

THE IMMANUEL MESSENGER

FEBRUARY 2024

Volume 38, Issue 5



From Your Pastor

The most precious of all things that Jesus is to us is that He is, above all else, our Savior. By His suffering and death in our place upon the cross He has paid the penalty of all our sins.

We soon enter the Church Year season of Lent with its special focus on God's call to us repent of our sins. God desires that we live in daily repentance. "Repentance" means "returning to God with one's whole being, and in all decisions of life, taking God absolutely seriously."

Many people don't take repentance (and God) seriously because to them *sin* does not mean very much. Sin is considered by many to be a mistake or fault that can't be helped, and so, therefore, is not so serious. Sin to many people is just a flaw that somehow or other will be forgotten when God begins to settle His accounts.

God says otherwise. No matter how lightly we may speak of sin—even joke about it—no matter how we try to excuse it, God has placed His curse upon our sin: "The soul that sins shall die" (Ez. 18:4). Sin, according to God, is a such a frightful thing, that if it remains unforgiven, will result in the eternal separation of a person from his/her Maker.

There are some people who associate the idea of sin only with criminals: with murders, abusers, and terrorists. But God says, "There is no distinction: for all have sinned . . . There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). There may be a difference in degree of sin, but there is no difference in the fact. According to God's reckoning, to have an impure thought, to say an unkind word, to be disrespectful, envious, or quarrelsome, is just as surely a sin as are theft or wicked violence. The great apostle Paul became conscious of the terrific burden of his guilt and cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24) When I look back to my youth, I see the truth of God's verdict: "The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21).

But why speak about sin when, as I stated above, "The most precious of all things that Jesus

means to us is that He is, above all else, our Savior"? Because no one can appreciate and tell how precious Jesus is until he has first told what *sin and it's power* has meant to him. To tell the full story of a rescue at sea one must first tell the story of the shipwreck that made the rescue necessary. No one is ready to receive Christ as his Savior from hell and damnation until he has felt the hot breath of hell blow over his quivering conscience. If Jesus is to be our Savior, we must know from what we must be saved. This is what makes Jesus so precious to you and me!

Jesus came down from heaven and was born to do what you and I could not do! He did it as our substitute. We were unable to keep God's Law. We sinned against it. But the Good News is that Jesus has kept all the commandments we have broken! What we could not do, Jesus did for us. To use the Bible's word for this, God has "counted" Jesus' righteousness to our accounts. He has written *His* record to *our* credit! (Rom. 4).

But there is more! Jesus also suffered all the punishment of all our sins! He assumed our guilt and our shame. He paid the penalty that we should have paid. Because Jesus paid for our sins, we are declared "Not guilty" by God Himself!

In view of all this Good News Jesus *is* our forgiveness. All of this is the gift of God for us helpless sinners! He calls us to "Repent and believe [this] Good News!" (Mark 1:15). Even our repentance is God's gift to us! St. Paul explains that God "gives the repentance that leads to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25). God is now asking us to seek from Him a life of daily repentance.

Now with the change our gracious and merciful God gives by the Holy Spirit working through our reading and hearing of His Word, live a God-pleasing life of repentance. The most precious of all things is that Jesus is our Savior! Daily dying to sin we rise with Jesus to live a new life!

Your fellow-servant for Christ,

Pastor Mahuken



- February 1.....Karen Wood
- February 5.....Dave Friedrichsen
Patrick McFarland
Wayne Miller
- February 6.....Rex Bielenberg
Steven Christiansen
Arielle Pedersen
Lydell Schoenfeld
McKenzie Weiss
- February 9.....David Jepsen
Kevin Streck
- February 10.....Michael Hatfield
- February 11.....Dennis Fredericks
Lauri Schoenfeld
- February 12.....Bonnie Schroeder
Camryn Schultz
- February 14.....Emily Kline
Da'Leyah York
- February 15.....Rebecca Segebart
- February 16.....Kim Petersen
- February 17.....Deb Green
- February 18.....Ruth Reincke (98)
- February 19.....Craig Harm
Carolyn Schroeder
- February 21.....Debbie Namanny
Darcy Reimers
- February 22.....Eve Rohlf
- February 23.....Brody Morgan
- February 24.....Ruby Friedrichsen (96)
Karsen Keim
- February 25.....Tanner Petersen
- February 27.....Abigail Friedrichsen
Alexander Friedrichsen
Dane Lee
- February 28.....Derrick Dimig
Travis Friedrichsen
Jason Hatcher

- Duane & Merry JacobyFebruary 2, 2013
- Dennis & Coleen BruhnFebruary 4, 1967
- Rick & Brandy PorterFebruary 14, 1998
- Richard & Becky HanlinFebruary 16, 1973
- Roger & Lois RotheFebruary 16, 1991
- Tim & Cindy Stoppel.....February 17, 1996
- Gene & Marlys HaberbergerFebruary 26, 1977

Please notify the office of any omissions or corrections.

