

Saint Mark's Quarterly Newsletter

January 26, 2003

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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH YEAR – IT REPEATEDLY TAKES US BACK TO THE BASICS



St. Peter is both concise and precise in his first Epistle, chapter 4:8, *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*

Love is the summary of God's Law. Catechism instruction classes have drilled this truth home for many of us. This is especially highlighted during the study of the Ten Commandments. The world in which we live would hardly disagree, even if they know nothing of the Ten Commandments. But . . . who gets to define what love is? What are its dimensions and parameters so that we can know and recognize it when such love is displayed?

- Some people feel that love is best defined by the individual's own experience and mood. If the experience or action seemed like a nice or kind thing to do, then it must be love. Nonetheless, this kind of measuring device for love is shallow and a matter of guessing.
- Some people feel that love is equal to tolerance. In their minds, everyone should be tolerant of all kinds of behavior – even a behavior that is abnormal or evil. In the end such a definition for love lacks any definition, because anything goes, without any moral absolutes of right or wrong.
- God has a definition for loving our neighbor as well as our God. His definition has not only stood the test of time, it alone remains flawless and perfect. Although it remains a high and seemingly unattainable standard, it still is the standard by which Jesus carried out his ministry. And by his perfect love we are forgiven for our lack of love. Read the words of Paul to the Romans, which spell out in no uncertain terms what our love must consist of.

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody" (Romans 12:9-17).

That truly is an exhaustive list of ways to show love to one another. This is an unnatural and impossible task. Everyone is born only with the desire to serve self. Even kind deeds are naturally done with the intent of getting some act of kindness in return. "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As we continue to take those scenic steps through the festival half of the church year, from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany and into Lent, let us remain mindful of what the message of Christ is all about. It shows us our daily deep-seeded need for a Savior from sin and from an eternal separation from God in hell. It shows us our ever-loving Savior, who was born to take our place, who lived to show his divine power and love in life by healing the sick and raising the dead, and then he died so that we would never die forever. "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Savor this truth, as we enjoy this rich focus upon our Savior's passion in these coming weeks of the church year. The hymn writer summed it up well, "What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul" (CW 120:1).

BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Women's Bible Study: "The Life of Christ"

The next scheduled class will be on February 14, at 10:00 a.m. Future times will be discussed at this gathering on the 14th. Note that this is a new series of lessons under the topic of "The Life of Christ". So come and get in on the first lesson. The location for this class is at the home of Linda Zeller. Street directions are posted on the church bulletin board. Kris Kuether will lead the study. Car-pooling is available. Call Kris Kuether if you have any questions, and also let her know if you plan to attend. Ladies are reminded to bring their Bibles. Children are still most welcome to come and play while class is in session. Please call Kris at 444-6334.

Sunday Morning Bible Class: "Burden Bearing"

Our topic of study, "Burden Bearing" is nicely divided into eight individual lessons. Therefore, if you miss a Sunday class, you will easily be able to jump into the next class. These classes are held each Sunday prior to worship, at 9:00 a.m. Sunday, February 3, will be our third lesson under this topic. That lesson is entitled: "Burdens Also Come to Believers' Lives". Join us and get involved, as we show our appreciations for what God has to say to us through his Holy Word. The Bible still is, and always is, God's conduit of communication. It is his means of giving grace and his way of fortifying faith within his people.

This article is from the newsletter of a WELS church in Neenah, WI "I Went To Bible Class and Lived To Tell About It!"

I was scared, intimidated really. What if I didn't know where to sit, what to say, what to do? Surely everyone else in the class was a close-knit group by now. I probably wouldn't fit in.

These are just some of the thoughts that raced through my mind as I considered attending my first Bible class. Sure, these thoughts were irrational (I realize that now), but I thought them nonetheless.

You may think I am a new member who is still unfamiliar with the names and faces at church. Oh no, I've been a member for twenty-nine years. Granted, for many of those years I was attending Christian grade school and high school, but what about the other eleven years? It took me that long to get the courage (although God would have provided it right from the start) to attend my first Bible class.

Well, I finally did it. I went. And do you know what I found? No one laughed, snickered, or whispered as I walked in. There were plenty of open chairs (that's what the stacks of folding chairs are for). Many people welcomed me with smiles. Many people told me how glad they were to see me. And best of all, I got to study and hear God's Word in a whole new way!

You may not believe this, but some of the bible study discussion stayed with me the entire week. It applied to my life. It helped me get through each day.

There may be others in the congregation who have the same fears and doubts that I had. Perhaps it will help them to read my story. Maybe it's not a fear of Bible class, but other church activities as well. (Don't get me started on my fear of potluck dinners!! Maybe next year.) In any case, I promise that God will see you through and you will be really glad you gave it a try.

