



THE FIRST PERSPECTIVE

January 2024

First Lutheran Church, Stephen, MN

Dear First Lutheran faith family,

Happy new year! I hope your Christmas season has been a blessing and truly filled with joy and love.

January can sometimes feel like a let-down of sorts – Christmas is over, the excitement is past, and up here, winter is still in full force, with maybe the worse still to come. It can feel like that in the church, too – Advent is over, the Christmas Program is done, and the candles of Christmas Eve have come and gone yet again. Where do we turn now?

We turn now to the Epiphany season, between January 7th and February 11th.

The word “epiphany” means manifestation or revealing, and in the church, that manifestation or revealing refers to the Magi (who were perhaps ancient astronomers) coming to pay homage to the Christ child with their gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh. Symbolically, Epiphany is a season of light, even though it’s physically dark outside. We remember the light of the star that led the Magi “from the east” to Bethlehem, and we remember the light of Christ that still guides us today.



I’m reminded of the children’s song, This Little Light of Mine. The verses give us words like these:

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...

Jesus gave it to me, I’m gonna let it shine...

All around the world, I’m gonna let it shine...


Do you think we ever outgrow that as adults, letting our light shine? Letting the light of Jesus Christ shine through us? I wonder sometimes. But, in this new year and Epiphany season, instead of hiding Christ’s light, let’s be like the Magi who looked to the Light for direction, and let’s let that same light shine within us. After all, in Holy Baptism we light a candle and present it to the baptized (or their parents) to remember that Jesus is the light of the world, and it is Jesus who desires for us to “let your light shine before others, so that they see your good works and give glory to your God in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).



What will you do with your little light? May the light of Christ guide our days, shine into our lives, and be revealed through us to a dark world in need.

Peace and everything good to you and yours as we start 2024!

Your pastor,
Brother Jeff



CHURCH NEWS

THE MARTHA/RUTH CIRCLE: Martha/Ruth circle will not meet until March when we begin our new year.

LOOSE CHANGE: Loose Change Sunday is the 3rd Sunday of each month. January Loose Change:

ELCA Good Gifts

QUILTERS: The Quilting Ladies meet on the second and fourth Mondays of each month. All are welcome to join them!

BULLETIN SPONSORS: If you would like to honor or remember a family member, you can sponsor a bulletin. Sponsorships are \$20. Please contact the office with your request.

ALTAR COMMITTEE: Reminder to change the paraments and fill the candles. Communion is served the 1st & 3rd Sundays. Committee members prepare the altar.

LAY READERS: Please consider signing up to read during services. If you haven't been a lay reader before, contact the church office to find out more.

THRIVENT MEMBERS, are you throwing away \$500 a year? You have the opportunity to use this money to help causes of your choice. Contact Sharon Kotts for assistance.

Do You Have News To Share?

Send announcements and events you would like to share in the newsletter to firstl@wikel.com by the 20th of each month.



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

1/1.....	Lowel Bring
1/4.....	Bruce Field
1/5.....	Kyler Szczepanski
1/8.....	William McGlynn
1/13.....	Darby Benitt
1/14.....	Addalynn Nelson
1/19.....	Justin McMahon
1/22.....	Mason Smith
1/24.....	Jonathan Anderson
1/31.....	Dianne Dammann

MEMORIALS

- In Memory: James Brinkman**
John & Shawna Peterson - Schendel Family Fund
- In Memory: Tylor Johnson**
Karen Lundee Cordes - Undesignated
- In Memory: Leonard, Troy & Aaron Bazey** - Kathy & Charles Labine - Education Fund
- In Memory: Jim Feller**
John & Shawna Peterson - Schendel Family Fund



Thank you...

To Michelle Weberg for new tables in our upstairs classrooms. She used a Thrivent Action team request to fund her idea. If you are a Thrivent member and have never used a team, please contact Betsy, Sharon or Whitney and we can help. It's a great program to support church and community programs.

Dear First Lutheran Church,

You are helping to carry out VIP's mission with your financial contribution!
We thank you for your gift of \$65.75 received on 9/22/2023.
We value your support tremendously. More than 400 children, women and men were helped this year and we are on track to serve as many, or more, next year. We provide victim advocacy, shelter, housing, parenting time programs, child advocacy, and a 24/7 crisis line because of supporters like you.
Furthermore, your cash donation expands in value as it becomes matching dollars for grant funding. Your gift works hard to help victims of domestic and sexual violence.
We can't do it without you!
Carmen Zuniga, Executive Director, Violence Intervention Project

TRUSTEE'S UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENTS

Listed are a few projects that have been completed or are in somewhere in the process of making our church look it's best!
New gutters have been installed. A new storm door to pastor's office has been installed.
We are also trying to improve the lighting in the sanctuary. Please check out the one new bulb in the back of the sanctuary. The idea is to provide a more general light let a council member know what your thoughts are.
Brian Hendricks, Trustee

A CALL TO CHURCH STEWARDSHIP

Every month the church council receives a report of the monetary donations to First Lutheran Church. We don't discuss or calculate the non monetary donations to First Lutheran, and those volunteer hours add up quickly.