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Soup & Sandwich Supper

On these cold winter evenings doesn't a hot bowl of soup sound good? Please join us for chili, potato or chicken noodle soup on Sunday, February 25. Serving will be from 4:30 to 7:00 p.m.



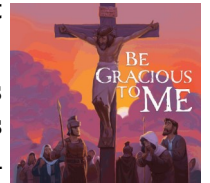
We invite you to join us in the Fellowship Hall! Carry out and delivery are also available, please call the Church Office at 676-2235 and put in your request.

Invite your friends or family to join you. Your support of this outreach could be life-changing for God's people. Sponsored by the Mission Board.

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Be Gracious to Me

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which will be February 14. The theme for our midweek Lent services this year is "Be Gracious to Me."



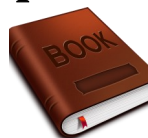
Because you are in Christ, you share in all things with Him, even the prophetic Word. David's vision in Psalm 41 has become your reality in Christ. In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers you; the Lord protects you and keeps you alive; you are called blessed in the land (see Psalm 41:1-2). Press on with us through this Lenten season to know better the Lord's suffering, death, and Word. As surely as the Lenten journey ascends to the victory of Easter, the Lord will raise us up as He responds to our plea, "Be gracious to me!"

Supper will be served at 5:45 each Wednesday; worship will begin at 6:30. Our themes will be:

- February 14—*Mutual Consideration*
- February 21—*Sustained in Sickness*
- February 28—*I Have Sinned*
- March 6—*Soon and Never*
- March 13—*Empty Words*
- March 20—*Vindication*
- March 28—*Maundy Thursday—My Close Friend*
- March 29—*Good Friday—Be Gracious to Me!*
- March 31—*Easter—Jesus' Resurrection and My Integrity*

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From the Church Record Book



Deaths: "I am the Resurrection..."

Elaine E. Friedrichsen, age 94, died Jan. 3, 2024, and was buried Jan. 8, 2024 in the Morgan Township Cemetery, Schleswig, Iowa.

Baptized: "Let the little children come unto Me..."

Marisol Isabel Cruz, daughter of Francisco and Madison Cruz was baptized on January 27, 2024.

THANK YOU S

Thank You to everyone who remembered us with cards and/or gifts as we have celebrated our Savior's birth! We are richly blessed to be a part of our Immanuel family. We praise God for the many kindnesses He showers upon us through you. We pray He will continue to guide us and bless us as we continue together in the service of Jesus our Savior in 2024.

Pastor & Chris Mahnken and Pastor Kaiser

Thank You to our Altar Guild, our Mission Board and to the volunteers who put up the trees and ornaments for this past Advent and Christmas seasons! Your efforts have enriched our worship and assisted in mission and outreach efforts to help spread the Good News of Jesus our Savior and the joy His presence brings.

Thank You to all who helped with setting up and then helping to take down the staging of our Sunday School Christmas service.

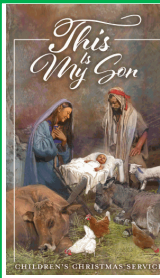


On Wednesday, December 20, some of the confirmation kids and their parents joined Pastor Mahnken in Christmas caroling at the homes of some of our congregation members.

Pastor Mahnken and Pastor Kaiser are now leading worship and providing pastoral care for Faith Lutheran Church in Deloit.

Their worship time in these winter months is Saturday at 5:30 p.m.

For more information on our pastors' service at Faith, Deloit, please see Pastor Mahnken's January Voters' report on p. 6 of this Messenger.



On Saturday, December 9, 2023, the Sunday School and High School children presented their Christmas service titled "This is My Son."

Afterwards, everyone was invited to a delicious soup supper served by the Board of Education.





Our January meeting marked the start of a new year with many projects and activities underway. We have already made some visits to our Immanuel members in care facilities.

The supplies have been purchased to sew bibs for Gracewell. The plan is to make a total of 50 bibs to be donated.

We have ordered two new tables for use in the Fellowship Hall as needed. We will be purchasing new Sunday School classroom chairs for the older students. We are currently in the process of gathering ideas, and information on what is available.

We will be hosting the Zone LWML Board Meeting on February 29th and will make plans for that at our February meeting.

Plans have begun for the Spring LWML Rally which will be hosted here at Immanuel in April. We chose as our theme Psalm 119:105 “Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a Light unto my path.” More plans will be made during the upcoming meetings.

Each meeting provides Bible Study, a discussion of upcoming projects and time for dessert and Christian fellowship. If you would like to join us on the first Thursday of each month, we would certainly welcome you!

—Submitted by Donna Harm, Secretary



Women’s Lenten Bible Study for this year will be, “Unshakable” by Donna Snow.

