

The B E T H L E H E M S T A R



February
2024

Gathered Into One—Lent 2024

Loving our neighbors is an essential part of our Christian faith. Here at Bethlehem we know that well and we live it well. What happens, though, when we face divisions and disagreements? How do we love our neighbors in the times when it is really hard? How do we love our neighbors for exactly who they are—honoring the diversity among us and allowing our neighbors to be exactly who they are?

These are just some of the things that the Letter of 1 Corinthians talks about. Paul wrote this letter to the churches of Corinth when he heard about division and strife among them. Many of the same struggles of these early churches are struggles that we still face now. Paul's words are just as relevant now as they were when he wrote them.

That is why for Lent this year we will be taking a deep dive into this scripture text in our Lenten series *Gathered into One*. For the six weeks of Lent, we will be hearing from different preachers from other Mankato area churches as we all take a look at different parts of the letter of 1 Corinthians. Pastor Jay and I will both also be participating in this, too, so we may be gone visiting these other churches a few of the weeks of Lent. I am excited for this opportunity to hear many different voices on this important piece of scripture and what it can say to us today. I hope you are excited, too, as we reflect on this together with our fellow Lutheran congregations.

So join us as we delve deeper into what loving our neighbor really means and what building Beloved Community that honors and respects diversity is all about. Let's see what scripture has to teach us about how to be a community in the face of division. I hope you'll join us! ~ **Pastor Jacie**

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Lenten Devotional Gathered Into One—Devotions for Lent 2024

Gathered into One provides daily devotions for each day from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection of Our Lord/Vigil of Easter (traditionally known as Holy Saturday). Devotions begin with an evocative image and a brief passage from First Corinthians. The writers then bring their diverse voices and pastoral wisdom to the texts with quotations to ponder, reflections, and prayers.

This devotional accompanies our Lenten series on First Corinthians. We will make a bulk order on Monday, February 5. If you would like to purchase one, the cost is \$3. You can find a link on our website, or sign up on the kiosk by February 4, and pick them up on Ash Wednesday.

Lenten Worship Schedule

February 14 — Ash Wednesday Worship at noon and 6:15

February 21 at 6:15 — Guest Preacher, Rev. Dave Reedstrom, Calvary Lutheran, Rapidan

February 28 at 6:15 — Guest Preacher, Rev. Sarah Deutsch, Epiphany Lutheran, Eagle Lake

March 6 at 6:15 — Guest Preacher, Rev. John Odegard, Grace Lutheran, Mankato

March 13 at 6:15 — Preacher, Pr. Jay

March 20 at 6:15 — Preacher, Pastor Jacie

March 28 — Maundy Thursday Worship at 6:15

March 29 — Good Friday Worship at noon and 6:15



Join us for Wednesday Night Suppers!

JD Truffles Catering will prepare a variety of delicious weekly meals, and Bethlehem volunteers will greet and serve you.

All are welcome!
Join us between
5:00 and 6:15 p.m.

February 7
Spaghetti & meatballs,
salad, & roll

February 14
Swedish meatballs, mashed
potatoes, vegetables, & roll

February 21
Beef stew & biscuit, salad, & roll

February 28
Chicken, mashed potatoes,
salad, & roll





Family Faith Formation Updates

Anna Wencel, Family Faith Formation Director



It's that time of year. I can almost smell the jambalaya in the air. It's nearly time to celebrate Fat Tuesday together!

Fat Tuesday, also known as Mardi Gras, Shrove Tuesday, or Carnival, is a rich tradition for many around the world. It began as a way to celebrate the harvest with some delicious food and good fun. In later times, it became a time of jubilation ahead of a more reserved Lenten season. Here at Bethlehem, we celebrate Fat Tuesday with a delicious meal of jambalaya or mac and cheese and, of course, king cake. (Yum!) This beloved Bethlehem tradition began as a fundraiser to send youth to New Orleans for the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering. 15 years later, we are sending youth to a New Orleans Gathering once again! We have 8 youth and 3 adults who will take part in this incredible and formative experience, worshiping, serving, and playing alongside 30,000 ELCA youth and adult leaders in New Orleans.

