



THE FIRST FRUITS

Serving Christ by proclaiming Christ crucified in the
Minnesota North District of the LCMS

First Evangelical Lutheran Church; Grand Rapids, MN
A member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod



*P*astor's Corner

For many people Christmas is one of the two best times of the year, closely tied with Easter. For many other people Christmas is a time of weariness, worry, debt, and loneliness. That's quite a difference. How would we explain this?

The key is in what we find truly valuable. There are so many traditions and activities we invest ourselves in that do not have an eternal value. Are these things wrong? Usually not. Are they detrimental to our well-being? Not necessarily so. Are they a waste of time and energy? They certainly take much time and require a lot of energy to accomplish. That often is why people are so frequently exhausted around the holiday season. This brings up an important point. Are our traditions and activities based on being a worldly holiday or are they things that make it a holy day? How we answer that question determines our priorities and our values.

Let me say it again, there is not necessarily anything wrong with our traditions, but are they valuable in the eternal perspective? Who doesn't like to decorate the house or apartment? I've seen large trees and tiny trees, but nearly everyone has a tree. Do we even know why? Who doesn't like to string up lights to make the place look festive? We recently heard of a man who fell off his roof putting lights on his house, breaking his collar bone and nine ribs as well as a punctured lung. Who doesn't make every

December, 2019



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effort to have a gift or gifts for everyone we cherish? I have noted for many years that offerings to the church in January slump significantly because of credit card debt. Who doesn't enjoy gathering with family around Christmas? Yet we hear that the season brings on the highest degree of depression than any other time of the year. Who doesn't resolve not to eat too many cookies or take that second helping of mashed potatoes and gravy as we stuff ourselves with turkey or ham? Then we spend weeks trying to lose the extra pounds we put on.

I don't want to sound like Scrooge, but do you get the point? There is so much we do out of habit or for others who do not always appreciate the slippers we gave them. Don't give up all the traditions you have participated in for years and years, but at least recognize them for the things we do that are less important than the true reason for the season.

The glitter of lights and ornaments should never overshadow the low estate of Bethlehem's manger. It is important to remember that the wise men gave gifts to Jesus, not to each other. The "let us go see" attitude of those humble shepherds should transfer to our readiness to gather together to worship the new-born King Jesus – even if it interferes with our family supper hour. While we spend so much time racking our brains to think of just the right present for each person on

your gift list, don't forget to present yourself to Jesus as a humble follower, a believer, a faithful servant.

We live in a society today where more and more people resent the greetings, the music, and the spotlight being put on our Christian values that they don't buy into. We can either sit quickly in the corner so as not to offend anyone or we can be true to our Lord and true to our own beliefs and be a person who is unashamedly willing to let the light of Jesus shine through us. Having Jesus as our Savior is eternally valuable. As Pastor Cloeter's bumper sticker said years ago: "Jesus, Don't Leave Earth without Him."

It is not my intention to put a dent in anyone's Christmas traditions. It is my hope, however, that this message does stir up your attention to make sure you focus on the true value of Christmas. See Jesus in everything we do!

PASTOR ZEIGE

Sue and I want to wish you all a very blessed time of celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus. While I will be retiring from full-time minister as of the end of December, I have stated my willingness to stay on as a more part-time vacancy pastor while the calling process unfolds. I hope to serve First Lutheran to the best of my abilities until our house in Grand Rapids sells or a new pastor is in place. The timing is in God's hands.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE:

- December 4th, 6:30 p.m. Midweek Advent I
- December 11th, 6:30 p.m. Midweek Advent II (Communion)
- Advent Soup Suppers before these two services
- December 18th, 6:30 p.m. Children's Christmas Program
- December 24th, 6:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Family Worship
- COME ONE, COME ALL!

BOARD OF MISSIONS

The Board of Missions has designated that our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day offerings will be given to our local food shelf. So many families in our community need the resources that are available to them through the food shelf.

As Christ has said "As you have done it unto the least of them, you have done it unto me"

We must be cheerful givers!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Wishing our families a Blessed Holiday Season.



It is so easy to get caught up in all the excitement of the Holidays. It is also becoming more and more apparent how Satan is working to diminish the "true" meaning and message of this holiday season. That baby born in Bethlehem is what it is all about!

Our Sunday School children are being taught that message in their weekly lessons. They will also be sharing that wonderful message as they present it on Wednesday, December 18th in our Advent Service.

