

THE SAINT MARK'S NEWSLETTER

MAY 2, 2004

Past issues are linked to the Saint Mark's website: www.stmarksbemidji.org

O GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD!

Read of how the Old Testament believers celebrated their freedom from slavery and captivity. "When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us and we are filled with joy. . . . Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy." (Psalm 126:1-3,4)

Saying "Thank you" should be genuine and flow from the heart. It would be living a lie to say such words and to never mean them. In much the same way our living "thank-you" to God will not be forced, but freely forthcoming. Such a "thank-you" is consistent with our worship and praise of our Creator-and-Savior-God. So that we do not dampen that Spirit-created desire to praise our Gracious Lord, we can make full use of God's Word in these summer months that lie ahead. Some people may equate summer with vacation time and get-away time. Such physical rest is good and often times necessary. But God the Holy Spirit does not take a vacation from using the means of grace. On the opposite side of things, Satan and our sinful flesh do not take vacations from seeking to take us down a path of spiritual destruction.

The means of grace are found wherever the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is proclaimed and put into practice. The sins of apathy and indifference towards God's work and mission can be and only will be forgiven and forgotten by God through Christ. How could we possibly stiff-arm this gift and those numerous opportunities to say "thank-you"? Why would your minister touch upon such indifference and apathy in connection with the upcoming summer? Because your pastor also has a sinful and selfish flesh, and he knows how it works to separate us from the tasks at hand. On the following page (and also included as a link to our church website) you will find the listing and times of our like-minded churches throughout northern Minnesota (possible vacation spots).

In that same vein recall that your congregation's expenses and operation costs likewise do not take a vacation. The principles of Christian stewardship tell us always to give in response to how God has blessed us. As our monetary blessings increase so will our offerings. Perhaps you may choose other areas of ministry within our WELS, not just St. Mark's, to be the recipients of such gifts. In this way, we show our thanks and gratitude to our loving God who has loaned out such treasures to us in the first place.

Such opportunities to say "thank-you" are real. They are tangible. They also make a difference in how the saving message of the Gospel can reach more and more people. Consider the full and final joy that awaits us in God's perfect heaven. Regarding that eternal joy in heaven, John Newton wrote in his well-known hymn "Amazing Grace". "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun." (CW #379, stanza 4)

YOUR MISSION STATEMENT OF YOUR CONGREGATION:

Because Jesus directs us, "Go and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19), our mission at St. Mark's is to nurture believers with the Word and Sacraments, preparing them for a life of service to the Triune God; and to spread the good news of Jesus and his forgiveness to our community and beyond.

News from the WELS __ May 2004

North American Outreach

At last summer's WELS convention, representatives from across our synod resolved to make outreach in North America a ministry emphasis. The theme for the four-year (2003-07) North American outreach emphasis is Proclaim Peace Through Jesus.

The goal of *Proclaim Peace Through Jesus* is that every individual Christian in WELS and every congregation in WELS will proactively and directly tell more people about Jesus.

This isn't some new church ministry effort or synodical program. It is core to the very mission of the Church. Proclaiming peace through Jesus breaks the bonds that sin, death, hell, and Satan have on so many people living in our neighborhoods and communities. Proclaiming peace is what Jesus commissioned his Church to do.

During the last several months WELS leaders have been diligently planning avenues and approaches for making this an emphasis in the lives of every one of our members and congregations.

At district conventions next month delegates will hear more about plans to make outreach in North America the priority it deserves. Visits to every congregation are planned for this fall and early winter to encourage one another to proclaim peace through Jesus!

Ministry for Women

A new committee, WELS Women's Ministry, is formulating ways to encourage WELS women to develop and use their God-given gifts and abilities to the glory of God and for the building of his kingdom. Their action plans include a national women's leadership conference in 2007, leadership training for women's roles in ministry, a magazine for women, and especially to encourage young girls to consider ways in which they can serve their Lord.

Apache Christian Training School

At the present time the Apache Christian Training School is training 27 students for leadership and ministry. As recently as five years ago there were no Apache called workers on the field; now there are six, with an additional student working part-time as a volunteer pastoral assistant and another completing his pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Russia Outreach

Mission work continues in Siberia through four congregations and several preaching stations. Last summer the first two national pastors were ordained in the Russian Lutheran Church and were called to serve the congregations in Novosibirsk and Iskitim. The training of more Russian workers continues to be a top priority. Our missionary families have had another opportunity to share the Word in a unique way. Two of the schools attended by the missionaries' children have invited the church to teach Bible stories to their children's classes periodically. In addition to bringing the Word to children, our missionaries continue to discover mission prospects through English classes and a radio broadcast in the Novosibirsk area. Work continues in the translating and publishing of Bible study and confessional materials in Russian.

