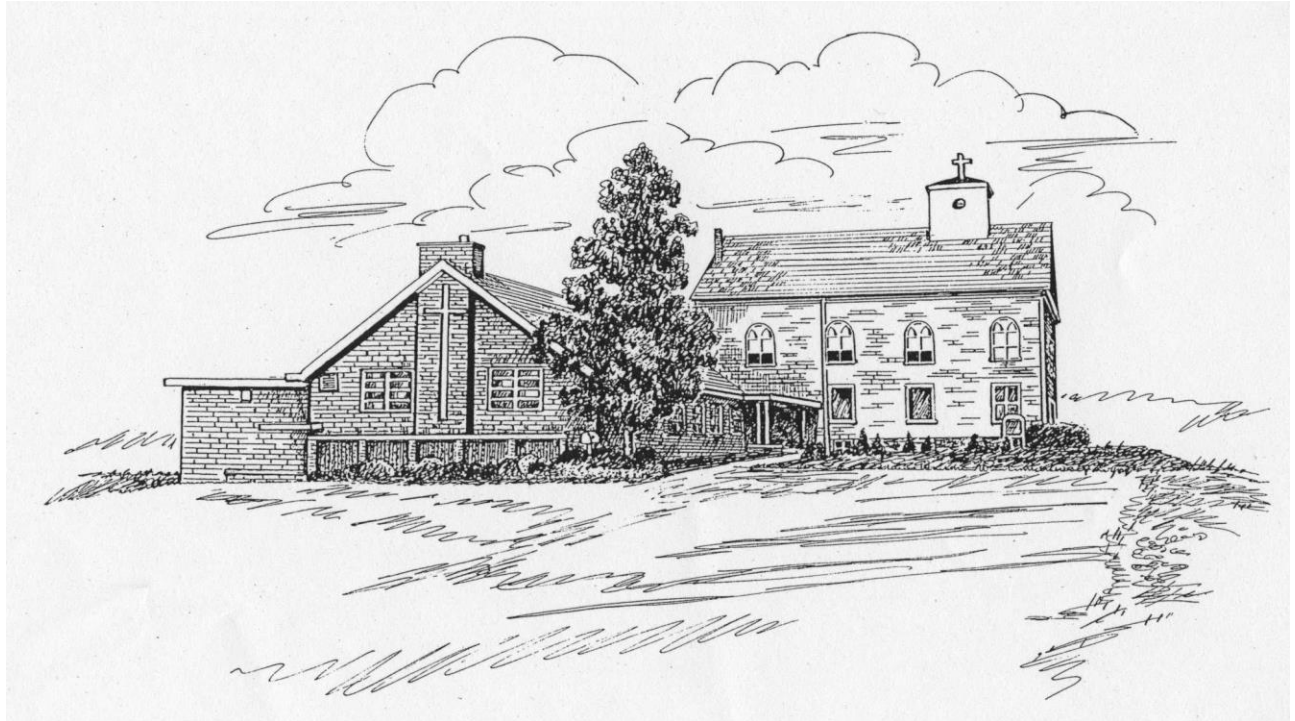


WISPS OF STRAW



St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter

April 2017

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*“Serving Christ in Word and Deed”
more than 265 Years*

Pastor's Letter

Easter - A New Beginning

For New Year's many of us make resolutions, because we see it as a new beginning. Sometimes we use our birthday as a time when big changes will happen: we will retire, or take that big trip or aim to have accomplished some goal. Anniversaries can be pivotal points in our lives too: a time to renew vows, to recommit, to rejoice.

All this is very good and very helpful. But Easter is the new beginning of all new beginnings. It is the time when God does something VERY big. Easter is the ultimate pivotal point. It all started with the first Easter, of course, but every Easter is a new beginning, a big change, a pivot point.

As we go through our lives day by day we become bound. Because of sin we are in bondage to sin. The apostle Paul puts it well: "*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*" ¹⁶ *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.* ¹⁷ *But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.* ¹⁸ *For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.* ¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*" (Rom. 7:15-19). Because we are bound to sin we are also bound to: broken relationships, pain, strife, disappointment, rejection, betrayal, resentment, separation and ultimately death. We see this in our everyday lives in big and small ways. We see it in the rebellious child. We see it in strained marriages. We see it when employers and employees try to exploit each other. We see it in the acrimony of society; the contempt of one group of people for another group of people. We see it in the ways we spoil the environment, mistreat creation, and abuse ourselves. We see it in that gnawing sense that there must be more than "this:, whatever "this" is.