The children continue sharing their faith through their songs during the Youth Sundays.

Please remember to tell them how much joy that bring to you. They need to know their ministry in this area is also very important.

Please also pray for our staff, children and families; and keep them in your thought and prayers.

Remember, God calls each and every one of us to share the love of Jesus in all times and in all places.

May the true meaning of the holly season bring you the peace, joy and hope and it is meant to share with all people.

***In Christ, Mary Buech
Sunday School Superintendent***



Youth Ministry

Attention parents! (and those wanting to know about what the youth are up to)

Are you familiar with our current youth group? Youth group is a group of 6th-12th graders who get together to talk more about how they can use God's Word in their everyday life. They get to talk about real situations that they are facing and it is a time for them to get real with their present God. We focus on how they can do good work in the community and in the church and most importantly share the Love of Jesus.

If we have any 9th-12th graders wanting to get together, we will break up the current youth group.

We have so many opportunities for the youth coming up! Please stay current and up to date with us by visiting the bulletin board outside the youth office, Sunday morning announcements, flcgr.org/youth, join our Facebook group "First Lutheran Youth Group", like the "First Evangelical Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Grand Rapids MN"

Facebook page, or follow us on Instagram @firstevlutheranyouth.

No Sunday School December 1st due to Thanksgiving weekend.

With Advent coming up we will be doing some soup suppers for the congregation to raise funds for upcoming events. The youth are encouraged to participant and help set up, serve, and clean up. The proceeds will be split among the youth that work. There is a signup sheet in front of the youth office. We will serve soup on December 4th and December 11th. Youth that are working will need to be there at 4:00, those in confirmation can stay after. Soup will be served from 5:00-6:00.

December 18th is the youth Christmas program service directed by John and Steph Schroeder. LWML will be serving a hotdish meal before this service. Youth will need to be at the church no later than 5:30.

Bell Choir practice will be December 8th and the 15th from 9:15-10:15.

Cards will be for sale on December 8th and the 15th. This is again a fundraiser for the youth. Sign up in front of the youth office. Working hours are from 8:45-9:15 and then 10:00-10:30.

December 15th is our next family event, cookies and caroling. Thanks to Theresa Howrey for applying for a Thrivent Action Team card. Our goal is to decorate 20 dozen cookies, we so far have 11 dozen donated. There are a total of 18 shut-ins that we need to bring cookies to.

Lunch will be served after second service in the fellowship hall. Please join us, all are welcomed!

Lord of Life Escape Room is coming January 3rd-5th. Youth are encouraged to help set up on January 2nd starting at 1:00 in the afternoon. If anyone needs a ride, please contact Jessica and we will work something out. The hours that the escape room will be open will be 10:00-7:45 January 3rd and 4th and from 12:30-5:15 on January 5th. We can't put this on without the help of the youth. Sign up in front of the youth office.

In Christ
Jessica Pellinen
Family Ministry Program Director

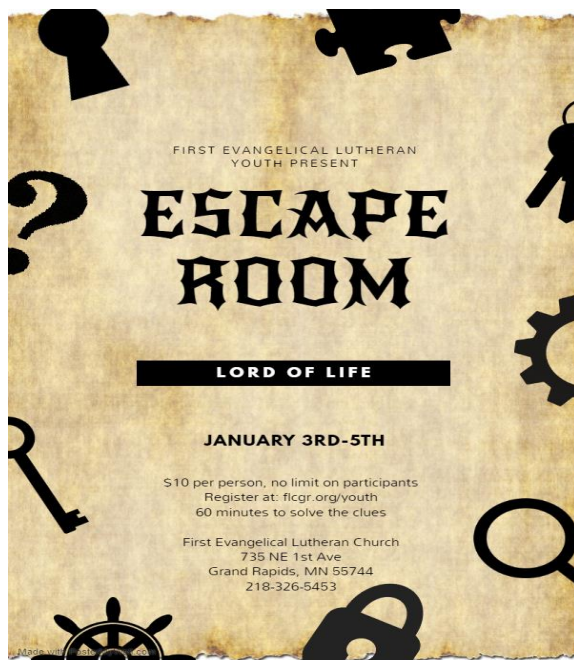
Escape Room

The youth group will be putting on an escape room January 3rd-5th at the church. The cost will be \$10 per person and you can have as many people as you want at a time. The Lord of Life Escape Room will challenge your brain on all levels. Solve riddles, crack codes and find clues before the time runs out! Work together with your friends or family and find out who has it in them to keep going and not give up!