God's amazing grace in Africa

Throughout this past year WELS members remembered the thousands of people whom the Lord has brought to faith through the power of his Spirit in Africa. Today, 50 years of God's *Chikondi Chodabwitsa* (Amazing Grace) shows that there are over 100 congregations and preaching stations with a baptized membership of over 10,000 souls. There have been many blessings, but there is still work to be done. The work of preaching and teaching continues. God's gift of free and full salvation is the message.

WELS Connection video

A year from now, May 2005, WELS Connection videos will be produced in DVD format only. The reason for the change is that DVD provides a better quality production as well as more space to include both caption and non-caption materials. We are making this announcement now so that congregations can budget for the purchase of a DVD player by 2005.

Mission Partners Update

Mission Partners is an on-going way to become personally involved in one of over 60 different mission and ministry projects around the world. These mission relationships are already being visibly blessed by our Lord.

Christ Lutheran in Eagle River, Wisconsin, tells us, "We see a lot of great things for the Lord's work coming from all this (Mission Partners) and are very excited here at Christ!" They are exploring various ways in which they can "make the whole idea of mission support a more meaningful and personal experience." Thank the Lord for congregations such as Christ Lutheran and for our many other donors! Their enthusiasm and encouragement is contagious!

As of March 31, 2004 we have received Mission Partner gifts of \$1,381,867. (This number does not include the many on-going commitments we continually receive.)

Interested in finding out more? Request a Mission Partners Information Packet by contacting us at 800-827-5482 or email loryy@sab.wels.net. Online you'll find information on nearly all of the projects at <http://www.wels.net/mpg> (Click on Mission Partners from the list on the right side of the screen.) *On this site you'll also notice how easy it is to make a donation by credit card.* Take a look!

WHAT ARE MISSION PARTNERS?

"Mission Partners" is the new opportunity to support mission work approved by last year's WELS convention. It allows individuals, congregations, or groups of members a chance to provide meaningful, focused support for a specific WELS "mission" (a home or world mission station, a ministerial education student or professor, or other administration projects). Donors are able to know specifically how their gifts are being used, and have the option of receiving firsthand reports of triumph and struggles encountered in spreading God's Word. To become a mission partner, contact the CCFS office directly at 1-800-827-5482. You will learn which projects are available so that you (your congregation, your school, your group) can choose the specific project you want to support. Once your partnership is arranged, you can send information about yourself to your mission partner, and he or she will send information to you. As you develop a relationship as mission partners, you can share ministry ideas and prayers for one another's mission work.

The following is a message circulated at the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, on
April 19-21, 2004

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

A major league ball player, too valuable to the team to be allowed to leave and play elsewhere, asks for and receives a multi-year, multi-million dollar contract. His new salary works out to more than fourteen million dollars a year. An embarrassment of riches? It certainly seems so!

According to the Environmental Protection Agency the average American produces a whopping 1500 pounds of trash a year. That's four pounds a day for every man, woman, and child. By the time a baby in this country reaches six months of age, he or she has already contributed as much solid landfill waste as a person outside of the US does in a lifetime. An embarrassment of riches? We may be far from making the "really big bucks," but as citizens of this nation we are materially blessed.

Sins forgiven. Heaven open. The pardoning verdict of a gracious God echoing in our ears. How can we hide all that we have received in Christ? As believers in Jesus we are embarrassingly rich. And doesn't it glitter all the more in the brilliance of Easter's glorious Son-shine?

Let's flaunt our incredible wealth – not by spending it on our selves in imitation of the "super-rich," but by investing who we are and what we have in the spread of the gospel. More paupers need to be made rich. They need to hear of the Savior whose priceless blood bought them, so that in those tailor-make robes of righteousness (the same ones we wear) they too may praise for all eternity the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the God who makes sinners embarrassingly rich!

YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP NEWS REPORTED AT THE PASTORAL CONFERENCE

International Youth Rally The 2005 rally will take place July 6-9 in Orlando, FL. Participants will stay at the Coronado Springs Hotel, one of the Disney World properties. Participant costs will not exceed \$275.00 We will accommodate 3000, a 500 person increase over the last rally. **The theme is "Wanna See?"** based on 2 Corinthians 4:18. Three sub-themes will also be emphasized: **1) How do others see us? 2) How do we see ourselves? 3) How does God see us?** Rally worship and presentations will emphasize outreach, multi-culturalism, and living above the world. For the first time, the rally will seek to invite and accommodate special needs teens across a wider range of disability. A very exciting development has been the addition of three teens to the International Youth Rally Planning Committee, one of whom is Crysta Miller of Rochester, MN.

