First Out Loud

God's Work. Our Hands. To Serve ALL People.

JANUARY- 2025 NEWSLETTER

Siblings in Christ,

As we begin 2025, three passages from the Bible leapt out at me, all centered on love. The first is from the first letter of John, chapter 4 verses 16b, 19-21. There we hear this important reminder: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

The second is from the Gospel of John, chapter 15 verses 16-17. There Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit
that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Love. Here Jesus and the author of first John are using love as a verb. We are on to love our neighbors. ALL our neighbors. We are commanded to do so by Our Savior Jesus Christ who is love incarnate. We are on to love everyone we meet no matter who they are, where they come from, whomever they might love, and in whatever circumstance we might encounter them- we are called upon to love. Love is the greatest force in the universe. True and lasting change, change for the better, can only come through loving one another. That is why Jesus come to embody God's way of love, so that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we might follow in God's way.

Therefore, this year, think of ways to love everyone we meet- especially those with whom we disagree. Pray for our leaders. Pray for our neighbors. Pray for our enemies. Pray that God's love will be poured into their hearts and open their minds to see and obey God's will. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." Christ is the head of the church. Christ is the Savior of the world. Christ is the ruler of the universe. Therefore, we must obey Christ above all others. The goal is to do so while living in a sinful and broken world. May God guide us with his wisdom as we attempt to do so.

Amen.
Sincerely yours in Christ,
Pastor Christopher Culuris

I am standing here on the precipice of what is the closing out of year 2024, looking out into the great, vast unknown, more broadly known as year 2025. While there is very little I know about how 2025 will unfold, there is one thing I am definitely sure of, we, at FLC, will be starting the new year with a full complement of staff. It will be the first time in roughly 15 months, if not longer. Even as we look back on the ups and downs, the successes and failures, the joy and disappointments of 2024, as challenging as it may have been to keep up at time for Karen, Pastor Chris, and the host of volunteers who chipped in to assist in the office until Ryan was hired on as the Office Coordinator, to say nothing about the committees who graciously and admirably filled in with their time and gifts necessitated by our lack of success to hire a Music Director and a Youth and Family Ministry Director, that is until we were graciously blessed to welcome Deacon Brenda Handel-Johnson into our family, I think it is safe to say that we are looking ahead with joy, gratitude and renewed hope at what 2025 holds for us at FLC. As Psalm 30 says, "sorrow may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning." And indeed, it is a new morning at FLC.

I tend to look at each new year as a crossroad that offers us this wonderful opportunity to take brief stock of the year that was without dawdling or sugarcoating. Taking stock also serves as a bridge that links us to the year that is yet to be. It may be as simple as acknowledging where we were and how it relates to where we are heading, where we struggled or failed, of acknowledging where strengths and need areas for growth are, of what went well and what didn't. More importantly though, as one year ends and another starts, this time for taking stock, is the time for coalescing and focusing our time and energy on the upcoming year and what our goals are and how they will relate to our broader mission.

I may be a by-product of the "human potential movement" of the 70s, but I also tend to look at each new year with a great deal of hope and optimism that good things will happen, that every year is unrealized potential to be tapped into, waiting to emerge as great art... though maybe not always immediately as a finished product. I don't tend to see this great art emerging from the unrealized potential before us as magical or wishful thinking, either. I accept it as a matter of faith. At FLC, I hope and pray this unrealized potential, this masterpiece of great art that is unfolding in our midst in 2025 fully aligns itself with our goals and mission at FLC: God's Work. Our Hands. To Serve ALL People.

In a few short weeks, we will hold our annual congregational meeting. We will adopt our budget for 2025, elect delegates to the Synod Assembly and to the Gustavus Adolphus College Association of Congregations (GACAC) and elect nominees to serve on the Nominating Committee. We will have other items on the agenda that will be addressed as important matters of church life, as well. This meeting will allow us to look back, to look ahead and then to imagine a path forward. That's all any of us can ask for, is a bit of perspective, a little hope, faith and the opportunity to get us moving in the right direction in lockstep with our mission.

Leading the congregational meeting will be my last official act as Council President, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity I was given to serve as your Council President. In 2025, your new Council President will be Mark Roemhildt. I ask that you prayerfully welcome and support him in faithfully carrying out his duties and responsibilities. The other officers for 2025 are Kaari Bly, Vice-President; Bonnie Pettis, Treasurer, and Pat Pehrson, Secretary. Please, prayerfully welcome and support each of them, as well

Where one year ends and another starts tends to brings out the introspective, reflective side in me. While I may think Iooking back on the year is important and necessary for gaining understanding and perspective, I believe looking forward is what keeps us living. I also think looking forward means being bold and daring, trusting that where there is darkness, the light of Christ is with us to guide us on our journey, and where there is doubt and uncertainty, faith will carry us home to the finish. I am truly hopeful about 2025 and about the life of our church and what lies ahead. We have strong leadership in Pastor Christ and now Deacon Brenda and great and faithful stewards within the church family to help lead and guide us. So, please, let us join hands going forward into 2025 to live out our mission: God's Work. Our Hands. To Serve ALL People. Go in peace, serve the Lord.

