



GROWING TOGETHER IN LOVE **LOVING GOD. LOVING OTHERS.**

November 2024

"... that my house may be filled." Luke 14:23

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the Parable of the Great Feast, Jesus tells the story of a man hosting a feast where none of his invited guests arrive. He then sends out his servants to find everyone they can and bring them to the feast so "that my house may be filled." I believe God's desire for us is the same as the host in the parable, that our house of worship may be filled. What would it look like if St. Mark's was filled today? Allow me to share my vision with you.

I see a church where children are embraced at every stage of life. Where an infant cries during service and their parent feels the support of their church family. A church where the seeds of faith are planted in our young people by their participation in the life of a church where their prayers and hopes for themselves and the world are heard and affirmed. I see a church where generations of families worship together, and where youth and seniors learn from one another.

I see a church where the doors are flung wide open, where strangers become neighbors and where neighbors become friends. A church where divisions of class, race, gender, and politics give away to our oneness in Christ. A church where those wrestling with their faith feel as at home as those who've never had a doubt. I see a church where discipleship is fostered by fellowship, service, and faith. A church known for its hospitality and for its support of the larger community.

I see a church where people are nourished through worship. A church where the music is as diverse and varied as God's people, where songs familiar and new are sung with equal enthusiasm, and where people's talents are shared and celebrated. A church where the Gospel is preached faithfully and the Word challenges, comforts, and inspires. A church where worship is not viewed merely as an obligation to God but as an incredible gift to ourselves, and where those who are sent out go in peace to serve the Lord do so in their daily lives.

One of Lutheranism's core theological ideas is "already but not yet." It is this idea found in scripture that the Kingdom of God is already here but not yet fully realized. Luther's understanding of us as sinners and saints is another expression of this idea. The same understanding can be applied to us as a congregation. The things I've laid out in this vision are already happening among us each and every day. You can see them and you have seen them. We are being filled but we are not yet full. In this stewardship season, I am asking for your help as we continue the work of fully realizing this vision for our congregation.

Friends, we've been able to do so much together these past few years. The spirit of our congregation is strong and the seeds we have been planting together are bearing fruit. In order to sustain and build upon the work we've been doing together we need the financial support of people like you.

Pastor David Bjorklund



Saint Mark's
Evangelical Lutheran Church

2025 STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: SUSTAINING CORE MINISTRIES

In a time when many churches are being forced to make cuts and consider closing their doors, we made the commitment to invest in our core ministries of Music and Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) because we know the future of our congregation depends on it. Because of these strategic investments our Music program is stronger than it has been in years and our renewed CYF ministry is planting the seeds that will bear much fruit in years to come.

BRIDGING THE GAP

We have to sustain these core ministries if we are to build upon our momentum and ensure a place at the table for this generation and the next. Sustaining these ministries requires our annual giving to increase by \$125,000 over the next several years.

In January our congregation approved a budget with expenses that exceed current giving levels by \$125,000. This was a bold move and we were able to make it for two reasons. One, we have the right leadership under Pastor David, Deacon Kate, and our Worship & Music Director Tom Paulson and we know they are committed to our vision for the future. Two, we have reserve funds that allow us to bridge the gap between expenses and giving in the short term. We expect to have strong leadership for years to come but our reserve funds cannot be counted on forever. To carry us into the future we are counting on one another. To get us towards our goal we are asking everyone to do what they can.

YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT

If you are not currently giving regularly in support of our life together please consider adopting this spiritual practice and become a giver. If you are a current giver we are asking you to increase your regular support by 7% or more if you are able. With your sustaining financial support we can ensure everyone at St. Mark's has a place at the table for years to come.

“ St. Mark's is clearly a tight-knit community that truly cares about each other. At the same time, it has been easy to feel at home here as newcomers. We love Pastor David's transparency and down to earth approach to faith. | Lauren & Jeff Lamers

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: SHARING IN LIFE TOGETHER

A few years ago we began to think of our Wednesday night meals, education, and worship as Act2. This was inspired by the example of the early church found in chapter two of The Acts of the Apostles. That first community of faithful were committed first and foremost to following the way of Jesus but also deeply committed to one another as a community. They did everything As Church Together.

The early church was a diverse group of people. They came from different backgrounds. They occupied different rungs on the socioeconomic ladder. They had differing views about world in which they lived. And yet they were one through their faith in Christ. When they gathered as church together they did so as sisters and brothers, as beloved children of God. Whatever their differences they remained one people in Christ.

ONE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

To live as church together means sharing in life together. It means breaking bread together, playing together, laughing together, crying together, serving together, leading together, praying together, rejoicing together, and worshiping together. It is our hope that every person who walks through our doors, whether it's their first time at St. Mark's or they've been coming here for decades, knows there is a place for them and that they take their place at the table.

What Does a 7% Increase in Weekly Giving Look Like?

Use this chart to assess your current giving and consider increasing it by 7% as a renewed commitment to God's work through the ministry of St. Mark's.