There are so many ways to volunteer at First Lutheran. This is not a complete list, but something to get you thinking about how to best serve your church family.

- Lawn Mowing
- Snow Shoveling
- Lay Reader
- Stream on Facebook
- Ushering 2 to 3 times a year
- Serving coffee twice a year
- Deep cleaning once a year
- Special music
- Altar committee
- Quilting
- Substitute teacher for Wednesday school
- Decorate/undecorate) for Christmas
- Summer flowers
- Clavinova- just pushing buttons, not actually playing so yes you can do it!
- Head Usher(s) - we would love to have a few people serve as head ushers for special events

There are jobs for families, retirees, college students, elementary students, everyone who is a member of our First Lutheran family. If you have a project you would like to add to our list, please talk to Betsy or Whitney.

We hope you remember First Lutheran with your monetary donations but we also need all hands on deck for the little jobs that make our church family run smoothly. If you have questions about volunteering, your Stewardship Committee, Betsy and Whitney can point you in the right direction.

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH FUND OPTIONS

The church council has decided to create a new fund, The **Schendel Family Fund** in honor and memory of Pastor Mike and Karen Schendel, who gave so much to our congregation and community. The goal is to create an endowment fund, where the interest can be spent on church and community projects. We have been fundraising for the outdoor sign fund in honor of Pastor Mike, and this would be a continuation of those efforts.

Our **Education Fund** is also open and receiving funds. If you stop by the church on a Wednesday night and see the rooms filled with K-9 students, you can appreciate how much time, love and materials go into our program.

The **Altar Fund** is also open for donations. The Altar is such a warm, welcoming sight for in person and online worshippers. Thank you for remembering First Lutheran as you consider your monetary donations. We want to make investments in our youth, congregation, buildings and community.

UPCOMING VIRTUAL RETREAT: SEASONS OF THE SOUL



"The spiritual journey is a marathon of seasons," according to Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. Just as we, and all of creation, experience seasons, so do our souls, also, and these spiritual seasons constantly shape us. This virtual silent retreat will engage us in awareness of the seasons of the soul we all go through, provide some practical reflection questions, and explore how God may be inviting us to new life in Christ in the midst of the changes and chances of this life.

Date: Saturday, January 27, 2024

Register with Br. Jeff Brown, Faith Practices Champion, at brotherjeff@lutheranfranciscans.org

PIETRUSZEWSKI'S TAKE PART IN A MISSION TRIP

Written by Kris Ann Pietruszewski

Myron and I had the opportunity to take a mission trip to Kingston, Jamaica, December 4th-8th. This is our first mission trip, but we can confidently say, it won't be our last. Myron received the email from the organization, Food For The Poor. We both contribute to this organization and Myron saw the email about a mission trip opportunity. When Myron asked me if I wanted to go, at first I said no. I had heard bad things about Kingston, Jamaica and it was fear more than anything that made me say no to begin with. We have been to Jamaica as tourists twice before and absolutely loved it, so I finally decided to go, but mainly because Myron was going also. And now that we are back, I'm so glad that I decided to go. To say it was rewarding and heartbreaking rolled up together, is an understatement. And to think I could have missed out on this trip due to fear, well let's just say, I learned some life lessons all the way around from this trip and thus the reason for writing this article (I'm not a writer). There was a total of 13 people on this trip. We were from California to Texas to Florida to the East Coast to Minnesota and even a guy from Canada. The 14th person was the tour organizer from Food For The Poor, the Florida office. We also had a bus driver and tour coordinator both from the Jamaican Food For The Poor organization. We also had a security guard with us during our excursions during the day (total of 17 of us on the bus every day). I never felt any fear for my safety at any point during the week.



Some of the highlights from our trip include:

Day 1:

- We received a tour, sang some songs, prayed and served breakfast to a night shelter in town.
- Assembling food bags at the Jamaican Food For The Poor factory/offices, which contained 3 cans of Mackerel, 3 cans of sardines, 3 cans of sausage (like the Vienna sausages or sometimes chicken), 5 packages of flour, 3 packages of corn meal, 3 lbs of dried peas, 5 lbs of rice, 2 packages of milk powder and 3 packages of crackers). When we handed out the food bags, we also gave the people a bottle of cooking oil separately. They wanted us to put together 100 bags, but we ended up doing 200 bags!