Author Unknown

CHURCH and SCHOOL NEWS AND UPDATES

On January 16, 2003, the voters of St. Mark met for their quarterly meeting. The highlights of that meeting include the following:

- ❖ **St. Mark will be sending an additional \$1,000 to support our WELS church body in carrying out our joint world-wide ministry.**
- ❖ **The St. Mark Building Committee is making notebooks available in the church library for member input regarding the church's space needs and future renovation.**
- ❖ **It was noted that all the church property will be annexed into the city of Bemidji by the end of February.**
- ❖ **The Board of Elders and the Church Council will be evaluating the possibility of using the new version of the Lord's Prayer, since this is what the school children are being taught with their religion curriculum. Input from members will be appreciated.**
- ❖ **Tuition for non-member use of our school has been set and approved. It is \$1,400 for the first child, \$800 for the second, and \$700 for the third. Registration will remain at \$125 for all students.**
- ❖ **The Mission Planning Committee has presented a wide range of objectives for all church boards and committees. They are still working to develop a formal Mission Statement.**
- ❖ **Roger Kuehn was appointed to fill the one remaining vacant position on the Church Council.**

UPDATE FROM ST. MARK LADIES' GUILD Ladies! Ladies!

- The Ladies are planning a Women's Day on a Saturday in either February or March. We have plans for a craft project, devotions, lunch and skits. Right now the Ladies Guild is trying to find out which Saturday will work the best for you. Watch out for more details!
- CHRISTIAN GREETING CARDS ARE AVAILABLE!! We can order boxes of Christian (birthday or sympathy) cards from Oshkosh Church Supply. If you are interested, contact Donna Schroeder (751-4107) and Ella Wagner (835-4639).

LENTEN WORSHIP SCHEDULE BEGINS, ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

- Our six Wednesday Eve services will begin at 7:00 p.m.
- Our overall theme is "**His Mercy Endures Forever – The Savior in the Psalms**".
- March 5, Ash Wednesday, worship will include Holy Communion.
- Pastor Shawn Stafford and Pastor Kuether will exchange pulpits during those six weeks.
- Lenten meals are being planned. At this point and time the St. Mark Youth Group will be hosting a meal on March 5, Ash Wednesday, with: soup, sandwiches and bars. (The free will donations will benefit those attending the International Youth Rally.)

EXAMINATION & CONFIRMATION IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 27 at 10:15 a.m.

- The parents of the confirmation class will meet Sunday March 2, at 11:30 after worship.

NUMEROUS RETREATS AND RALLIES ARE BEING PROMOTED

1. **Camp Croix Campus Ministry Retreat (February 7-9), with registration forms available from Pastor Kuether**
2. **Winter Youth Retreat at the Fosston Civic Center (February 16 & 17), cost is \$10, registration forms are on back table in church.**
3. **WELS Marriage Getaway in Brainerd (February 28 – March 2), registration forms are in the yellow tri-fold, on the back table.**
4. **Christian Woman Today Retreat in Oconomowoc, WI (March 28-30), Registration forms are on the back table of church.**
5. **Spiritual Renewal Weekend For Women in Rochester, MN (April 4-6), Registration forms are on the back table of church.**

6. 2003 WELS International Youth Rally in Estes Park, CO (July 9-12), Registration forms must be submitted by February 15. Here is more information and details concerning this youth rally.

- It will equip our young people through the study of God's Word so that they value Christian friendships and are cautious of all that does not come from God.
- Eligible youth must be a Confirmed high school teenager.
- Total registration cost per youth is \$250, with \$100 due by the registration deadline.
- Transportation will be an additional cost.
- Chaperones will be needed, possibly two, according to the Rally guidelines. These costs are equal to those of each youth attending the Rally.
- The cost for our chaperones needs to also be covered by the youth group treasury. (Currently there should be enough to do this much. But that leaves nothing for transportation help with the youth.)
- **FUND RAISING WILL BE NEEDED!** (This may include car washes or lawn care or etc. to help with these costs.)

SCHOOL NEWS AND BENEFITS

February 21-23 will mark the second annual trek to New Ulm for the Small Grade School Basketball Tournament. It will also give our parents and youth the opportunity to see where their teachers at St. Mark School come from. We pray that it may also lead a youth to consider that college as a viable school for pursuing a future calling as a pastor or teacher.

Possible Ways to Benefit Your School

1. The "Take Charge of Education" program. By using a Target credit card you can designate St. Mark School as the school to receive dollars in return. The school will receive 1% of any your purchases made at Target on that card and also ½ % of any purchases made outside of Target using that same card.
2. The "Give 'Em Five" program. This is through Kemps milk products. The gallon or ½ gallon milk jug caps are worth 5 cents each. Just give these caps to our Principal, Mr. Nathan Bitter.
3. Use the "School Spirit Card" at K-mart. You can stop at the courtesy desk of K-mart to pick up this card. You just show this card when you checking out at the register. Then the school receives ¼% of your total purchase.
4. The "We Care" sticker program. When you check out at the register at Marketplace Foods, you can ask for the "We Care" sticker. This will be place on your receipt. Then when that receipt is turned in here at school, our school gets back 1% of that total purchase.
5. The "Box top for Education" program. On certain General Mills Products you will see a Box top that can be turned in here at the school. The school receives 10 cents for each one.
6. The Campbell Soup Label program. Turn in these soup labels, and they will count for points in purchasing school items.

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP SCHEDULE [April 13 –20]

Palm Sunday, April 13, 10:15 a.m., Worship with children singing

Worship will also be offered on Monday, April 14 at 7:30 p.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 17, 7:00 p.m., Worship with Holy Communion offered.

