

## **THE MESSENGER**

**September 2023**

*St. John's Lutheran Church at Stone Bank*

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### **The State of the Church**

I don't know if you've noticed but lately there have been quite a few news articles about the decline of the Christian church today, particularly in the US. Just a quick google search produces a whole pack of titles like "The Great Decline: Religiosity in America," "6 Reasons Religion is Dying," and my personal favorite: "The Decline of Christianity: 15 Shocking Facts Every Christian Should Know." These stories are invariably presented next to a photograph of a mostly empty cathedral with just a few straggling folks seated on one side of an enormous aisle.

Things seem to be going badly for the Christian Church.

At least if you're looking at the numbers.

But I'm not certain that those numbers tell the whole story. For one thing, as anyone knows who pays attention to political polls, there are numbers, and then there are numbers.

That last story, for example about the "15 Shocking Facts", turned out to be written by an evangelical Christian who apparently equated "Christian" with "Born-Again Christian" so in the surveys he cites the declining numbers of born-again as proof that the whole Christian church is dying.

Most of the evidence of the declining number of people who identify as Christians, is based on surveys of people who are asked to fill in the bubble of the people with whom they identify: Christians, Moslems, Jews, Atheists, "Other" or those with "No Religion."

Isn't that a curious way to define a Christian? As a person who fills in the bubble next to the word "Christian" on a survey? I mean, you'd think being a Christian would have more to do with—I don't know—faith in Jesus Christ?

We could easily imagine someone who was a Christian not filling in the bubble, because she might not like to be identified by any category—like many young people I know—not by political party or gender or sexual orientation—or religion. "Yeah, I don't like to fly a flag," one 20-something told me.

Others might fill in the bubble because they were baptized, or confirmed or because their parents went to church, even though they no longer believe or practice any of it. So what do these surveys even mean?

And if you like numbers, there's still the fact that 2.6 billion people even now count themselves as Christians world-wide, and that number is still rising, even though our percentage of the general population is declining.

I just don't think you can call this a crisis. Think about saying to the apostle Paul desperately trying to keep his handful of congregations alive: Paul it's really bad in our time, there's 2.6 billion of us, but now we're only 63% of the population down from 78% 10 years ago.

And Paul is saying: There's 2.6 billion of you??

Besides all that, as our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has pointed out, it's not even our church: it's Christ's church. And I am certain that the church will be safe in the hands of our God revealed in Christ.

So what's the State of the Church today?

Unfinished!

And isn't it grand that by the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Spirit, we get to be part of the finishing?!

Blessings on the end of your summer season.

Pastor Karen

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## CHURCH NEWS

### One In Christ Sunday

Sunday, September 10<sup>th</sup> will mark the official end of summer services as we come back together in the sanctuary. On *One in Christ* Sunday, we gather all together to celebrate worship as one congregation. This year Joe Conti, will again join us on drums along with three guest singers from the Milwaukee symphony chorus to perform with St, John's choir the "I Believe" section of Robert Ray's great Gospel Mass. Bring your friends and family because you don't want to miss this!



This year we will also host a special potluck brunch following the worship service. Family, guests and visitors are all welcome. A sign up sheet is available in the fellowship hall. So, pick your favorite brunch dish to share and join us for a joyful reunion of fellow parishioners.

### St. John's Website News!

Watch next week for exciting information about our new website!

## Awesome Building Improvement Fund News

*"Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind!"*  
Psalm 107:21

There is no such thing as a small miracle! Thanks to each and every one of you for your love, support and generosity in participating in St. John's Building Fund campaign these last few months! We will continue to keep you posted periodically as we progress forward with the campaign over the next 3 years!

We are ecstatic to announce the latest update on the Building Improvement Fund! St John's is now up to 30 participants (goal of 22 participants exceeded!) with 11 of those pledges 100% paid in full! We have also exceeded our target goal of \$45,000--we are now at \$45,230!

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."*  
Thessalonians 5:11.

### Lutheran World Relief School Kits – We're On the Home Stretch



Please continue gathering school supplies for children unable to do so. Lutheran World Relief school kits, personal care kits and quilts will be collected until the end of September. We will be assembling the school kits the last Sunday in September during the coffee hour. Feel free to contribute until that time or submit a donation if unable to do so. Mark your donation "school kits" and we will fill in those areas that don't have enough items.

There are flyers on the round table in the fellowship hall outlining what each kit has. However, here is a rundown of how many kits we have and what items are still needed.

