

# The BETHLEHEM STAR



April 2024



Not too long ago I was given a copy of a devotional about Easter. It used the metaphor of biscuits to talk about Easter and resurrection. As well as having good baking advice (spoiler—baking powder is your friend when making biscuits), it got me thinking a lot about hope.

Hope is one of many themes that we can find ourselves reflecting on at Easter Time. I have found myself dwelling on it quite frequently over the past several years actually. There are so many things in the world that can discourage us from having hope. Many people, especially from my generation and younger, seem to have begun to lose hope for the future instead choosing to live with thinly veiled cynicism laced with sarcasm. Just look at various memes on the internet if you want to see an example of what I am talking about. How do you find hope in the midst of a planet who is in trouble, a country that feels like its government is falling apart, and neighbor is fighting against neighbor?

Our faith reminds us to not lose hope, though. The Apostle Paul literally writes this in his letter of 2 Corinthians. Paul writes that we should “not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” In other words, Paul reminds us to keep having hope because even when we struggle we can find hope in God’s promises. It may seem strange or even impossible at times to hold on to hope that God will bring about the great Kingdom of God that is promised in scripture. Many people in the world would even call it foolish and pointless to hold on to hope for that. That is perhaps a gift that we can offer to the world, though — to remind people of what it looks like to hold on to hope in a world that can feel so hopeless for so many. After all, when we have felt lost and helpless in our lives, we can probably think of the people who held on to hope for us when it felt impossible for us to do so on our own.

So during this Easter Time, I pray that you are able to feel hope in some way. I also pray that you can hold on to that hope however you are able. Maybe by doing that it can be a gift and inspiration to others who need that hope, too. ~ Pr. Jacie



**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.**

**April 3**  
Chicken tenders, mashed potatoes, vegetable, roll

**April 10**  
Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, vegetable, roll

**April 17**  
Sub sandwich, chips, cold pasta salad

**April 24**  
Taco buffet with rice & beans

**May 1**  
Dave’s Delight with roll & salad

**May 8**  
**End-of-the-year picnic!**

**Spring is finally here!** Come and join us for the ALS Walk on **Saturday, April 27**, to honor Pastor Don and in memory of Jon Nelson. The walk will be at Spring Lake Park, 650 Webster Avenue, in North Mankato. **Check-in time is at 8:30 a.m. at the warming house, with the walk beginning at 10 a.m.** The walk around the lake is a comfortable walk. Can’t join us that day? Please donate online at [als.org](http://als.org), or you can pick up a form and a postage-paid envelope in the narthex or the office. If you have any questions, please contact Ginger Erlandson.

**JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO CURE ALS.**



# Family Faith Formation Updates

Anna Wencel, Family Faith Formation Director



## Wishing our Muslim Neighbors a Blessed Ramadan

For the first time in recent memory, we have a planned day of school off on a Wednesday. We are used to the occasional snow day, but this is for another reason. Our MAPS kids have April 10th off to allow time for our Muslim neighbors to celebrate Eid. Throughout the month of Ramadan, which began on March 10th, Muslims break fast after sunset each day. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate with a feast or festival known as Eid al-Fitr. When Kaitlin Carter and I were planning our Family Faith Formation schedule for the year, we realized this day off and celebration for our Muslim neighbors would coincide with our weekly Wednesday programming. **We thought: what better way to honor this day for our Muslim friends than to learn about Eid together at church?** That night, we will have a variety of activities for our kids, youth, and families to honor Eid together. We hope this will continue our congregational goal of fostering a community that embraces and celebrates diversity within and outside our church walls. Though this event is geared toward our children, youth, and families, you are welcome to join us, too!

**MARCH HIGHLIGHTS** — 4th Grade Communion Retreat, Torchlight youth preparing to lead worship on Palm Sunday, and NightLIGHT kids painting roosters after they read the story of Peter's Denial



## Coming Up in April & Early May

- April 3rd & 6th: LIGHT, NightLIGHT, Torchlight, and Confirmation resume!
- April 10th, 7-8 pm: Eid Celebration in honor of our Muslim friends (3yo-9th Grade)
- April 14th (10:45-11:30 am) & 17th (7-7:45 pm): 1st & 2nd Grade Prayer Milestone
- April 19th: Friday Fun Night Youth Event (5th-12th Grade)
- May 5th: Confirmation Sunday, Camp Cinnamon Roll Fundraiser, & Last Day of LIGHT
- May 8th: Wednesday Finale with Worship & Picnic at Spring Lake Park

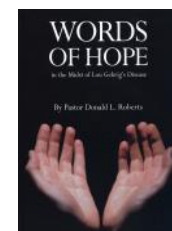


Blue Earth Taxi is now available for members in need of transportation to and from Sunday worship. Members can call [507-388-2227](tel:507-388-2227) on Saturday to arrange their pickup for Sunday. The ride will be billed to Bethlehem.



## 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.**



**...since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... ~ Romans 3:23, 24**

We all sin. We all know this. Sometimes we do things to please God to atone for our sins. We do things to please God. For example, being nice to others, not swearing, or attending church more often. If we think we have to do these things to please God, they won't bring joy to our lives. Sometimes we think God is a drill sergeant.