Good Friday, April 18, 7:00 p.m., Worship as we "Survey The Wondrous Cross"

Easter Sunday, April 20, 7:00 a.m., Sun Rise Worship and Praise

10:15 a.m., Easter Worship with Holy Communion offered

(St. Mark Youth Group will serve breakfast from 8:15 until 9:45 a.m.)

NO MONDAY EVENING WORSHIP WILL BE OFFERED on April 21!!!!

RECENT NEWS AND INFORMATION ABOUT OUR SYNOD'S CHALLENGES AND LIKELY CUTBACKS

(This is a message sent out after the meeting of the Synodical Council earlier this month.)

January 20, 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have just gone through some hard and distressing weeks in our synod. Not all the news has been good, but God's promises and love have remained unchanged.

You may know that the Conference of Presidents and Synodical Council met together Jan. 10-12, 2003, to assess the present situation and its implications for the future. At that meeting we were able to consider the many comments we've received from God's people in WELS, taking them to heart and speaking them to each other during our discussions. I'm sending this letter out to all of you to report on that meeting.

Since our meeting, we have received some good financial news. As of Jan. 14, special offerings sent directly to the synod total \$449,000. Nearly half a million dollars, what a blessing! Secondly, Congregational Mission Offerings for the first half of the 2002-03 fiscal year are well on the way to meeting the revenue projection for this year.

There still is work to do. The synod's revenue is made up of several components, nearly all of which were lower for the past year. Interest income, proceeds from bequests, as well as gifts from the Schwan Foundation were down, some of them significantly.

Briefly stated that means that our present situation is as follows:

- **\$4.3 million is the shortfall for the 2002-03 fiscal year because of the above,**
- **\$3.0 million in cuts reduced the shortfall to \$1.3 million, and**
- **\$1.3 million in additional revenue is still needed for the balance of the 2002-03 fiscal year.**

Consequently, the joint meeting of the Conference of Presidents (COP) and Synodical Council (SC) concluded that budget reductions were necessary. All areas of ministry worked to reduce their budgets by 9% for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2003. For fiscal year 2003-2004, they are seeking to budget at 80-85% of last year's previously adopted budget.

The joint meeting of the SC and COP arrived at the following points by consensus:

- The love of Christ compels us to proclaim the gospel so that the lost may be saved and the saved may be strengthened.
- Mindful that the workers we train must be equipped to meet the outreach and nurture needs of our congregations throughout the world today, maintaining a biblically sound and academically excellent worker training system is essential to our work as a synod.
- The SC should seek to stabilize the Board for Ministerial Education budget by providing additional dollars (\$1.2 million was suggested with the expectation of a significant reduction in the number of personnel cuts in ministerial education.)

- The COP would work to find alternate ways of using the growing number of trained workers who may not receive regular divine calls.
- The SC will seek to minimize the number of workers withdrawn from world mission fields so that the process of indigenization (creating an independent national church) is not harmed. (Indigenization plans call for withdrawing from world mission fields as a strong, national church emerges.)
- Ongoing stewardship training in our congregations is very important.
- We need to practice good stewardship of the offerings of God's people by conforming our synod's ministry program to the available financial resources.
- We will implement the new compensation program, recognizing that it will need to be phased in.
- The Special Support budget will be provided with additional funds (\$300,000 was suggested) to help called workers in transition.
- We appreciate the work and cooperation of the administrators and the boards they serve.

I will be sending out additional communications about the budgetary process, and the financial blessings and challenges that must be considered as that work takes place. I will also communicate with you again after the Synodical Council meets at the beginning of March. At that meeting the SC will prepare and propose to the synod convention a budget that is in keeping with our income. Please also check the [WELS Web site](#) for interim updates and additional information.

We believe the Lord will bring good out of this, because he has promised "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). In the meantime, it's important that we reflect on the rich blessings God has given us in the past; on how we have used those blessings; and on how we will use the gifts he gives to us in the future. It's also important that we earnestly encourage each other in the practice of Christian stewardship of finances. Above all we need to remain committed to the task the Lord has given us—proclaiming his saving gospel in all the world—trusting that God will both bless its proclamation and provide us with the resources necessary for this work.

Serving the Lord with you

President Karl Gurgel
On behalf of the Conference of Presidents

God's people respond to WELS budget news

As of Jan. 21, 2003, \$612,601 in special offerings has been given to WELS to help with the revenue shortage. Thanks be to God. If you wish to make a special donation to help with the budget deficit, you can do the following:

- You may mail it directly to the synod. Make the check out to "WELS" and mail it to WELS, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. If you indicate in the memo line that it is a special gift to relieve the budget shortfall, it will go into a special holding fund designated "Response" and will be applied to where it is most needed. If you do not designate your gift for budget relief, it will go into the current budget.

MEMBERS OF ST. MARK, please note that there are addressed envelopes on the back table of our church, for anyone to use, if he or she is led to make an additional contribution to help decrease our Synod's deficit. The Schwan Foundation will also match these additional gifts that are above and beyond our church subscription.