But it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, it should not be this way. By nailing all our sins to the cross and defeating death, Christ has shattered the chains that keep us in bondage. The problem is that we live like we are still chained. We live like the circus elephant chained to a peg in the ground. The elephant learned as a calf that he was chained, and so as he grew bigger (and stronger) he continued to act like he was chained. So, by the time that elephant weighs more than a Cadillac Escalade, a GMC Yukon and a Ford F150 truck combined, he has come to believe that he can't possibly pull that ten-inch peg out of the ground.

How often do we live like we are still chained to old ways of behavior? How often is resentment, competition, fear, and alienation our "go-to" response? What might be different if we lived like we were free from our bondage to sin? What if we were able to trust Christ's forgiveness enough that we could forgive those who trespass against us? What would it be like if we really believed that we are one in Christ, and so there is no need or even room for competition? Do you ever wonder what a life free of fear and worry might be like? What if we could know we are really reconciled to God and God wants us to be reconciled to each other? Are you willing to give that peg a good tug?

Easter is the pivot point. God invites us to turn from our sin-bound ways and live into the freedom that He suffered and died to give us. Easter is the time when we can commit to "pull the peg out of the ground" and run like an elephant freed from the circus. Wouldn't you like to run free with your ears flapping and your trunk held high as we trumpet, "Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen.-I am free!" (That may be a crazy metaphor, but just the picture of it makes me smile. ☺) Won't you accept God's invitation to come to his house and be set free?

Fun Fellowship Event!

Personable People + Fabulous Food +
Melodious Music + Jovial Jokes
= TERRIFIC TIME!!!

The Lehigh Valley Harmonizers Barbershop Chorus will perform their annual spring show at Moravian College on **Friday, May 5th** at 7:30. pm. This year's show is entitled "Sounds of the '60s" and will feature songs from The Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Elvis, Johnny Mathis and Simon & Garfunkel. The award winning quartet Gimme Four will also be performing, as well as Nazareth High School's Chorale. Karen Kelly's brother is a member of the chorus, and Pastor and Karen have been attending these concerts for years. They are *always* really fun and uplifting. We would love to have you join us! Please contact Karen if you are interested, by phone at 215-872-0949 or by email at kbak58@comcast.net

Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$15 for seniors and students. We will be joining with folks from Grace Lutheran Church. Arrangements can be made to carpool. We may meet for dinner beforehand at Marianna's in Phillipsburg, if people are interested.

Baptism

On Sunday, March 19th, we welcomed into child membership Noah Matthew Larimer. Born November 3rd, 2016, Noah is the son of Matthew Jesse Larimer and Kristen Lynn Larimer of Bethlehem, PA.



Book Study: In With the New and Out With the Old

Our book study of *The Shack* concluded on March 27th after 20 (!) of us from Grace, St. James, and elsewhere gathered to see the movie on March 20th. It was a joy to share interesting and thought-provoking discussions while we also got to know one another and make new friends. It was so successful we have decided to continue with another book study, **beginning on May 1st**. This time we will be reading *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. This book has been described as "a masterpiece of satire." It is a series of letters written by an assistant to the devil and his nephew as they work to 'win' a human away from God. It is an engaging account of temptation and suggests how evil forces can work in insidious ways to destroy our relationship with God. It is a reminder of our need to be aware and intentionally connected with God. Lewis was a very influential Christian writer in the 20th century and you may know him from *The Chronicles of Narnia* which included *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. We will continue holding the book study on Monday evenings at 7:00 pm at the parsonage: 481 Barrymore St, Phillipsburg. We would love see **you** there! Please sign up or contact Karen if you are interested and/or need a book.

* * * * *

Don't let your worries get the best of you; remember, Moses started out as a basket case.

Worship Ministry

As we move toward the missional goal of excellence in worship, we have expanded the opportunities for individuals to help make our worship services the best they can be. We have separated the Worship Assistant into two roles: lector and liturgist. The lector will read the lessons and the liturgist will lead various sections of the liturgy and the prayers of intercession. Both the lector and the liturgist will help distribute communion. We are also scheduling ushers and greeters. This will help guarantee diversity in worship and greater engagement of members. Soon, we will also be scheduling counters and acolytes.