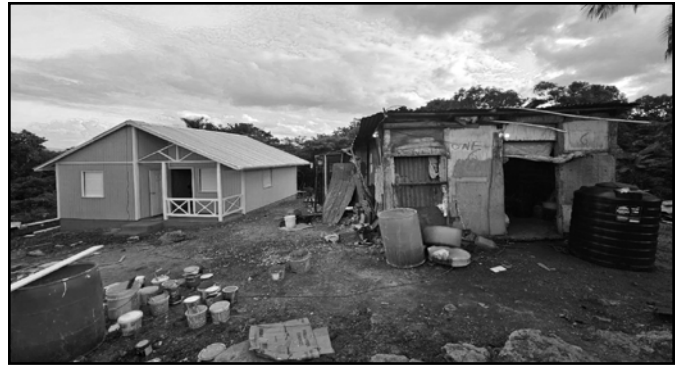
- We toured a group home for disabled children & adults and children living with HIV. We brought in some candy, stickers and bubbles.

Day 2:

- We built a house for a gal (Lorna) in one day. Lorna is 64 years old. She used to work on an orange farm in Linstead (True Juice) for many years, picking oranges for up to \$1200 JMD (approx. \$7.75 US) per day. Recently, she was moved to ancillary duties because she can no longer manage the rigors of orange picking. Lorna's current salary is \$40,000 JMD (approx. \$258 US) per month. She also gets occasional financial assistance from her daughter, Kemeisha. Lorna was living in a one-room shack measuring 12x12. The shack is made of ad hoc zinc and board with makeshift cloth lining the inside for insulation. The floor was rough cast with some remnants of linoleum that she used to cover it. There were no sanitary facilities in or outside the shack, no kitchen, and she bathes in the room. Lorna does not have any access to electricity and uses an oil lamp at

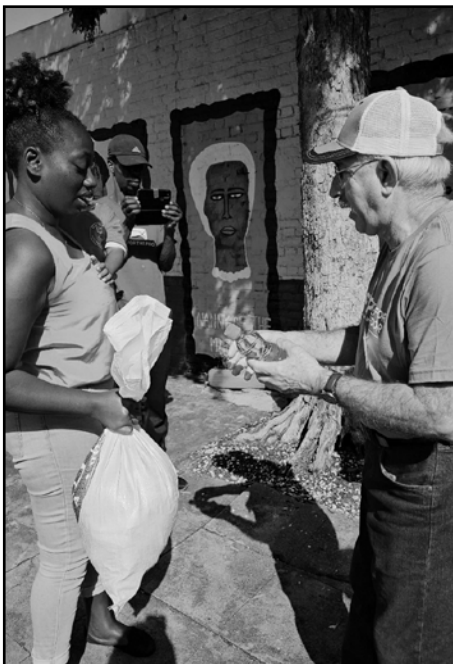


night. She has to charge her phone at a relative's home. Her home is devoid of furniture, except for a bed and a makeshift table that stores the few items she owns for cooking. The house we built (foundation and framing was already done by the time that we got there), was built right next door to Lorna's existing shack.



Day 3:

- We toured a basic school sponsored by Food For The Poor for ages 3-6. We were able to distribute 50 of the food bags that we prepared previously to the parents. We were able to interact with the kids, where we brought playdough, coloring books, crayons, bubbles, etc. It was so great to see their faces light up.
- We toured the Operation Restoration Christian School for students that are 12-18 years old. We were able to distribute another 50 of the food bags that we prepared previously to the parents. The students put on a show for us, which was fun.
- We also toured the AOH Home - The Nest: there were 13 children with ages ranging from 7 – 17. This was run by the Salvation Army. I would say this is one of the most heartbreaking stops, because these are kids that were pulled out of homes due to abuse or parents just dropped them off at the gate. We were also able to interact with the students with items that we brought with us, i.e, basketball, beads, matchbox cars, bubbles, coloring books, etc.



In our nightly dinner & reflections, someone asked what we should do with everything we saw during the week and how not to become so overwhelmed with the heartbreak and need. The one comment that stuck with me is when someone said 'never forget'. I know I won't forget. I look forward to my next mission trip whether it is international or domestic and whether it is for Food For The Poor or another organization. It seems there are so many out there looking for volunteers.

I will leave you with one final thought. There was a sign in one of the buildings that we were in. It was a verse from John 13:35 – 'Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.'

