for children 5th grade and younger?  
Contact Callie Jones at [children@stjohns-lc.org](mailto:children@stjohns-lc.org)!*

## Lutherdale Confirmation Retreat: Feb 23-25

Middle school youth are heading to Lutherdale in Elkhorn to retreat. Friday, February 23 – Sunday, February 25 youth and adults will enjoy good food, games, spiritual growth, and a big sleepover with friends. We all need to retreat and refocus our lives.

Head to the Lutherdale website. Click Year Round + Youth Retreats + Register for Youth Retreats. Create a new account or log into your existing account. Click on your child's name, or add them as a participant. St. John's Registration Code: SJLCEV. Let's make time to renew and refresh!

## Lutherdale Summer Camp Opportunities

There are many opportunities for our youth to try out Bible camp at Lutherdale this summer. Whether it's for a few nights or a whole week, campers get to try new activities and practice new skills. This could be canoeing, archery, Bible study, arts & crafts, field games... the list goes on and on! Here's the schedule:

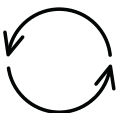


- Young Pioneers (Grades 1-2) July 7-9 or July 10-12
- Adventure Week (Grades 3-8) July 7-12
- Fireflies (Completed 4th-5th Grade) July 14-19
- Night Owls (Completed 6-8th Grade) July 14-19

Head to [www.lutherdale.org/summer-camp](http://www.lutherdale.org/summer-camp) to get more info and to register, or contact the church office for more details.

### 5 WAYS TO GIVE

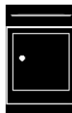
Automated



Mail



Dropbox



Online



In Person



# IN OUR THOUGHTS & PRAYERS

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## St. John's Members

|               |                |                 |              |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Michael Adams | Adam Kopp      | Kira Tortomasi  | Barb Nieman  |
| John Almond   | Warren Yoerger | Jeanette Schunk | Tammy Landen |
| Kent Englund  |                |                 |              |

## Family & Friends

|                  |                |              |                   |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Braiden Bergum   | Marlene Jones  | Jodi Seyer   | Georgan Nicholson |
| Rosemary Wangard | Craig Thompson | Linda Harris |                   |
| Bill Springer    | Barb Buttchen  | Tom Timm     |                   |
| Sandra Zahn      | Ken Creek      | Mike Feirn   |                   |

## Partners in Mission:

Rev. Carl and Kelsey Grulke & family, in Botswana  
Rev. Bridget Gautieri in Germany  
Ashley Bowman, Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans

## Men and Women in Service:

Matt Forster, Nate Madsen, Bailey Olin, Tyler Schnell, Hunter Speropulos,  
Marcus Steindl, Mark Trawicki, Heather Ihlenfeldt, Branden Samela, Samantha Ihlenfeldt

## Condolences to:

**Cindy (Jeff) Hurst and family** as they grieve the death of her nephew Randy Rasmussen.

**Jan (Jim) Schuh and family** as they grieve the death of her nephew Jeremy Larsen and sister-in-law Peggy Schuh.

**Amy (Ben) Banks and family** as they grieve the death of her mom Mary Dammen.

**Glenace Smelcer** as she grieves the death of her cousin Virginia Smith.

**Mitch (Alicia) Ziolkowski** and family as they grieve the death of his uncle Cory Ziolkowski.

## Congratulations to:

**Corey and Madeline Smith** on the baptism of their son Theodore.

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## Bible Study on Thursdays at 1:00pm with Pastor Matt

You are invited to join Pastor Matt every Thursday afternoon at 1:00pm for Bible Study in the lounge. Each week we'll preview the upcoming weekend's scripture reading through reflection and conversation. No experience necessary. Come when you can; our group is different every week. What remains constant is that we always laugh and learn together.

# POINTS OF PRAYER

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Together we lift up these prayer concerns. Start by reading the prayer topic and “holding” those people or that situation before God. Say the topic over and over in your mind, or aloud, and raise it before God. Then continue in agreement with the petition of prayer. We pray:

## **For all who experience terror and violence**

Lord of the nations, bring an end to oppression and warfare. Bless the road toward peace. Protect the innocent, humble the proud, and clear away all forms of evil. May your church respond with compassion to provide for the needs of all who suffer.

## **For small groups**

Lord Jesus, our Close Companion, bless the small groups of our congregation. Open our hearts and minds and plant the seeds of faith. Encourage us to be vulnerable and honest so that we might know one another and know you better.

## **For those called to national leadership**

God our Shepherd, guide us as this country prepares to elect a President. Provide discerning minds and hearts. Direct those who are campaigning to be models of kindness and strong leadership. Empower us to use our voices and votes for God’s mission of love and forgiveness.

## **We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.**

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## **A Prayer For Lent**

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

From *Lent: Penitence, Pilgrimage, Preparation* by Audrey Novak Riley. Copyright © 2012 Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



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