Background: A Pastor has passed away and he left his very first precious Bible in his study. But, he didn't hide it in plain sight. With a few clues, puzzles, and riddles you will have to work together to find it. You will have 60 minutes in the

room to solve the clues and find the Bible. Sign up at flcgr.org/youth

Are you up to the challenge?



OPEN DOOR COAT RACK



The Board of Human Care would like to thank the congregation for your outstanding support of this community project. Our congregation donated in excess of 250 various items in the form of jackets, coats, boots, mittens,

gloves, hats and scarves for adults and children. Your response this year exceeded the donations of the past 5 years. Open Door helped to meet the needs of more than 1100 individuals in our area. Board of Human Care also applied for and was accepted to receive \$250 for a Thrivent Action Team project, which was used to prepare a display of new winter outerwear items, which were then donated to the coat drive. The distribution was held on October 29-30 at the United Methodist Church. There were more than 250 persons in line on the opening morning. It was heartwarming and enjoyable to see our Community helped in this way. Thank you all again from the Board of Human Care!

GINGERBREAD GIVING TREE



First Lutheran will again be participating in the community toy drive 'Gingerbread Giving Tree'. The gift tags will be placed on the Christmas tree in the foyer at Thanksgiving time and will be available through December 12th. The tags will designate for a boy or a girl with an age noted. If you would like to help out with this worthwhile project, please purchase a toy in the price range of \$20 or less, attach the tag to the gift or bag and return to First Lutheran. Our donations will then be delivered to the Distribution site by the

12th of December. Please note that gifts for the ages of 9-12 are especially needed as these tend to be in short supply each year. Gifts for this age range can be backpacks, scarves, jewelry, board games, craft kits, etc. Thank you all in advance as First Lutheran has been very generous in past years. Your gifts go forward to bless many children this Christmas.



LIBRARY CORNER



CENTER OF GRAVITY

by Laura McNeil found at 813.6 McN. This is a book, that after reading it, the story will stay with you for a while. Thought provoking, uncomfortable,

angry, wanting to get into the story to help these characters were some of the reactions I had. I'm not sure it is considered a Christian book; would like feedback from readers! Ava Carson's picture-perfect marriage begins unraveling at the seams, yet she considers it temporary. The chapters tell the story as each character enters. Center of Gravity weaves a chilling tale, revealing the unflinching and dangerous truth that things – and people – are not always what they seem.

Reviewed by Darlene Baltus

HOUSE OF LIVING STONES by Katie Schuermann found at 813.6 Sch. Another of the delightful recent books added to our library. The trials and triumphs of a congregation from very young children to the saints going to be with their Savior. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll see some very hurting human dilemmas handled with not only the Law, but also with the Gospel's compassion and wisdom. Be sure and get all 3 books in the series, marked 1, 2 and 3 on the spine, including **THE CHOIR IMMORTAL** and **THE HARVEST RAISE**.

Reviewed by Alice Hill

RIVEN by Jerry Jenkins found at 813.54 Jen. If you will pardon a pun, **RIVEN** will keep you "riven to your seat". This book tells the story of two people who are very different – a young man who continually is on a downward spiral, and a pastor, who feels defeated in his ministry. As their lives intersect through a prison ministry, you will find yourself finding it difficult to put this book down. Chuck Colson has quoted about this book that it was "a deeply personal reminder of why God called me to prison ministry so many years ago." Dwight, you were right! I would have to put this novel on my list of "favorites".

Reviewed by Sue Zeige

Just a heads up to our readers! We've recently received many new books and a DVD from our Library Angelz and put them into circulation. Enjoy a good

book when it's cold outside (actually anytime is a good time to read!).

More books have been checked out this year January – September than we had all last year in 2018! Just goes to show that some of you are finding treasures and we like it!!!

"I tried everything to get to sleep last night. Well, everything except closing the book and putting it on the night stand. Let's not get too crazy..."

Anonymous



**JANUARY
"FIRST FRUITS"
ARTICLES**

**December "First Fruits" items are
Due by December 15th.**

**ALL ARTICLES NEED TO BE
EMAILED TO
Debbie.Robertson@hotmail.com**

USHERS NEEDED: We need ushers for both the 1st service and second service. Women are encouraged to volunteer. Contact Ed Ames and David Storrs.