Would you consider volunteering in any of these capacities? (you'll notice some blank spaces in the worship schedule printed below.) How are you willing to serve? Please let Pr. Kelly know or call the church office and let Carol know!

	Day/Date	Special	Greeters	Lector	Liturgist	Ushers
April	Sat. 8 th			Sue Miller	Tori Esposito	
	Sun. 9 th	1 st Communion	Charlotte & Dave Morris	Multiple	Karen Kelly	Ron Knoble Harvey Walters
	Thur. 13 th	Maundy Thurs.	George & Chris Scherer	Steve Stocker		
	Fri. 14 th	Good Friday		Multiple		
	Sat. 15 th	Easter Sat.				
	16 th 8:45	Easter Sun.	Carol Steible Lois Steible	Steve Stocker	Polly Newbold	
	16 th 10:45	Easter Sun.	Janet Bray	Jamie McLain	Karen Kelly	
	Sat. 22			Mark Aloise	Tori Esposito	
	Sun. 23 rd		George & Chris Scherer	Bob Babcock	Jamie McLain	Ron Knoble Harvey Walters
	Sat. 29 th			Kelly Perna	Sue Miller	
	Sun.30		Janet Bray	Polly Newbold	Ralph Avard	Ron Knoble Harvey Walter
May	Sat. 6	Mother's Day w/e				
	Sun. 7	Mother's Day	Charlotte & Dave Morris	Dan Gulick	Steve Stocker	Ron Knoble Harvey Walters
	Sat. 13					
	Sun. 14		George & Chris Scherer	Karoline Avard	Karen Kelly	
	Sat. 20					
	Sun. 21		Carol Steible Lois Steible	Marlie Raspe	Dan Gulick	
	Sat. 27	Memorial weekend				
	Sat .28	Mem. w/e	Janet Bray	Karen Kelly	Jamie McLain	

Social Ministry News & Opportunities

Recently St. James helped with Family Promise, partnering with St. Luke's Episcopal and Pilgrim Presbyterian churches of Phillipsburg. Pilgrim hosted the families for the week of March 5th, opening their church to homeless families participating in the International Hospitality Network anchored in Oxford, NJ. St. James volunteers supplied a dinner for Tuesday evening, March 7th, for 3 adults and two children. The number varies, and more volunteers are needed to cook and serve the meals and also to chaperone overnight stays at the church. This activity occurs every few months and is not an everyday commitment. Anyone interested in helping, please talk to members of our Social Ministry Committee or Pastor Kelly for information. You will receive God's blessing for giving of your time and love for neighbors in need. Please think and pray about helping the homeless.

In a similar vein, the Links of Love campaign this year raised \$280, which was donated to Habitat for Humanity of Warren County. Thanks to all who contributed to this worthwhile ministry.

The Social Ministry Committee is also collecting lap blankets for the care centers in the Phillipsburg area. They are asking for donations of new blankets approximately 36 by 36 inches in size. The lap blankets will be distributed to the Brakeley and Lopatcong centers, and to Warren Hospital.

Social Ministry Committee members and associates are: Mark Aloise (Chair), Sue Agans, Cindy Aloise, Ralph Avard, Shirley Johnson, Liz Kolba, Carol Meixsell, Sharon Risko, Chris Scherer, and Janice Youpa.

Event at Grace Lutheran

On Saturday, May 20th, Grace Lutheran will be having a pot-luck dinner and movie night. Join our sister church for an evening of food, fellowship and entertainment seeing the film *Manchester by the Sea*. Bring a favorite dish to share for the dinner starting at 5:00 pm.

If you plan to attend or need more information, call 908-859-0884 or email gracelc2003@verizon.net.