Jesus loves us enough to die on the cross to forgive our sins. We can live a guilt-free life. If we feel guilty, Jesus forgives what we have done wrong. If we have done something wrong to another person, talk to them, if it doesn't hurt others. If they don't forgive you, Jesus will. There is more to come. On the third day, God raises Jesus from the dead. That guarantees us eternal life with Jesus and one another. We should joyfully worship the risen Jesus. If we have to do it, it brings us no joy. We should joyfully worship the risen Christ. Think of all that Jesus has done for us.



**Worship joyfully!**

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

Here are the “highlights” of the Bethlehem Council meeting held on **March 19**. Meeting minutes with details are posted at [www.blcmankato.org](http://www.blcmankato.org) and also available in the church office notebook. Visit with Council members with questions and concerns! We welcome your conversation & feedback!

**Welcome New Members:** The Council approved & welcomed the following new members to Bethlehem: Gary & Lavonne Phillips; Gary & Jane Petersen; Shelly & Erik Olson; Rachael Jaeger; Maxine Boyer and Jamie Rivers.

**Financial Report:** Continued positive news as February 28 general fund balance finished at **+\$1,089.29**. General fund offering was \$53,022.51 more than budgeted for the month. With another advance principal payment, the mortgage balance is now **\$480,454.99**. An additional advance payment to be made in March/April.

**REACH Lease Update:** Expanded lease recommended for REACH for use of Youth Room space to hold individual confidential client meetings. To be presented to LSS for approval.

**April 21 Semi-Annual Meeting:** Agenda approved for meeting. Primary focus to be annual reports; approval of new Council, board, committee members; and updates on strategic plan and WELCOME project. Join us at 10:45 a.m. in the dining room for coffee, conversation & action!

**2024 Ballot:** 11 positions remain to be filled on the Council (2), Endowment (1), Finance (5), Stewardship (1), Welcome & Inclusion (1) & Youth (1) boards. Contact **Bob Ihrig** if interested & available to serve the church. Every member makes a difference!

**Council Annual Report:** 2023-24 Council annual report reviewed & approved for semi-annual meeting presentation along with annual reports from 12 boards & committees.

**2024 Personnel Committee:** Mary Bliesmer approved to complete 2 years of a committee term resulting from a resignation. Planning underway for June BLC annual lay staff performance reviews with review questions approved and review teams organized.

**Strategic Plan Update:** Positive progress on Goal #3 “We will foster a climate of respect and appreciation to nurture the differing perspectives among our members and the greater Mankato community” was reported with details shared on the 3 supporting objectives and practices.

**WELCOME Update:** Much is happening with Cruz family on driver’s permit testing, plans for summer Bible camp participation, work permission application & waiting on asylum application.

**Connections Shelter:** 3 candidates interviewed for director to replace resigning Erica Koser with positive outcomes. Board of directors to conduct follow-up interviews during next week & finalize hiring decision.

**Kato Sleep-Out Fundraiser:** 4 BLC members including Pr. Jacie, Amy Haigh, Ben & Danielle Johnson to sleep out on April 26 to raise funds for Connections. **\$1,500** contributed thus far from BLC members. Contact **Bob Ihrig** with your dollars for Connections.

**Next Council Meeting:** Tuesday, April 16.



**Special music slots are available for individuals or small groups in worship this Spring/Summer!** Sharing your musical gifts enhances worship for us all— We invite you to share in any capacity and are happy to help you find music. Contact Charlie to schedule a time!



**We need radio broadcast sponsors for the rest of this year.**  
Contact the office if you can help!



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



Our April Mission Partner is the **WELCOME Committee**, a combined effort of five local ELCA congregations including BLC. The mission of the committee is to welcome refugees into the community. The initial family sponsored by the group is the Cruz family from Nicaragua. Areac and Andrea have two young sons and first came to the U.S. in December 2022. They are seeking asylum, an arduous process. The application has been submitted and the necessary steps completed. Additionally, they have filed the paperwork to be able to obtain paid employment as non-citizens, again a complicated process. The family has received phenomenal support from our community as they seek to establish productive and independent lives in their new home. They are working hard to learn English and master the skills needed for a new country. Because they are not allowed to have paid employment, their full support depends on the generosity of our congregations. There are additional opportunities that exist for the family if the financial support is there, including a summer soccer program for their older son and a family summer camp for all of them. We as a congregation have the opportunity to bless this family as they seek safety and belonging in their new home. Our goal is \$3,000. **Thank you for giving generously!**



**Thursday, May 23**  
**1:00-6:00 p.m.**  
**Grounds for Joy**

**Welcome & Inclusion**  
**Photo Booth**



The Welcome & Inclusion Board is looking to collect as many photos as possible of our members of all ages to be included in a Noah’s Ark themed display to bring visibility to who we are as a church community at diversity events in our community over the next year. Help us show our community that “All are welcome in our boat!”

Grab your family and friends and stop by the Welcome & Inclusion Photo Booth, which will be located in the narthex between April 3 and May 8 and snap some fun pictures! A photographer will be present around worship times, or you can snap a photo and text it to Marie Slotemaker at 507-995-5629.



**Financial Report**  
Elizabeth Ruiz, Financial Secretary



**By the end of February, the general fund deficit was eliminated.** The month ended with a surplus balance of \$1,089. This was due to very generous giving by the members of Bethlehem, as well as no snow removal costs. Reusable cards are now available in the pews for electronic givers to place in the offering baskets. Offering envelopes for 2024 are available on the kiosk.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
720 South Second Street  
Mankato, MN 56001

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

(507) 388-2925  
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



**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](http://blcmankato.org/calendar).*