We will begin Wednesday, February 14 at 7:15 p.m. More information to come! Come join us!

From Your library . . .
“Have we got a book for you!”



Fifteen Minutes
by Karen Kingsbury

Karen is one of the top Christian authors and has been on the New York Times best-selling author list many times.

This book deals with a guy, Zack Dylan and the promise he made to God and his college sweetheart when he left his family horse farm in Kentucky to compete on the popular reality television show “Fifteen Minutes.” If he makes it, the fame won’t change him.

Overnight, Zack becomes the nation’s most popular contestant, he’s a country singer with the looks and voice of a young Elvis. Find out what happens as he becomes more famous and to quiet his beliefs in God and something else he could never imagine. America is falling in love with Zack and he’s on the verge of winning it all, will he make the right choice?

His girlfriend Reece, a therapeutic horse instructor, isn’t sure of her relationship with Zack, or the wedding they had dreamed about. She receives an offer to move halfway around the world to England.

A pop star who is now a judge for “Fifteen Minutes” intervenes. She has suffered pain and agony since she was a contestant on “Fifteen Minutes.” Can she convince Zack to think really hard about his choices? What is really important in his life? Check out the book and find the answers.

—Submitted by Carol Neddermeyer



LWML Hour of Prayer Worship

Everyone is invited to join on February 12, for the Denison Zone LWML Hour of Prayer at Our Savior Lutheran church in Denison, hosted by Christ Lutheran LWML. Coffee at 9 am, service at 10 am. Hope to see you there!
Peace, Hope and Joy in Him - Deb Osborn

**Immanuel Lutheran Church
Voters' Meeting Minutes
January 28, 2024**

The meeting was called to order by President Riessen with 35 voting members in attendance.

I. Opening Devotion and Prayer

Led by Pastor Mahnken

II. Reading/Approval of Minutes and Agenda

Minutes from October were read. They were approved as was the January agenda.

III. Reports of Officers and Boards

A. Elders (Curtis Korner)

A planning meeting was held recently. Welcome to Joel Bubke as a new Elder.

B. Trustees (Ryan Kragel)

Ryan highlighted some of the 2022-2023 accomplishments of the trustees which included a new roof on the parsonage, a new roof on the education unit, new gutters on all of the church buildings, elimination of drainage and landscaping issues, and improved lighting above the pews. Future needs are to replace siding on the church parsonage (bid of \$9,400 has been received and is being considered.) Some exterior lighting options are being considered. Paint flaking above the altar will be addressed. Ryan has spoken with Diamon Vogel and received input on how to move forward. This information will be passed onto the painter.

C. Treasurer/Stewardship/Finance (Larry Abbe)

The income and expense reports for 2023 were shared. Currently, Immanuel is \$17,010.98 ahead for the year's budget. Larry also talked about how traditional IRA's funds could be given directly to the church. Neither the owner of the account nor the church has any tax burden under this situation. Please contact your investment professional and tax preparer for more information.

D. Education/Youth (Angie Ellis)

Ross Wood and Kelsi Jepsen were recognized as new board members.

E. Preschool (Jessica Ogren)

Thanks to those who helped make the preschool carnival a great success! The preschool board still has 1 vacant seat to be filled.

F. Mission/Fellowship (Judy Gierstorf)

Due to a very healthy account balance, the Mission Board would like to disperse the following funds: \$1,500 to Orphan Grain Train, \$1,500 to Unity Ridge School, \$1,500 to the African Radio Ministry, \$1,587 to the Sharp Family, \$1,587 to the Baker Family, and \$1,587 to Mission Central's choice project.

The soup supper will be Sunday, February 25 from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm. A volunteer sign-up sheet will be in the narthex soon.

G. Memorial Committee (No Report)

H. Pastor's Report (Pastor Mahnken)

Pastor shared congregational statistics with the voters. He renewed his plea to pray and pray frequently for the members of our congregation, especially its youth. He also talked about "NONES" and how they represent 28% of the US population. Please keep these people in your prayers as well.

IV. Old Business

V. New Business

A. Designate Use of Meal Receipts

1. Soup Dinner (February 25—4:30 to 7:30)

2. Lenten Suppers (February 14 is Ash Wednesday)

The voters approved the motion that allows the board/organization serving the meals to be able to direct the

proceeds to a cause in concern within the mission of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

B. Request Voters for Subsidy from Home Mission Fund to pay registration cost for couples to attend Weekend to Remember marriage conference.

\$350/couple (Price is 1/2 off until JANUARY 22)

1. Omaha, NE: March 1-3 at Hilton \$146/night-room (price good until March 3).

2. Lincoln, NE: April 26-28 at Marriott Cornhusker Hotel \$124/night-room (until April 5)

To register or seek more information go to

<https://www.familylife.com/weekend-to-remember#where>.