The Youth Board and I invite you to join us for Fat Tuesday. You won't want to miss it! Tickets for a takeout meal or the in-person dinner can be purchased online with a credit card, or by mailing a check to the church. Tickets are \$12 for youth and adults. Kids five and under are free. Our online silent auction will begin on Facebook starting February 4 and end at 2:30 p.m. on February 11. Some auction items may only be open for bidding at the in-person dinner. If you can't come, we always welcome your donations. Every little bit makes a difference. We appreciate all your generosity and support of our youth. I hope to see you there!

January Highlights



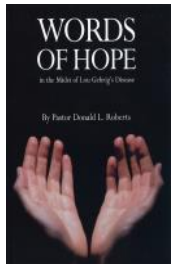
Coming up in February

- *4th & 7th: Camp Sunday & Camp Wednesday (Join us in worship & LIGHT or NightLIGHT to learn more about camp!)
- *7th: Brave Conversations: Phones, Technology, & Boundaries (7-8 p.m., 5th-8th grade youth and parents join us in the Heritage Room)
- *11th: Fat Tuesday Set Up for 7th-9th graders (12-2 p.m. with pizza)
- *13th: Fat Tuesday Dinner (Serving from 5:30-7 p.m. with tickets available at the door. Youth help serve from 4:30-8 p.m.)
- *14th-March 20th: Torchlight youth prepare to lead Palm Sunday worship; 7th & 8th grade Confirmation youth meet with their Lenten mentor.
- *28th: Youth Gathering Trip Meeting (7:30-8:30 p.m.)



Pastor Don's Devotion

Pastor Don Roberts served as pastor at Bethlehem from 1989-1996. He was diagnosed with ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease in 1995 and continues to be an inspiration of life and faith to our congregation.



I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith. ~ 2 Corinthians 1:24



This is a good text for the new year. We have faith in the risen Jesus Christ. It brings us joy. Because of the joy it brings, we want to increase our faith. We do try harder to increase our faith. Sometimes we think we should do more good things. While these are good, the only way to grow in faith is to listen to Christ proclaimed. We have to remember the cross. Jesus loved us enough to die a painful death on the cross to forgive our sins. He rose on Easter to guarantee us a beautiful future when we die.

We have joy in Jesus now. Some years are difficult, and others are fulfilling. Probably most of us will experience both in 2024. We find joy in Jesus no matter what happens to us. We find joy in Jesus when we pray for our situation and worship. It will help us to obey the second great commandment, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves. We will be able to love ourselves more. There is joy in Jesus.



~ **Council Corner** ~
**Highlights from the
 Monthly Council Meeting**



Here are the “highlights” of the Bethlehem Council meeting held on **January 16**. Official minutes with more details are posted at www.blcmankato.org and are also available in the church office notebook. Visit with Council members with questions and concerns! We welcome your conversation & feedback!

Finances: December 31 financial reports not completed & available. November 30 budget deficit of **-\$47,270.50** reduced to approximately **-\$17,000** with BLC member contributions. Thank you!! Major progress made on mortgage funding with balance owed now under \$600,000. Additional funding is in hand to reduce balance to \$500,000 at end of January.

Endowment Board Update: Chuck Piehl, board chair, presented background on board members; founding resolution; fund growth (\$1,453,214.68 current balance); current diversified investment strategies; 2023 grants to 15 church, community, national and global groups totaling \$22,575; scholarship program totaling 330 granted over 33+ years and current board budget. BLC member and professional investment counselor David Morgan acknowledged for guidance on investments.

Stewardship: Fall pledge campaign report finalized: **165** pledges made for 2024. We have **\$13,046** and **3.64%** more in total dollars & percentage pledged compared to 2023 pledges. Reminder cards mailed to 153 members in December with no additional pledges received. Some BLC members provide financial support annually but do not actually pledge a specific commitment.

Strategic Goal #1 Update: Engaging Youth: “We will implement creative & effective ways to better engage post-confirmation youth and their families and young adults.” Additional progress made on 10 specific objectives since last Council update in August reviewed by pastors.

Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST): Council approved BLC Personnel Committee proposals to update BLC pastoral & lay staff sick and family leave to comply with the new 1/1/24 state law.

Synod Meetings: MN River Conference annual meeting to be held on February 18 at Grace Lutheran in Waseca for Council members. SE MN Synod Assembly to be held on May 11 in Mankato. BLC members interested in serving as delegates should contact Bob Ihrig by **January 31**.