Randy Frey-Hawkins
Council President

FROM SW MN SYNOD BISHOP DEE PEDERSON 3

Women's Retreat: Saturday March 1, 2025

Arrival and Snacks at 9am

Retreat runs from 9:30am-12:30pm

At First Lutheran

Theme: We are the Body of Christ

With sessions on hands, feet, and heart

There will be activities for each session

Free to attend

All women from First Lutheran in grades 9 and up as well as their friends and family are invited to attend.

Please RSVP to the church office by February 20 so that we know how many resources to prepare.

A Bench For Our Excess Plastic

A new program is commencing at First Lutheran Church. By March 1, 2025, we will accept all clean plastic bags and film. Just drop it off into an identified box at the entrance of our church. It will be weighed, recorded and taken to a distribution center where it will be sent to TREX and made into a bench for our yard. For our efforts of collection 1,000 pounds in one year from March 1, 2025, we'll receive a bench.

What do we need from our members at First Lutheran?

1. **A fish weighing scale to weigh our bags of plastic. Anyone have one we could use for a Year? Please bring it to the church office.**
2. **An interested individual(s) to weigh bags, record and deliver to a site in town for sending them off. You may work with others so that the duties are reduced. Lift 15 pounds in a bag.**
3. **Become aware of types of plastic to be recycled. We will publish items to guide you in the coming days.**
4. **Start collecting grocery, bread, ziplock and salt bags to bring to the church after March 1st. There will be other types of plastic bags and film which in the future we will let you know about, but let's start there.**

With this effort, we will not only receive a bench for our yard, but responsibly recycle plastic to keep our environment clean– a winner in two ways! Thank you and start collecting recyclable plastic for a brighter and cleaner future.

A note from the Green Committee.

Join us for youth group January 8 at 7:30! Open for 7-12th graders and their friends!
We will celebrate the New Year with a puzzle themed evening with snacks and a chance to meet Deacon Brenda!
We will have lots of fun so join us and bring a friend! NOTE THAT WE ARE MEETING ON THE 8TH because of New Year's Day being on our normal youth group night!

Please help support our wounded Veterans by donating your stamps here at church. They accept new and cancelled stamps as well as foreign stamps. Please cut the stamps off the envelope leaving a 1/4 inch margin. Entire postcards with and without stamps on them are also appreciated. They also ask for the entire envelope if you have old envelopes dated prior to 1941. They also accept stamp collections and stamp collecting materials. Look for the donation box near the ushers stand! Thank you!

"MAY THE GOD OF HOPE FILL YOU WITH ALL JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING SO THAT BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, YOU MAY ABOUND IN HOPE."

ROMANS 15:13

Join us as we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with an ecumenical service on January 21, 2025 at 1pm at First Lutheran in St. Peter MN. Representatives from a variety of denominations will be participating including leaders from the MN Council of Churches, the New Ulm Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. All are welcome to attend! There will be a time of fellowship following the worship service!

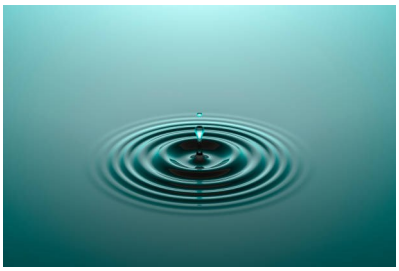
Welcome Deacon Brenda Handel-Johnson!

First Lutheran is very blessed to have you join us in worship and guide us through your leadership. We look forward to welcoming you with open arms and warm hearts. Look for an article in February's newsletter to find out a little more about our new Deacon.

BRING LIGHTS FOR EPIPHANY

During Epiphany, the Season of Light, the Green Committee invites First Lutheran members to donate energy-efficient light bulbs, of your choice, in their original packaging, for the committee to bring to St. Peter Area Foodshelf for their clients. Like food, light bulbs are a budget necessity, particularly in winter. Our gifts of Light have been appreciated by SPAF in past years.

Beginning on Epiphany Sunday, January 5, 2025, and continuing on January Sundays 12, 19 and 26, please choose a day to bring your gifts of light bulbs. The Green Committee will place designated containers in the narthex. Thank you for your support of St. Peter Area Foodshelf.



Thanks to everyone who returned a 2025 Pledge Card. We have received 105 cards totaling $345,192. Do we have yours?

Joyous month, Members!
This month our Building Renovation mortgage will be below a million dollars!
Thank you to all who have faithfully helped pay this down.
Our original mortgage in 2012 was $2,180,215 and in just over twelve years we have paid off more than half of it. The current balance will be $995,316 in December. Again, we can't thank all of you enough for your generosity.

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
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St. Peter, MN 56082

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Thank You!

The staff appreciates all your treats, cards, kindness and smiles you gave us this holiday season. We are truly blessed to be working at First Lutheran. Thank you.

From the Office Staff.