C. Request Home Mission Funds to Cover 2/3 of Registration for Okobojo Campers

1. Cub Week1 : June 23-27, grades 3-5, \$310

2. Jr. High Week: July 7-13, grades 6-8, \$355

3. Cub Week 2: July 14-20, grades 3-5, \$375

4. Youth Week: July 21-27, grades 8-12, \$375

5. Family Retreats also available, prices based on full week or half week

6. Adult Retreat

<http://www.campokobojo.org/>

It was moved, seconded and approved to fund items B and C from the Home Mission Fund.

D. Form Committee to Write a New Constitution for Immanuel

It has become necessary to update/modernize the language in Immanuel's Constitution to make us defensible against people who would look to challenge/seek loopholes in the language/policies we currently have in place. In addition to updating/streamlining our Constitution. Pastor is recommending that we create a policy manual to take out some of the procedural items from our Constitution that don't belong there. Pastor is seeking three people to assist him in this endeavor. Sandy Bubke and Peggy Wunschel expressed interest in serving on this committee. The Alliance Defending Freedom is a great asset in this process as well.

E. Use of the 2023 Offerings that Exceeded Our Budget

Currently, Immanuel is ahead of its budget by approximately \$17,000. The Council has recommended to the voters that they approve the following dispersal of these excess funds: Immanuel Lutheran Preschool \$6,000 with the intent of paying this out over time in the form of a salary bonus to the employees, Crossroads of Crawford County \$2,000 to assist with various expenses, and Lutheran Family Services \$2,000 to fund their endeavors for a total of \$10,000. Kent Bornhoft moved, Curtis Korner seconded and the voters approved this \$10,000 funding package. Curtis Korner moved, Don Wunschel seconded, and the voters approved a \$2,000 gift to Unity Ridge School.

F. Camp Okobojo Annual Meeting-Saturday, April 6, 2024

The meeting begins at 11:00 and will wrap up around 4:00 p.m. Immanuel is allowed to send 1 representative to this meeting.

G. Other

Pastor Mahnken was asked if Immanuel is equipped for "online giving." The answer is NOT YET. Pastor asked the Finance Board to explore the opportunities of people giving their church contributions electronically. Kent Bornhoft moved, Eric Schneider seconded and the voters approved the investigation of "electronic giving" and reporting back to the voters on the matter.

VI. Adjourn With Prayer: Led by Pastor Mahnken.

~Submitted by Craig Bogatzke, Secretary

Everyone should be eager to advance the teaching and study of the Word for his own salvation and the glory of God."

~Martin Luther

**Pastor Mahnken's Report
Voters' Meeting--January 28, 2024**

We began 2023 with 608 baptized members on the books, and 501 communicant members on the books. We have received 12 by Holy Baptism (of these 12 baptized five were adults, who were also added as communicant members). We have added 11 communicant members by adult confirmation (of these six were already baptized). We added six to our number of communicant members by Jr. Confirmation. We have had six deaths: Larry Clausen, Judi Clausen, Curt Schultz, Lois Ernst, Kenny Winsor, and Colton Clausen. We released two from our roll by personal request to other Christian church bodies. We have had one transfer out to another LCMS congregation. We have had four transfer in. We had one death in 2024—Elaine Friedrichsen. As of today, January 28, 2024. we have 622 baptized members and 514 communicant members on our roll.

Pastor Kaiser and I are now providing pastoral ministry for Faith Lutheran Church in Deloit. They had been in a Dual Parish arrangement with St. John, Kiron. Since Pastor Kluzek left last July, they have been exploring options for their future. St. John in Kiron is moving toward being served by a young man from their congregation who is enrolling in the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. Pastor David Viggers of Trinity Lutheran Church in Odebolt will serve as the vacancy pastor of St. John and the SMP supervisor. Faith, Deloit voted not to go in that direction, and the SMP candidate allowed that it would be very difficult for him to serve both congregations while continuing as a husband and father of younger boys, and full time employment, and studying for the ministry. So, Faith contacted us and inquired about whether we would serve the. Two of our Elders—Curtis Korner and Ryan Morgan, President Riessen, and I met with leaders of Faith late in the summer. Several of their leaders also came and met with our Board of Elders in November. Our Elders approved Pastor Kaiser and I serve their pastoral needs. We have not entered into a Dual Parish arrangement nor are we moving toward that at this time. That may be a possibility in the future. We wait upon the Lord and His will. Faith, Deloit has changed their worship time to Saturday evening. After doing our service here at Immanuel, the pastor who preached here goes to Deloit for their service. When our service times changes from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. in March, theirs will change from 5:30 to