National Youth Ministry Conference The first WELS National Youth Ministry Conference will take place September 17-19, 2004, at the Holiday Inn Select – Naperville, IL (25 miles west of Chicago, IL). **The conference theme is, "Building from the Ground Up"** and is for WELS called and lay ministers who are engaged in ministry to youth from birth through the final year of high school, and to their parents.

CYD (Commission on Youth Discipleship) Websites The CYD website www.wels.net/youthdiscipleship currently has 34 different resources or links to resources on ministry and 20 different downloadable Bible studies. Content continues to be added to the **LivingBold** website as well. As of last month, **LivingBold** was receiving 13,000 hits a month. A special website for the 2005 International Youth Rally has been established.

CHURCH NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following information has been submitted by members of St. Mark's, and is in addition to the weekly bulletin announcements.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

- **SPECIAL LENTEN OFFERING WAS GATHERED.** The moneys given by the Sunday school children, collected during the Palm Sunday service totaled \$55.57. This amount was designated for the WELS outreach efforts in the nation of India.
- **OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL WRAPUP AND POTLUCK IS MAY 23rd.** After worship on that Sunday (May 23rd), all are welcome to stay afterwards for food and fellowship. Added to this activity will be the cake and ice cream, provided by our church's Thrivent group. This will be done in recognition of our 2004 Confirmation Class. (For the potluck, we are asking that our members bring a main dish to pass along with a salad or desert to share.)
- **SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT AND TEACHERS ARE NEEDED FOR FALL, 2004.** Currently, a Superintendent is needed. This person would work with Pastor Kuether and Mr. Bitter in the areas of ordering teaching materials, planning Sunday school teacher meetings, and helping to find substitute teachers when needed. We thank Donna Schroeder for her dedicated work and faithful service in this area of ministry for these past years. Anyone also interested in helping with the teaching of Jesus' Lambs, is also asked to volunteer and speak with Pastor Kuether. We can always use substitute teachers. But we are especially in need of another Preschool teacher for Sunday school, next fall.

WEDDING SHOWERS SPONSORED BY THE ST. MARK'S LADIES' GUILD

- On May 16th at 1:00 p.m., the ladies of St. Mark's are invited to attend the gift shower for Rebecca Barckholtz and Nathan Jewett. This engaged couple will be married early in this coming summer.
- On May 23rd at 1:30 p.m., the ladies of St. Mark's are invited to attend the combined gift shower for Jennifer Carlson and Alex Peterson, and also for Sandra Hughes and Andy Peterson. Jennifer and Alex will be married on May 3rd, and Sandra and Andy will be married this summer.

A CHANGED ADDRESS TO ADD TO YOUR CHURCH DIRECTORY

- Brenda Wagner recently moved into an apartment in Blackduck. Her phone number has not changed, but only her address. Here is the full listing:

Brenda Wagner
181 Northern Ave. NW
Apt. 101
Blackduck, MN 56630
218-835-4639

SCHOOL NEWS FROM THE LAST QUARTER

- The past three months was highlighted by the school's overnight field trip. A well written article is included on the next page.

The Big Trip

Day 1

On April 1 at 8:15 we left Bemidji to go to New Ulm. On the way we stopped at Camp Ripley for a self-guided tour about the wars that our country has been in, along with military life in general. After we departed Camp Ripley we made our way to the Stearns County Historical Museum in St. Cloud. We left the museum ready to get to the farm. When we arrived we walked around the barnyard and were able to hold two-week old puppies. Later in the day, we left the farm and headed to MLC (Martin Luther College) where we had a delicious meal, a tour of the campus, and went to chapel. Being done with that, we headed back to the farm and played games. Being tired but happy, the girls headed for the original farmhouse to sleep while the boys stayed in the other house.

Day 2

Although the boys didn't wake up, the girls woke up at 5:45 in the morning for milking time! They also got to see the puppies and calves for the last time. After packing up and saying good-bye we were off to MLC for breakfast. After eating another delicious meal we were excited to see the performance of the play *The Ransom of Red Chief*. When the play was done we left MLC and were ready for the long drive back. When the fun was over we arrived in Bemidji and came home with happy memories.

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Written By: Katrina Schnackenberg (8th grade)
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Note: Pictures from the trip are posted in the church entrance near the coatroom.