Fat Tuesday Contribution: Council members approved voluntary donations to fund a basket in support of BLC youth fundraiser on February 13. Thrivent action grant of \$250 approved to cover event expenses.

New Mankato Ministerial Association: Held 1st meeting in January with 5 pastors in attendance. Listening session planned with city manager on January 30 regarding new Mankato strategic plan.

Lent: BLC will share Lent worship with 3 area churches. Noon worship to be added for Ash Wednesday & Good Friday.

Youth/Young Adults: 8 BLC youth planning to attend summer ELCA national youth gathering. Conversations held with REACH staff about how to connect with community young adults.

Crossroads Campus Ministry: New campus pastor, Jenna Couch, to be installed on February 18 with SE MN Synod bishop.

WELCOME Update: Coordinating team to meet to update operations to provide appropriate support of Cruz family. Travel by family to Wisconsin held to connect with relatives.

Welcome & Inclusion: RIC Sunday scheduled for January 28 with worship service & adult forum. Congregational art project planned for January. Get your BLC T-shirts to wear on the 28th.

2024-25 Nominations: Nominating process starting to update memberships of BLC Council & boards/committees. Council positions include: Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer & Member-at-Large. Board/committee chairs to be contacted to identify new members & vacancies to be filled.

Next Council Meeting: Tuesday, February 20.



~ **Monthly Mission** ~
**Notes from the
 Community & Global Missions Board**



*For I was hungry and you
 gave me food... Matthew 25:35*



ECHO Food Shelf is our February monthly mission partner. They have been committed to addressing food insecurity in our community since 1981. ECHO provides Blue Earth County and North Mankato residents with monthly and weekly food orders, home deliveries for those without transportation, a summer feeding program for school-aged children, Thanksgiving baskets, and daily food for the unhoused. Eligibility is self-declared; no one is turned away. The program is supported by grants and donations (food and monetary) as well as food rescue from local grocery stores and restaurants. Our February donations will be presented in March, which is Minnesota Food Share Month, doubling what we give. This program depends on dedicated volunteers—we encourage you to give of your time as well as financially!



Thank you to the Bethlehem Care Ministry for the Christmas gift I received. It's great to be remembered. I enjoy being able to watch the Sunday services on Facebook. ~ *Alice Haugen*



Financial Report
Elizabeth Ruiz, Financial Secretary



Fiscal year 2023 ended with a deficit of \$16,923. This is very much in line with the deficit budget of \$13,697 that was adopted for 2023. A detailed report of 2023 financial happenings will be given at the semi-annual meeting. **Offering envelopes for 2024** are available in the narthex for those who choose to use them. If you need them sent to you, please let the office know. **Year-end contribution reports** were e-mailed to contributing members. If you need a printed report, please let the office know.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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blchurch@blcmankato.org



*A Reconciling in Christ
Congregation*

Pastor Jay Dahlvang: (507) 469-3792
pastorjay@blcmankato.org

Pastor Jacie Richmond: (612) 581-8855
pastorjacie@blcmankato.org



@bethlehem.mankato

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 ***Opportunities to get involved!*** 

Worship

**Sundays at
9:30 a.m.**
in sanctuary & online

**Wednesdays at
6:15 p.m.**

Our Sunday service is
streamed live on
Facebook &
broadcast at 11 a.m.
on KTOE Radio.

Adult Bible Study

Tuesdays, 7 a.m.
Lectionary online

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**Book of Faith:
Wednesdays at
10:30 a.m.**

**Fellowship
With Food**

Join us for coffee &
treats In Grounds for
Joy after worship on
Sundays!

**Wednesday Night
Suppers**
5:00–6:15 p.m. in the
dining room

Education

Please check Family
Faith Formation on
our website for details
about children's/
youth activities.

Adult Forums are in
Grounds for Joy
at 10:45 on
Sunday mornings.

Small Groups

Book clubs, school
kit assemblers,
young adults, Life in
the Spirit, BLC Men,
Meet & Eat,
Women's Circles,
etc.

Please check online
calendar for times
& places.

Music Groups



Choir,
Gospbells,
BLC Brass,
Praise Band

To join the music
program, contact
Charlie Leftridge,
Director of Music
& Worship.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

*Bethlehem is an inviting community that is
growing in Christ, loving our neighbors,
and serving God's world.*

***All calendar details can be
found on our website at
blcmankato.org/calendar.***