6:30. Last evening, I also began a Bible Study at Faith, following the service. Faith worships about 20 people/service in our experience so far. Last night there were 16 adults in worship and four children. 12 of the 16 were in Bible Study last night. Oh, that we had 75% of our worshippers in Bible Study! One child of Faith goes to school in Schleswig and is part of our 5th & 6th Grade Confirmation Class. Two other children of Faith are 7th Graders, attending school in Denison, and a member of Faith is teaching their Confirmation instruction this year. A few other children are in a class such as Sunday School, but meeting on Tuesday afternoons. Faith has five shut-in members; although, two of those five were in worship yesterday evening (and so, then, are not visited in their homes so long as they are able to keep attending worship). They have been visited by Pastor Kaiser. It is a joy to worship at Faith in Deloit because it is such a small building and every one sits so close to the Pastor! It is much easier to engage with people as one preaches when they are only 20 feet away rather than 40-80 feet away! They truly are like a family.

Continue to daily pray, asking our merciful Lord to call more men to the Pastoral Office and, beyond that, more church workers. We face a huge shortage of teachers as well. Keep on praying to the Lord of the harvest!

Finally, I again remind you of my prayer challenge for us all: "Please join me three times a day in prayer for the spiritual growth of the members of Immanuel. Please pray three times a day—following the example of Daniel in Daniel 6! Pray that the eyes of our hearts may be opened to the wonder of God's grace. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work among us. Pray on behalf of the families and children of Immanuel that they will be blessed with a love for Jesus and a growing zeal to live for Him in this darkening age.

Our prayers have been answered in the number of adult baptisms, affirmations of faith and adult confirmations we have had in the past year. Besides them, there are still many who say they are "in the church" who haven't been in a church to receive God's grace for years! Yes, continue to pray, but we also need to continue to invite and teach and grow in ministry to help one another grow up in our salvation (1 Peter 2:2).

Finally, as you pray, thank the Lord Jesus for His promise that whatever we ask the Father in His name, He will give it to us for the glory of our Savior (John 15:16)." I thank you for your prayers.



Okay, bear with me as I start this month's newsletter with a random story. I promise I'll go somewhere with a point before I'm done. A couple of weeks ago I had a dentist appointment. As I settled into the chair, the hygienist asked if it was okay for a college student to sit in the room and observe. Sure. I was fine with it. The student sat quietly and didn't say much until the cleaning was complete. (It's so difficult when they try to carry on a conversation with instruments in your open mouth, isn't it?) Anyway, the little gal looks at me and asks if I used to teach preschool at St. Rose. Apparently, eighteen years prior (when I was 12), I was her preschool teacher. Oh my goodness! It felt awful not to recognize her but once she reminded me of her name, the bells started to ring!

Now, while that is a piece of the story, it isn't why I'm sharing it. The part I found to be completely God-ordained was the conversation which then ensued. There had been a tragedy in our state which led to questions, fears, and an opportunity for we believers to encourage and support one another in love. At this point, I knew the young lady had heard the gospel so the conversation was "all in" so to speak. We talked about God being more powerful than evil, how He uses everything for good, and how He has/will equip and train this upcoming generation to stand against the schemes of the evil one.

Why do I share this story with you? Well for a couple of reasons. First, I think it is amazing that the seeds planted today will continue to be watered for years to come. It was a gift for me to connect with a former student years later, but we will all get to be pouring into today's preschoolers for years to come. And anytime you are investing in relationships now, God will provide opportunities to further His love in their lives later. Whether you are the one who gets to water or another believer, God promises that His Word will not return void.

The second part of the dentist scenario which I found applicable was the training and equipping of our next generation. Our students just finished a unit on the armor of God. Today, the children were running around the classroom with their swords (yes, another brilliant idea to keep four year olds calm, give them a sword) and I heard one little boy swinging his sword and speaking out the name of Jesus as he was "chasing" away something bad. Another parent shared that her little girl woke up in the middle of the night after a bad dream. She didn't go get her mom. Her mother said she asked what she did and the little girl replied, "I said, in Jesus name, get out of here and then I went back to sleep." Isn't that amazing? These children already know the power in the name of Jesus. I pray these will be the future people in the dentist office who are reassuring others regarding the love of Christ.

Serving Him with you,
Mrs. Gustafson





Find out why over 1.5 million couples have attended FamilyLife's Weekend to Remember.

Weekend to Remember marriage conference Marriage is a lifelong adventure of growing together through every age and stage of life. The happiest couples are those who commit to learning skills that help them weather difficult seasons and deal confidently with relationship challenges. It's your turn to make a great marriage happen.

Our congregation will pay the registration costs of any member couple attending a *Weekend to Remember* (those attending are responsible for their room and all other expenses). Local weekends coming up include:

Omaha, NE: March 1-3, \$175/night—room.

Lincoln, NE: April 26-28, \$175/night—room.