CHRISTMAS BAKE SALE – SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8TH:

The women of the congregation are having a Christmas bake sale December 8th after both services. Cookies, breads, pies, jams, jellies, candy, etc. will be available for purchase. The bake sale is a free will donation. This is one of our fund raisers to help support mission grants. Quilts will also be sold for missions. Please mark your calendar for this event! Bakers – Please package your items and bring them to the church either Saturday, December 7th between 2:00 pm and 3:00 pm or the morning of December 8th. Thank you for supporting LWML mission grants!

CALL COMMITTEE MEETING: The Call Committee will have a kick-off meeting on Monday, November 25 at 5:30 pm at the church. An update on the current status will be provided and we will discuss the call process. Please let me know if you have any questions prior to the meeting. Matt Pellinen - Call Committee Chair

MEN'S CLUB VENISON FEED
December 2nd @ 5:00p.m. Donations Of Venison Welcomed. Please Greg Taylor or Leigh Serfling.

AN ARTICLE was in the November newsletter mentioning an advent celebration for the women of First Lutheran. Due to unforeseen circumstances we have had to cancel this event.



IT'S RED STOCKING TIME!

We hope you've been filling your stockings with your dimes or any change you have. We will have the stockings out ready for distribution on Sunday, December 1st. They can be returned any Sunday during the month of December. You may leave your stockings in the basket designated at the back of the church or in the mites box. You may also pick up an empty stocking and start collecting for 2020! This money goes toward the LWML mission goals in our District and at National. Thank You! LWML



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA'S have been ordered at a cost of \$7.00 each. Your donation is appreciated each year to help defray the cost

of the flowers. You may do this in memory of loved ones. All flowers will be available for you to take home after 12/29 services. Please put your donation in an envelope and mark it "Christmas Flowers". Thank you Kathy Hohenstein



“Sharing the Love of Jesus”

Voters Meeting Minutes - Unapproved

October 27, 2019

1. **Call to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 12:45PM by Tom Lattimore.
2. **Opening Devotion and Prayer** – Pastor Zeige’s devotion and prayer was based on “I am with you always to the closing of the age.” Look for opportunities to serve and reach out to others. God is always with you and He will get you past your fears.
3. **Minutes from the January 20, 2019 Annual Voters Meeting**
4. **Minutes of the May 5, 2019 Audio Visual Special Voters Meeting**
***Motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the minutes from the January 20, 2019 Annual Voters Meeting and the minutes from the May 5, 2019 Audio Visual Special Voters Meeting.
5. **Reception of New Voting Members**
***Motion was made, seconded and passed to approve Lee Thorson into membership.
6. **2019 Congregation President Report – Tom Lattimore**
Very busy year. Good to see progress made. Selling of the parsonage, parade involvement and outreach into the community, Family Camp, AV system up and running and training in progress.
7. **Pastor’s Report – Pastor Wm. Zeige**
Enjoys preaching and teaching. In addition to the weekly Wednesday Bible Studies, Pastor has been doing a Bible Study at Grand Manor for 38 years and meets with members of Our Redeemer and First Lutheran every other week. Nineteen members have been receiving private communion because they are unable to get out. He tries to see them every month. There are 16 students in confirmation. Four of them are in their third year and will be confirmed in the Spring. There have been 4 baptisms, 4 deaths, and 3 weddings. With his vacation, Pastor and Sue have been able to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary, attend a granddaughter’s high school graduation, and attend a granddaughter’s confirmation. His plans are to retire at the end of the year and stated that he would be available for part-time vacancy until their house is sold.
8. **Children’s Ministry Program Coordinator Report – Jessica Pellinen**
This year has been very busy. There are 24 students in Sunday

School. Release Time has a total of 29 students registered. Youth Sunday dates have fluctuated. In January we should be back to the 3rd Sunday of each month. November 3rd will be Youth Sunday and the Christmas program will be on Wednesday, December 18th. There are youth/family events planned for each month from September to January. VBS didn't have as many adult volunteers this year, but the youth stepped up to volunteer. There were only 3 students who had no ties to our church. Ideas or suggestions on how we can better utilize our resources are welcome. In July, Jessica and 2 youth attended the National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis. The next youth gathering will be July 9-13, 2020 in Houston, Texas. Jessica stated that she will be attending a national conference in Minneapolis November 14-16 that focuses on Rural and Small-Town Ministry. Please let Jessica know if you have anything you want advertised on Facebook or the church website.