#### **Each kit needs:**

- 4 – 70 sheet spiral notebooks (wide or college ruled)
- 1 – 30 centimeter ruler
- 1 – blunt scissors
- 1 – pencil sharpener
- 5 – unsharpened pencils
- 5 – ballpoint pens (no gel ink)
- 1 – box 16 or 24 crayons
- 1 – 2-1/2 inch eraser
- 1 – 14x17 inch drawstring backpack

#### **Thus far we have:**

- 64 kits
- 52 kits
- 81 kits
- 60 kits
- 120 kits
- 56 kits
- 93 kits
- 110 kits
- 68 kits

Thank you for your generous donations. Please consider helping assemble the kits on September 24. Scott Hampton has volunteered to deliver the boxes to Waukesha where they will be loaded into boxcars. – Judy Swanton

### **Mission Fest Sunday 2023**



This year's chosen mission is The Hope Center of Waukesha. Their mission is to reduce the risks of poverty by helping people in Waukesha County meet basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing through services, partnerships and community collaboration. Rev. Roy Nelson, President of the Board of Directors, will preach at our service on September 24 where we will learn more about and celebrate Hope Center's mission during and after worship service. So, come and see what this important mission is doing to help people in our area.

***Hope Center is a non-profit organization that has been serving the basic needs of financial assistance, food, and clothing in Waukesha County for more than thirty years. They believe that helping people with their basic needs is essential for them to have dignity and respect in their lives.***

***In all of their programs, Hope Center reaches out in a caring manner, always trying to help people help themselves; hopefully empowering them to have the best possible quality of life given their limitations. They recognize the dignity of each individual no matter what his or her personal circumstance may be and they always strive to bring HOPE to those living in despair.***

***(Information from [hopecenterwi.org](http://hopecenterwi.org))***

## Outreach for Hope Bike Ride



**16th Annual Outreach for Hope  
Family Ride Run Walk**

**OUTREACH  
FOR HOPE**  
2023 FAMILY RIDE RUN WALK  
MILES FOR HOPE

**Saturday, Sept. 30 @ Four Event Sites:**  
Milwaukee • Kenosha • Dousman • Grafton

Together, let's raise \$160K for grants to ministries serving neighborhoods experiencing material poverty in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA!

- Bike rides, a 2-mile walk and 5K fun run (options vary by site)
- Picnic lunch and fellowship with friends from other churches
- Celebrate progress towards our \$160K fundraising goal
- Hear stories of impact from OFH Ministry Partner leaders

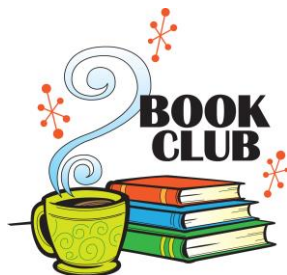


**Register starting July 18 at  
OFHRRW.org**

Questions? Contact us at 414-671-1212  
or penny@outreachforhope.org

**Saturday, September 30th starting at Cory Municipal Park in Dousman: Outreach For Hope Bikeride/Run/Walk** raising money for the Greater Milwaukee Synod's low income area ministries. Everyone is welcome to join Pastor Karen and Jim on the Ride/Run/Walk, or support us with your spare change! If you would like to register, call the church office and Barb McShane can assist you.

## Listening Book Club News



**Join us on Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup> at 1 pm to discuss Yossi Klein Halevi's *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*:** "One Israeli's powerful attempt to reach beyond the wall that separates Israelis and Palestinians. In a series of letters Yossi Klein Halevi explains what motivated him to leave his native New York in his twenties and move to Israel to participate in the drama of the renewal of a Jewish homeland and help ensure that it succeeds as a morally responsible, democratic state in the Middle East." (Goodreads.) Interestingly the author has generously offered this book in Arabic translation for free downloading.

Listening Book Club seeks to love and understand our neighbor by listening to our neighbor, so we read books written by people who are not like us. Everyone is welcome to join us for one or more of our quarterly discussions.

## **St. John's Excellent Treasurer, Barb O'Connor, Announces Her Retirement**

We so appreciate Barb for stepping in to organize St. John's budget process during a time of transition. Barb was tireless in continuing to find ways to present our finances in ways that are clear to everyone. She was a creative force on our council and she will be greatly missed. Her last day will be October 31. When you see Barb, please thank her for her contributions to St. John's

### **Filling Barb's Big Shoes**

We are looking for someone to replace Barb. It is a flexible one to two hours a week position that requires bookkeeping skills. If you or anyone you know is interested in this position, please call the church office.