For more information and to register visit <https://www.familylife.com/weekend-to-remember#where>.



**REGISTRATION OPENS FEBRUARY 1
campokoboji.org**

- * May 31-June 2 Kids' Kamp
- * June 1 2024 Auxiliary Quilt Auction
- * June 7-10 J.O.Y. Camp #1
- * June 23-27 Cub Week #1
- * June 30-July 5 July 4 Family Retreat
- * July 7-13 Jr. High Week
- * July 11-14 J.O.Y. Camp #2
- * July 14-20 Cub Week #2
- * July 21-27 Youth Week
- * July 28-August 2 Family Retreat I
- * August 4-9 Family Retreat II



**Thrivent Choice Dollars for 2023
will be expiring soon!**

If you are a Thrivent member, you may direct Thrivent Choice dollars to our congregation, our preschool, Mission Central and other LCMS organizations.

Simply go to www.thrivent.com/thriventchoice or call the Denison office at 712-263-6785 for assistance before March 31.

AFRICAN RADIO MINISTRIES—NEWS

We celebrate God's work through you, the African Radio Ministries partners and the saints serving in God's vineyard in Africa.

Ethiopia News

December Kingdom Growth:

- * New Converts: 39
- * Confirmations: 95
- * Baptisms: 81
- * Callers: 97
- * Listening Groups: 5
- * Booklets: 400
- * Bibles Obtained: 40
- * Inmates in Confirmation Classes: 599

New Preaching Stations & Baptized Confirmands.

Rev. Melikamu's recently visited two new preaching stations, Mester and Zemba Gari. 24 people were confirmed and 49 people were baptized in Zemba Gari. These statistics are more than just numbers, they represent stories of hope, perseverance, and the immense impact of Christ's influence in Ethiopia. Though people are experiencing hardship and unrest in Ethiopia, the growth of God's Kingdom persists, even in the face of such challenges.

West Africa Updates

Muslims follow Jesus after hearing ARM radio program.

A heartwarming example of the Kingdom Message taking root in people's hearts was recently witnessed through a Muslim family living in Sierra Leone. After several months of listening to the Kissi radio programs aired in Liberia, they decided to give their children to Christ. The family traveled to Liberia and had their kids baptized at Yendema St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church where Rev. Tengbeh baptized fifteen new believers into the Kingdom of God. The parents' request to baptize their children is a testament to the transformative power of Christ. The couple expressed that they preferred their children to be Christians, freeing them from the oppression they are experiencing under their Muslim beliefs. Due to the persecution they will face, the parents are following Christ in secret. Let us keep them in our prayers.

Liberia & Ivory Coast Churches Christmas Conference.

During Christmas, a cross-border Conference was held among the Krahn-speaking Lutherans. The conference is a long-standing tradition that involves members of the national Lutheran churches in the bordering regions of Southeastern Liberia and Ivory Coast. The event was a huge success, with 22 people baptized during the conference! Several of those who were baptized came to know Jesus initially through ARM radio programs, then were connected to a nearby Lutheran church.

Your partners in the harvest,
~Missionary Linda Kurtz and John & Kathy Duitsman

Funds are needed and can be sent to:

African Radio Ministries
C/O Hope & Care Outreach
9811 W. Charleston Blvd. Ste 2-229
Las Vegas, NV 89117

!AMIGOS EN CRISTO and GRACIA!

News from *Las Iglesias Evangélicas Luteranas*
Amigos en Cristo in Denison and Gracia in Storm Lake
 Pastor Pedro Lopez

Greetings to you!

I am so happy to write to you as we just finished celebrating the birth of Jesus and are enjoying this new year 2024. I am so happy and excited to write to you again to share the things that are happening with our Hispanic Ministry around our District. Amazing things that God is helping us to do, as we develop more and stronger points of contact and thanking Him that He has put us in touch with new people and possible future leaders of our church.

In Hartley, we finished our third ESL (English as a Second Language) with amazing results! Twelve students were able to learn more English and got to hear the Gospel of Jesus. Who would have thought that we would have a wedding and two baptisms at the closing of the program! Thanks to the many volunteers and to Pastor Nitzel for the ongoing support of this endeavor. We have a group of people already participating in the English worship service. Some also participate in the Bible studies happening in English and we hope that more will come when we start one in Spanish. Now that the ESL session has ended for the winter months, we will plan things at church to continue the relationships with the students. We have a Bible study going on now with congregational deacon Noel helping us together with the amazing support of St. Paul Lutheran church people. We are blessed to have a local grain company that is helping us by hiring our people and giving them a chance to improve their lives and future in this area.

In Carroll, we also had our ESL closing graduating 20 students. One student has visited the worship service in English, and a few are coming to our Bible study that is offered in Spanish on Saturday evenings. On Wednesday, we are having Bible study at 11:45 am at a prospect member's house. On Sunday, December 10, we had three baptisms from people of Carroll in Denison too! God is at work my brothers and sisters! New people are coming to the knowledge of God and receiving the sacrament of new life through baptism.