9. Oral Reports of Boards and Committees

A. **Board of Education:** No Report

- B. **Board of Elders:** Les Flem – The Elders have been leading a few worship services in Pastor's absence. He asked the question, what can we put on hold or what can you help with while we are short staffed?
- C. **Board of Human Care:** Molly Goplin – The board has a major need for volunteers. We reach out into the community through projects such as the house build, coat drive, gingerbread gifts. Anyone is welcome to help with a specific project.
- D. **Board of Missions:** Mary Buech – The Thanksgiving offering will go to the Second Harvest Food Bank. In January we will be supporting new missionaries, Kip and Tami Baudoin in the Ukraine. Mary also mentioned a special ministry that her brother is involved with. It is a Christian organization to improve the lives of Uganda's orphaned children. All funds totally go to the children's programs. There is a choir that tours in the US and it may be possible for them to come to Grand Rapids.
- E. **Board of Stewardship:** Doug Carlson – We are in the midst of the three weeks of Pastor's stewardship messages: The

Stewardship of Obedience, The Stewardship of Relationships, and The Stewardship of Time Management. There is a vacancy on the board. This board does not meet every month. There is also a need for more counters. Doug stated that they are gathering information about automatic withdrawal for offerings and will do a survey to see how many would be interested.

- F. **Board of Trustees:** Gary Rosin – The year has been very busy and all construction and repairs have been completed. Organ repair is scheduled for next year. The Lift is still not working. The company has been very difficult to contact and they have not shown up for repair appointments. This needs to be resolved and we possibly may need to have a lawyer send them a letter.
- G. **Board of Youth:** RaeAnne Lattimore stated that there is a need for more board members.
- H. **Revolving Trust Fund Committee:** Greg Taylor – In addition to Greg, members of the committee are Dick Buech, John Howrey, Dave Braaten and Jennifer Flem (treasurer) ex officio. The committee manages funds that

come in other than the general funds. These funds can be either designated or undesignated. Contingency fund loans can be used when offerings are down and are to be paid back. The Church Council has the ability to ask for the loan. The Radio Fund was changed to Media Fund. We are one of the few churches that have Revolving Trust Funds.

- I. **Wiebe Grant Committee:** Greg Taylor – This grant is for the Youth and there have been no requests in the last quarter.
- J. **Direction and Planning Committee:** Greg Taylor – The committee has not met recently. Next year they will be researching Day Care possibilities.

10. Financial Secretary's Report: Deb Robertson – We are in the black.

11. Treasurer's Report: Jennifer Flem – Report in Packet

12. Correspondence - None

13. Unfinished Business - None

14. New Business

- 1. Proposed 2020 Budget – The Youth budget was increased to reflect more monthly expenses with scheduled activities and also planning for the next National Youth Gathering by setting aside \$750.00 each quarter. The Elders

Budget increased with Concordia Plan to be added for new pastor. Salary numbers are uncertain because of level of experience. The Trustees budget increased because of possible snow costs for hauling and equipment rental.

*****Motion was made, seconded and approved to accept the Proposed Operating Budget.**

2. Final AVE Payment & Repayment of Loan Advance

*****Motion was made, seconded and approved to remove Media from the Securities Am Media Fund to make funds more available (Securities Am Fund).**

3. Elections of Officers and Board Members – There were no additional nominations for President or Vice President.

Nominations added to the ballot: Mary Buech, Board of Human Care; Sue Nelson, Board of Missions; Joan Johnson, Board of Stewardship; Greg Taylor, Shirley Mattfield, Erik Karkela, Board of Trustees.

*****Motion was made, seconded and approved to accept a White Ballot for Officers and Board Members as updated at the meeting. SEE NOTE BELOW**

4. Constitution – The new Constitution and By-Laws have been approved by the Congregation and the District.

Adjournment – Meeting was adjourned at 2:15PM.

Pastor closed the meeting with prayer.

NOTE: When nominations were being made there was a question as to if congregation members who were not voting members could be nominated.

After the meeting was adjourned it was discovered in the By-Laws 3.8.1 All elective offices of the congregation shall be reserved to members of the voters assembly who are at least 18 years of age. Shirley Mattfield and Erik Karkela are not voting members but they will be asked to attend the next congregation meeting and request to become voting members.

**Respectfully submitted, Linda Urevig,
Recording Secretary**