First Lutheran Church Council Minutes December 6, 2023

Members Present: Connie Troska, Melanie McGlynn, Jess Rogus, Sharon Kotts, Whitney Weisenberger, Betsy Jensen, Brian Hendricks, and Pat Heggen.

Also in attendance: Darlene Bates and Pastor Jeff.

President Connie called the meeting to order.

Brian gave devotions.

Secretary's report: Melanie presented November's Secretary's Report. A motion was made by Betsy to accept the November minutes with that correction, seconded by Pat. All in favor, motion carried.

Treasurer's report: Darlene presented November's offerings. Sharon made a motion to accept the treasurer's report. Melanie seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

Offerings for November

November 5th.....\$2,178.00
November 12th.....\$3,654.00
November 19th.....\$2,288.00
November 26th.....\$1,250.00
Vanco.....\$592.11

November Loose Change

\$151.00 - Marshall County Sharing Tree Project

Membership Changes: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Deacons:

- Brother Jeff will be gone on December 31st.

Trustees:

- We have a CD in Hallock that has come due. We will renew it for 3 years
- The buttons on the handicap door have not been working for a while. Thief River Door came to look at the door. We need to replace the box and button. It will cost \$870.00.
- Brother Jeff would like a piece of glass added to his office door. Thief River Door would be able to easily do this. It will cost \$429.00. Jess made a motion to repair the handicap door and install a window in Brother Jeff's door. Whitney seconded. All in favor, motion carried.
- There was a miscommunication with the gutter installers. They forgot to put us on their schedule. They will be here next Tuesday, December 12th.

Parish Education:

- Nothing

Stewardship:

- The Christmas Program offering will go to Peoples Church.

Pastor's Report:

- Brother Jeff met with the Worship Committee to get ready for the Advent & Christmas Season.
- Wednesday School & Confirmation have both been going well.
- Stephen-Argyle Central approached Brother Jeff about filling in for Renee while she is in Arizona for the months of February and March.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Brother Jeff's in-laws are interested in the possibility of renting the parsonage from May-October.
- Brian has installed a trial light at the back of the sanctuary to see if we can get better light in the church.
- We have been talking about what to do with our old clavinova that sits in the Fireside Room. There is a church in Shelly that had their clavinova die. Betsy made a motion was made to donate our old clavinova to a new congregation. Jess seconded it. All in favor, motion carried.
- We still need to look over the Mission Partner Covenant Agreement with Peoples Church. We will introduce this to the congregation at the annual meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

- We will continue to work on improving the Family Area in our Fireside Room. This way we can use this as a multipurpose room.
- Thank you to Steve & Michelle Weberg for using her Thrivent Action Team Plan to donate tables for the classrooms.
- We need to look at updating some of our lists: Servant Groups List, Altar Committee List, Usher List, and Acolyte List. Brother Jeff will take care of Acolyte List.
- The annual meeting will be on Sunday, January 28th. Boards & Committees should have reports to Darlene by January 10th. Church will be at 9:00. Brunch will be after church with the annual meeting to follow.

Brian made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Whitney. All in favor, motion carried.

Meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

The next meeting will be January 3rd at 7:45 PM.

Melanie McGlynn
Church Council Secretary

CHRISTMAS PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



BROTHER JEFF'S CONTACT INFORMATION AND OFFICE HOURS

Brother Jeff Brown | Email: flcpastor@wiktel.com | Phone 218-230-6583 | Office Hours: Sunday -Thursday (Friday off)

CHURCH OFFICE INFORMATION:

Secretary: Darlene Bates | Email: firstl@wiktel.com | Phone 218-478-3895 | Office Hours: Tues-Wed-Thurs 9am - 12 pm

THE FIRST PERSPECTIVE
 FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
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 STEPHEN, MN 56757

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
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 PERMIT NO. 1

JANUARY 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
All Sunday Services are celebrated in-person or on Facebook Live	1	2	3 7:45 - Council	4	5 Pastor's Day Off	6
7 9 am Worship with Communion 10 am - Fellowship	8 9:30 am Quilting	9	10 6 pm - Wed. School 6:30 - Confirmation	11	12 Pastor's Day Off	13
14 9 am - Worship 10 am - Fellowship	15	16	17 6 pm - Wed. School 6:30 - Confirmation	18	19 Pastor's Day Off	20
21 9 am Worship with Communion 10 am - Fellowship	22 9:30 am Quilting	23	24 6 pm - Wed. School 6:30 - Confirmation	25	26 Pastor's Day Off	27 Virtual Retreat: Seasons of the Soul
28 9 am - Worship 10 am - Fellowship	29	30	31 6 pm - Wed. School 6:30 - Confirmation			

Published monthly by the Congregation of First Lutheran Church, Stephen, MN
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