In Denison, worship services continue with the same schedule, our Bible study here has been moved to Carroll. We continue to explore ways to outreach the community. Our plan is to prepare for new strategies for this area. We pray and ask you to pray as we work on this and continue to work in this area.

In Storm Lake, our worship services and Bible studies continue to happen. We continue to have confirmation and baptism classes. A couple of new people have joined this group.

In Fort Dodge, we continue our relationship with the people we met through the ESL program. We are planning to restart the ESL and Bible study early in the new year. We know that God is bringing opportunities there also.

We are excited about the possibilities ahead of us in the new year. We are talking and planning together with the Center for Hispanic Studies of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. We are working on getting a few people to start the program to become future pastors, teachers and deaconesses. This program will give a great boost to train and educate our future leaders to get ready to help us with the Hispanic Ministry in Iowa District West.

As you know, the weather has been a little rough this second week of January, with cancellations of Bible studies and church services we missed getting together this week. We hope that we don't have a long winter or at least not as severe as this. Nevertheless, the groups are going and going strong. For these first couple months, we will not be having ESL classes. The plan is to restart them at the end of March or beginning of April. Right now, we are focusing on the spiritual growth of our members and future members of churches in the different regions we are working in. God has been very gracious in giving us great opportunities to meet lots of people, both Hispanic and others, to keep the work going and to prepare for the next step of our ministry.

As I mentioned before, we had a lot of fun bringing the new tradition of the Christmas Mexican style Posadas to our churches. In the future, we hope to introduce these events to more churches. I am working in some Spanish crash classes for you all to learn and be able to help us more with your Hispanic Ministry.

Please remember to keep your Hispanic Ministry in your prayers and support. God is doing great things! Remember that you are always welcome to volunteer and that your donations are appreciated. In the new year, we plan to use these to help train new leaders and expand the outreach to more areas of our District.

Gracias and Bendiciones.
 ~Pastor Pedro Lopez

NOW IS THE TIME FOR REPENTANT FAITH!

By The Reverend Dr. Gregory Seltz, LCMS Center for Religious Liberty

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15)

In a Charlie Brown cartoon, little brother Linus is looking very forlorn. He asks big sister Lucy, "Why are you always so anxious to criticize me?" Lucy, looking very self-righteous, replies, "I just think I have a knack for seeing other people's faults." Linus turns indignant. "What about your own faults?" he asks. "I have a knack for overlooking them," says Lucy.

I think Lucy's attitude is an endemic condition of the human heart. What do you think? Be honest now. It is so much easier to see the faults and sins of others, while virtually ignoring the enormous brokenness in ourselves. Human beings tend to judge themselves by their own noble intentions while judging others by their actions. We also have a natural tendency to learn to live with our "pet sins" while becoming extremely irritated and put off by the sins and weaknesses of others. Sin ravages our relationship with God, it devastates our relationships with each other, and it destroys a healthy sense of ourselves. The Bible is clear, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). No cryogenic freezing, DNA tinkering, or long-term health program is going to reverse what starts in our rebellious hearts.

Now is the time to realize the sobering news that God will not overlook our sin. He's holy; He cannot abide with sin. But He loves us and doesn't wish for us to be ravaged eternally by our sin. Now is also the time to hear the great news that God, out of love, has done something about our sinful, human condition. The good news is in the second half of Romans 6:23 – "The wages of sin is death, but **the** gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Gospel of Mark gets right to the point, doesn't it? Of course Jesus had to be born, but Mark doesn't spend time retelling the events of Jesus' birth. Mark doesn't even take time to talk about the early years of Jesus' life. What matters most is the public ministry of Jesus. He has come to deal with the universal, eternal problem of the human race. He has come to deal with our sin and the judgment it deserves. He has come to save.

That's why Jesus' message in our reading today is as simple and multifaceted as, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." Can He be any more direct or straightforward?

So don't be a "Lucy" who misses out on the good news of Jesus because you're too busy telling yourself that you are just fine the way you are. On the other hand, don't miss out on the good news thinking that you are too much of a lost cause for Jesus either. Jesus came for you, sins and all, to give you His gracious gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. The question isn't whether you are too terrible a sinner for His grace. The question is, "Is His grace powerful and all-encompassing enough to include you?" The Bible's answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

Sometimes we look in all the wrong places for healing from our brokenness. We look to self-help gurus, smooth talking politicians, and athletic or societal "heroes." Ironically, even believers often tend to underestimate what Christ has done for us. I'm sure those first disciples had a hard time thinking that Jesus could do much of anything that would ultimately matter, especially the really big things. I know that they would see Him still the storm, feed the hungry, and heal those with diseases. I know that they would see glimpses of His greatness. But then they would also seem Him tired, hungry, and exhausted. They would ultimately see Him willfully hang on a cross and give up His life for us. Little did they know that the hands that were pierced with the nails of the cross were the "hands" that created and shaped the heavens and the earth; they would soon realize that the words of this Jesus of Nazareth were indeed the words of the One who created the heavens and the earth (see John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:16-17).