## **Worship, Music, & Hospitality Ministry News**

*Mark Your Calendars:*

Thursday, August 31<sup>st</sup> – Campfire Worship Service 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 10<sup>th</sup> – One in Christ Sunday 9:00 a.m.  
With Potluck Brunch following the service

Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup> – Mission Fest Sunday Worship Service 9:00 a.m.

### **Fall Choir Schedule**

Calling all Singers!! Singers are invited to join our St. John's choir. If you like to sing, the choir would like to have you. Just call or email the church office with your contact information.

This fall, the choir is scheduled to sing on the following Sundays:

September 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>

October 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>

November 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>

December 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>

Practices will be following the coffee fellowship on those days, as well.



## Worship Assistants for 2023



The worship assistant volunteer forms for 2023 will be available beginning September 10<sup>th</sup>. Assistants are needed in all areas: ushers, readers, communion assistants, and especially altar care persons. Please prayerfully consider helping us to enhance our worship services by volunteering to help in one or more of these areas.

Deadline for form submission will be November 12<sup>th</sup> so that the schedule can be finished by the beginning of December.

### Join Us for After Worship Fellowship

Fellowship following services offer a valued time of socialization and togetherness. There is a sign up sheet on the counter for volunteers to host. Please check the list and sign up to supply treats one week. Thank you.



## Summer Highlights at St. John's!

### In June –

**Blessed the Bees** and learned about them too, thanks to the hospitality of Kris and Kim.

### In July—

**Listening Book Club** met for our quarterly discussion, this time engaging in a thoughtful look at Toni Morrison's haunting novel of the post-Civil War south, *Beloved*.

We welcomed our pets to worship for a **Pet Blessing** and revisit of the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi.

Pastor Karen extended St. John's hospitality by presiding over the **wedding** in Brookfield of Marissa Kaster and Noah Huotari.

We cleaned and spruced up our **Parsonage** in preparation for the next new tenants.

St. John's offered our pavilion as a rest station for the **Cow-a-Lunga Bike Ride**, a fund-raiser for the **Respiratory Health Association**. 50 or so participants in the longest of three rides, a 3-day, 190 mile ride from Gurnee, IL to Hubertus, WI, stopped for rest and refreshments (provided by RHA). The riders thanked us heartily for our fine space and excellent restrooms!

### In August—

We enjoyed another excellent fish fry together at **Lutherdale Bible Camp**.

We celebrated the **successful conclusion of our Building Fund Drive!** Thanks to all who worked hard to make this happen!



## St. John's Outreach Partner Mt. Meru



### Meet Mt. Meru Farmer: Wilson Shanguya

The Coffee Bean News for Congregational Ambassadors Volume 3: August 2023 Message from MMCP Board President Walt Chossek Tanzania Capital Projects Coffee Harvest GMS Visits Tanzania MMCP Board of Directors 2023 Ambassador Mtg. Coffee Price Increase Farmer highlighted on our website in August Meet our Farmers Wilson Shanguya has been a member of the Mt. Meru Coffee Project since 2018 with his first planting. His farm at 4400ft. currently consists of two acres where he has planted 900 coffee plants. In 2022, he delivered 150 kg of cherries to the SILK processing center and 300 kg to the Leguruki processing center. He would like to expand his coffee farm as he owns the adjacent land which is currently planted with corn. Wilson joined because he wanted to understand how the processing centers worked and to improve his farming practices. He has a wife and six kids, the youngest being twins. He used the small amount of funds he received (his plants are still young with many yet to reach full maturity) to send his children to school. He was trained in 2019 where he learned good farming practices and how to manage his plants. He also received new plants from TaCRI in 2020 which supported his second planting. He feels he is just beginning to learn and more improvements are possible.



### Tanzania Farmer Training

Farmer training at the Tanzania Coffee Research Institute (TaCRI) in Moshi covering all six processing centers was completed during the month of May. We have now trained 575 farmers over the past five years. They wish to thank everyone who contributed the past few years to make this session possible which enables them improve their knowledge and farming practices.





### **Tanzania Visits by GMS Congregations**

The local Mt. Meru Coffee Project team hosted visits in July by two congregations from the Greater Milwaukee Synod and learn more about the various phases of coffee bean production. Ascension Lutheran Church, Waukesha, visited the Makumira processing center and Our Savior Lutheran Church, Oconomowoc, visited Mlimani processing center. Both had an opportunity to visit local farmers as well.