Reformation 500

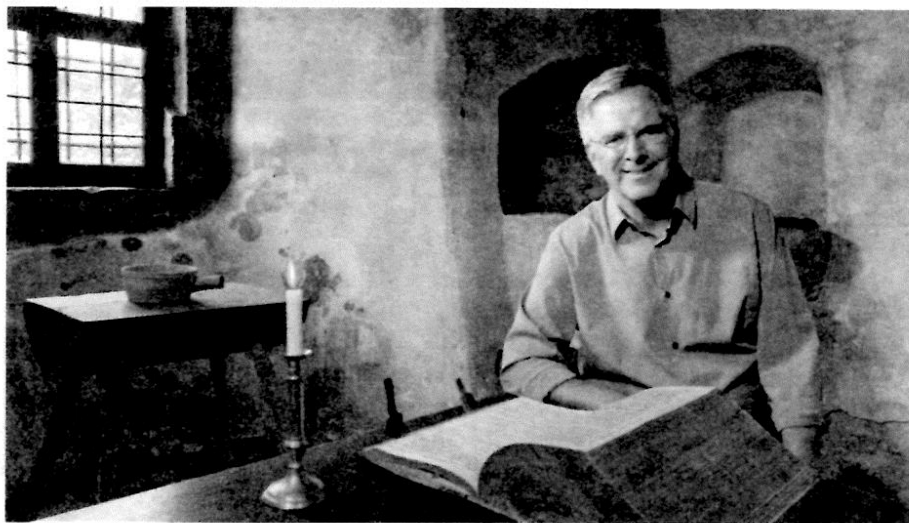
This item appeared in the ELCA publication, *Seeds for the Parish*. For those not familiar with Rick Steves, he is a well known travel guide with special interest in Europe, whose travel documentaries have run on the PBS network for many years. He is also a devout Lutheran who has woven Christian European history into several of his programs.

Rick Steves' 'Luther and the Reformation' travel documentary available to congregations

For years, Rick Steves has had his sights on 2017. As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approached, the travel guide knew he wanted to create for his popular PBS series a special devoted to Martin Luther and the ways in which his tumultuous time helped lead to the Modern Age.

With "Luther and the Reformation," Steves set about crafting a documentary that highlighted the historic, economic and social context of the Reformation. His goal was to produce a special that could be used as a resource for congregations and have wider appeal for TV audiences. "I hoped to contribute to community within the Lutheran family," said Steves, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, Lynnwood, Wash. He also sought to "find a way to witness in the secular world through the teaching and media platform I've been blessed with."

Steves' "Luther and the Reformation" is airing throughout 2017. It's available



Travel guide and Lutheran Rick Steves is helping Lutherans explore the Reformation, our church history and faith.

to watch online at ELCA.org/ricksteves, along with resources for hosting congregational screenings of the film, including ELCA discussion points and study questions, a special introductory video

from Steves, and art and video clips to promote your event. DVD copies of the special have also been sent to every ELCA congregation.

**"STRAW CHURCH: PRIDE IN OUR PAST, STRENGTH IN OUR PRESENT,
LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR OUR FUTURE"**

The Shack



Catechism Class went to see The Shack movie with dinner afterwards.



The book study group saw the movie version after concluding their discussions.

Local Tours

Now that nicer weather is here?? the Historical Committee is planning to schedule some group tours to local historic places of interest. Congregation members and friends may enjoy one another's company while experiencing some local history. There is no charge to attend these events; however "free-will" donations may be made to support the non-profit organizations that we visit.

The first group tour will be to the Hoff / Vannatta Farmstead "Open House" in Harmony Township on Saturday, April 29th. Michael Margulies has agreed to give our Straw Church group an overview tour of the complete Historic Farmstead **beginning at 11:00 am** so this gives us a time to meet there. We are grateful that Michael was available and willing to give us this personalized attention. He will make this a very complete and informative experience.

Other visits being planned are:

The Bread Lock Museum on the Morris Canal near Stewartsville

St. John's Lutheran Church in Easton - supplied our church with Pastors from 1773 to 1837.

Shippen Manor (built 1750) / Oxford Furnace (built 1741) in Oxford, NJ

Questions, comments, suggestions? Contact any Historical Committee member: Pastor Kelly, Luann Beatty, Charlotte Morris, George Scherer, Ken Kutzman, Craig Steible, Dave Morris

Scout Sunday, February 12th

Scouts were recognized for their achievements and took part in our worship as readers



The following Sunday, February 19th, Boy Scout Troop 56 held a food drive at the Greenwich ShopRite. Representatives from the troop asked shoppers to please purchase an item from the list and leave it with the scouts on their way out. We collected over 890 food items for the Alpha Food Pantry and over \$100 in donations. Most of the money donated was used to purchase additional food, with the remaining money given directly to the food pantry. We look forward to continuing to support the local food pantry serving families in our community.



Pictured left to right are Andrew Hardenbergh, Justin DiMarsico, and Wayne Van Blarcom