This very day Jesus Himself calls you to "repent and believe the good news!" The word, "repent," means "to turn around from the direction you are going." That means turning away from living life on your terms or on those judgmental "Lucy" terms; it means to be honest with yourself and open your eyes to the Messiah named Jesus. Now is the time for a repentant faith which believes in HIS good news for you and places your very life into the hands of the One who came all the way from heaven to earth to be your Lord and Savior.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, let Your simple invitation to repent and believe in Your good news move us to confident trust in You for our very lives, this day and every day! AMEN.



FEBRUARY 2024

Immanuel Lutheran Church,
Schleswig, Iowa

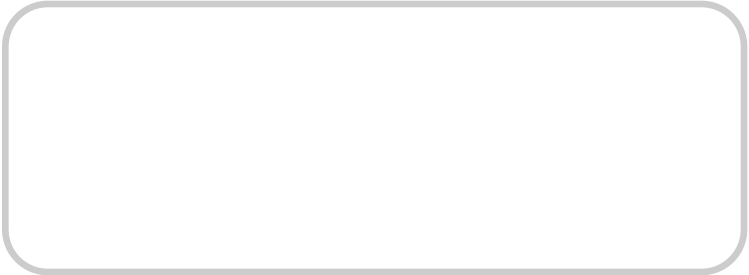
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>Preschool Mon., Tues., Thurs.: 8 a.m.—3 p.m. Wed.: 11:45 a.m.—3 p.m.</p> <p>Confirmation during Lent 5th & 6th grade: 3:30 p.m.—5:15 p.m. 7th & 8th grade: 7:15 p.m.—8:30 p.m.</p>				<p>1 Preschool 1:30 LWML 6:30 p.m. Bible Study</p>	<p>2 <i>Groundhog Day</i></p> 	<p>3 4 p.m. Worship w/HC</p>
<p>4 9 a.m. Worship w/HC 10:15 SS & BC 11:30 Board of Ed Meeting</p>	<p>5 No Preschool</p>	<p>6 Preschool</p>	<p>7 6:30 Bible Study p.m. Preschool Confirmation (5/6 3:30-5:15 and 7/8 6:15-8)</p>	<p>8 Preschool 9 a.m. Quilting 6:30 p.m. Bible Study</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10 4 p.m. Worship w/HC</p>
<p>11 <i>Transfiguration Sunday</i> 9 a.m. Worship 10:15 SS & BC 11:30 Elders' Meeting 1:00 Schleswig Sharks 4-H</p> 	<p>12 Preschool 9 a.m. LWML Prayer Service @ Deloit</p>	<p>13 Preschool 8:30 Pastors' Conference in Charter Oak</p>	<p>14 <i>Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day</i> 6:30 Bible Study p.m. Preschool Confirmation 5:45 Lenten supper 6:30 Ash Wed. Worship w/HC 7:15 Ladies Bible Study</p> 	<p>15 Preschool 6:30 p.m. Bible Study</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17 4 p.m. Worship w/HC</p>
<p>18 9 a.m. Worship w/HC 10:15 SS & BC</p>	<p>19 <i>President's Day</i> No Preschool</p> 	<p>20 No Preschool 1:00 p.m. Volunteers to OGT <i>Messenger</i> Deadline for March issue</p> 	<p>21 6:30 Bible Study p.m. Preschool Confirmation 5:45 Lenten supper 6:30 Ash Wed. Worship w/HC 7:15 Ladies Bible Study</p>	<p>22 Preschool 9 a.m. Quilting 6:30 pm Bible Study</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24 4 p.m. Worship w/HC</p>
<p>25 9 a.m. Worship 10:15 SS & BC 4:30-7 p.m. Immanuel Soup Dinner</p> 	<p>26 Preschool</p>	<p>27 Preschool</p>	<p>28 6:30 Bible Study p.m. Preschool 8:45 am Newsletter assemblage Confirmation 5:45 Lenten supper 6:30 Ash Wed. Worship w/HC 7:15 Ladies Bible Study</p>	<p>29 <i>Leap Day</i> Preschool 9 a.m. LWML Zone Board Meeting @ Immanuel 6:30 p.m. Bible Study</p> 		

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**OUR MISSION
STATEMENT:**
*"Together in Christ,
we grow through the
Word and
Sacraments, serving
our Lord and
sharing His saving
grace with all
people."*