\*Excerpts from Mt. Meru Coffee Project August 2023 Newsletter

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## **ST. JOHN'S GOOD NEWS REPORT**

Pastor Karen and Jim Edgar's oldest daughter Maris and her husband Ravi are expecting the first grandchild in both families!

*Call or email the church office to let us know of any "Good News" to include in future newsletters.*

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## **WE APPRECIATE ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY MEMBERS:**

Nancy Barr for organizing the campfire service, making the worship assistant and altar care assistant schedule for the rest of 2023

Jim Hanson for managing the finances of the building fund

Grant Schuldt for his help with many church building projects

Judy Swanton for coordinating the Lutheran World Relief school kit and personal care item collection

St. John's Community members for their contributions to the Building Fund

Try A Yummy New Recipe -  
5-Ingredient Chicken and Dumplings for Two  
By Judy Swanton

2 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth (from 32-oz. carton)  
1 Tbsp. ranch salad dressing & seasoning mix (from 1-oz. Package)  
1/8 tsp. black pepper  
1-1/2 cups shredded cooked chicken  
3 Pillsbury frozen buttermilk biscuits (from 25 oz bag), thawed (**generic work also**)  
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese (2 oz)

- 1) In 2 or 3 quart saucepan, heat broth, ranch seasoning mix, pepper and chicken to boiling.
- 2) Cut each biscuit in half and cut each half into 4 pieces (**note: cut pieces half thawed so doesn't stick on knife**). Reduce heat to medium, simmer uncovered 5 to 7 minutes, stirring frequently, until dumplings are cooked through and mixture is slightly thickened.
- 3) Stir in Cheddar cheese until cheese melts. Serve immediately.

*(Note: I usually throw in whatever veggies happen to be in the fridge/freezer after adding the biscuits and before stirring in the cheese.)*

**If you have a recipe that you would like to share, please mail, email or drop it off at the church office.**



## SEPTEMBER READINGS

### September 3

Jeremiah 15:15-21 - *God fortifies the prophet against opposition*

Psalms 26:1-8 - *Your love is before my eyes; I have walked faithfully with you.*

Romans 12:9-21 - *Live in harmony*

Matthew 16:21-28 - *The passion prediction and rebuke to Peter*

### September 10

Ezekiel 33:7-11 - *The prophet's responsibility to warn the people*

Psalms 119:33-40 - *I desire the path of your commandments. (Ps. 119:35)*

Romans 13:8-14 - *Live honorably as in the day*

Matthew 18:15-20 - *Reconciliation in the community of faith*

### September 17

Genesis 50:15-21 - *Joseph reconciles with his brothers*

Psalms 103:[1-7] 8-13 - *LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy.*

Romans 14:1-12 - *Accepting diversity in the community of faith*

Matthew 18:21-35 - *A parable of forgiveness in the community of faith*

### September 24

Jonah 3:10--4:11 - *God's concern for the city of Nineveh*

Psalms 145:1-8 - *The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

Philippians 1:21-30 - *Standing firm in the gospel*

Matthew 20:1-16 - *The parable of the vineyard workers*



# SEPTEMBER

## Birthdays & Anniversaries

September 4 – Steve Vinkavich  
September 5 – Diane Seeley  
September 7 – Jim & Mary Hanson  
September 15 – Lois Baumann  
September 18 – Wilbur Baumann  
September 27 – Gene Seitz



### **St. John's Council**

President: Judy Runt

Vice President: Nancy Barr

Council Members at Large: Julie Bohlen and Kris Kaptain

Financial Secretary: Judy Swanton

Acting Treasurer: Barb O'Connor

### **St. John's Music Program**

Music Minister: Jim Edgar

Pianist: Lauren Genthe

Choir: Nancy Barr, Ann Greenseth, Oscar Kraft, Shirley Kraft, Bennett Shebesta, Judy Runt

### **Worship Assistants**

Alan Abeld, Carol Baird, Phil Baird, Nancy Barr, John Baumann, Julie Bohlen, Jim Edgar, Ann Greenseth, Kris Kaptain, Jerry Katz, Brigitte Katz, Oscar Kraft, Shirley Kraft, Julie Kuhtz, Nancy Kuhtz, Megan Rollefson, Deb Runt, Judy Runt, Grant Schuldt, Judy Swanton, Cynthia Tobolt

### **Altar Ministry**

Nancy Barr, Brigitte Katz, Julie Kuhtz, Nancy Kuhtz, Anita Olson, Kris Kaptain