CURRENT Weekly giving:	Weekly giving with 7% INCREASE:	Results in ANNUAL giving of:
\$500/wk	\$535/wk	\$27,820/yr
\$400	\$428	\$22,256
\$300	\$321	\$16,692
\$200	\$214	\$11,128
\$100	\$107	\$5,564
\$75	\$80	\$4,160
\$50	\$54	\$2,808
\$25	\$27	\$1,404
\$10	\$11	\$572

The numbers tell a story...

- 202 – average weekly worship attendance year-to-date
- 580 – families who attended St. Mark's free produce giveaways this past summer
- 11 – community partners that regularly use our facilities
- 43 – students and children sponsored by St. Mark's in Tanzania (31) and India (12)
- 48 – number of children who attended VBS
- 500 – number of people who attended Trunk-or-Treat
- 233 – households who made a commitment to financially support our mission in 2024
- 93 – households who give electronically

These numbers are the story of a community of faith that is embracing hope for a bright future. Over the years, St. Mark's has grown, adapted, evolved, and remained resilient – all the while trusting that God is at work in this place and through us. All are invited to join us as we continue in our mission to Love God and Love Others.

“ I've visited some other churches and no one talked to me, and they wouldn't let me take communion. But here at St. Mark's on Wednesday nights, I feel welcome to eat, meet people, and go to church and worship God.

— Randy, community member

“ My friend was coming to St. Mark's every week and they said that everyone there is welcoming. At first, I was really nervous, because my parents aren't religious and I see a lot of things out there saying God doesn't accept gay people. But everyone here is so accepting and welcoming. I've already learned so much about God and even made some new friends. I am so happy to be here and very grateful for everyone's support.

— North High Student



CORE MINISTRIES UPDATE

Deacon Kate Bentley

When thinking about filling our house, our place of worship, and having a place at the table for all people, this vision cannot be complete with the youngest among us present. We have rallied behind our youth this past year in some very significant ways. With the help of the Foundation, and the generosity of the congregation, we were able to send ten teenagers to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, requiring families to only pay the deposit fee. We also hosted nearly fifty children for full-day Vacation Bible School where we provided lunch and snacks Monday through Friday at no cost to our families. Having programming and opportunities available to our families is one thing, keeping them accessible is another. We have worked hard together to do just that, to be able to show up so that all children and youth get to participate fully without creating a hardship or strain on their family. Creating community and filling our space, inside and out, is a wonderful thing. This fall, we were able to celebrate with our KidsFest in the parking lot with over one hundred church and neighborhood families. St. Mark's is striving to be a place of joy and welcome for all people, not just those of us already on the inside. I look forward to the new ways we can fill this house together in the year ahead.

Tom Paulson, Director of Music and Worship

It is our responsibility and privilege to discern where God is calling St. Mark's. We know that we are beloved children of God, blessed with many skills and talents for making this a better world. But what is God calling us to do with those skills and talents? One area is very clear to me, and summed up beautifully in the song we will be singing several times during November. "For everyone born, a place at the table. For everyone born, clean water and bread. And God will delight when we are creatures of justice and joy, compassion and peace." In verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 we sing, "For woman and man, For young and for old, For just and unjust, For gay and for straight." In the songs that we sing, in the ways we sing them, and in the words that we sing, we can make this community a welcoming place. A broad variety of musical styles is a clear statement of welcome. Music ensembles that find space for everyone is a clear statement of welcome. Language that includes all God's people is a clear statement of welcome. My prayer for us in 2025 is that we do the things in which God would delight.

WAYS TO GIVE FINANCIALLY

Electronic Giving

This is the easiest and most convenient way to give to St. Mark's. By setting up recurring donations online, you enable St. Mark's to maintain financial stability and plan for the future. It's safe and secure, easy to track your giving, and quick to set up. Visit www.stmarks-nsp.org and select Online Giving on the home page to access Realm giving options.

Offering Envelopes

Weekly offering envelopes are a great way to combine your giving with attendance at worship services. Place your gifts in the offering plate, and your personalized envelope number will assure that your contributions are properly credited.

Stocks and Securities

Gifts of appreciated stocks and securities are an excellent way to share God's gifts. Your broker can electronically transfer your securities directly to St. Mark's. To ensure that we can acknowledge your gift for income tax purposes, please notify us in advance.

Need Assistance with Giving Options?

Please email helened@stmarks-nsp.org or call 651.777.7451, ext 238.



COMPLETE AND RETURN YOUR STATEMENT OF INTENT CARD

Indicate your financial intent for 2025

Knowing what members intend to contribute financially to the work God calls us to do serves as an important planning tool for the coming year.

If you've never turned in an intent card before, please join us this year. Even if you are unable to state the amount of your intent, the card is also an indication of your prayerful support for the ministry of St. Mark's.

Return your Statement of Intent during worship on Sunday, November 24

You may also mail the card using the enclosed return envelope. Thank you for your faithful support of St. Mark's ongoing ministry.



“ I enjoy coming to the St. Mark's Wednesday night dinner because of the great welcoming feeling. It's nice to meet new friends from church and the community. | *Wednesday night attendee*