

Lenten Devotion booklets with daily devotions from Ash Wednesday through Easter will be available. You may download a copy [HERE](#).

Lenten suppers will take place at **5:30 PM** on each of the Wednesday's, assuming that enough people sign up to host. If you're interested in **helping to host**, contact Diana in the church office.



By The Way...

Just a reminder that we do have **individually-packaged gluten-free communion wafers** available when we celebrate Holy Communion.

We also have **non-alcoholic wine** available. The individual cups containing this are in the center of the tray and are lighter in color.

There are **weekly WELS radio worship services** each Sunday at **8:00 AM** on **WKTY, 580-AM**.

Let Me Tell You What I'll Be Doing In Africa

I'll be going to Zambia on my own for a week and a half, leaving on January 31 and returning on February 10. It's an opportunity for me to sit down and talk with all of our mission families in their own homes – something I think is really important and which they truly appreciate.

But more than that, there are two really big issues to discuss.

- 1) During my time in Africa – now more than twenty years ago – I saw some things in our pastor training program that I felt needed to be corrected. It's taken a couple of decades, but now everyone – both the missionaries on the field and the WELS Board for World Missions – has come to the same conclusion. So, that issue is finally going to be discussed. And it's more important than ever because today the WELS One Africa Team is working with more national church bodies than ever.
- 2) Just as it is difficult for congregations to find new pastors, it has become very difficult for the One Africa Team to find men who are willing to accept calls to work in Africa. Consequently we are presently looking for three people to serve in Africa. At the upcoming meeting we'll begin to think outside the traditional box for finding people to serve in Africa.

God Bless,

Pastor Mark



First Things – February 2024

What Are You Giving Up For Lent?

The six-week Lenten season will begin on Ash Wednesday, February 14.

The Christian church has been observing a time of *fasting* before the celebration of Christ's resurrection on Easter for over 1,600 years. When we hear the term "fasting," we usually think of going without food. But that's not exactly what the early Christians did. Rather they gave up meat and alcohol before Easter. Later Christians gave up other things during the season of Lent, such as chocolate and cigarettes. I know some Christians today who give up Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter ("X") for Lent.

But the fasting – the giving up of one thing or another – was never the big thing in Lent. The purpose of Lent was to reflect and to repent. We hear the word "repent" and we usually think of it as "being sorry" for something we've done. And it is that. But repentance is so much more.

True repentance is something GOD DOES TO US.

It's really two things. Through the words of Holy Scripture he reminds us that he demands perfection of us – and that we have fallen woefully short of that, and thus deserve the consequences. The Christian Church has traditionally called this work of God "crushing" or "contrition."

But after the Lord our God has crushed us, the words of Holy Scripture then tell us that he loves us, tells us what his Son Jesus Christ has done for us – how he lived and died – not just to take away our sins, but also to make us holy and righteous in God's sight. And those words of Holy Scripture cause us to believe – to have "faith" – to rejoice, to have peace in our hearts, the peace that passes all understanding.

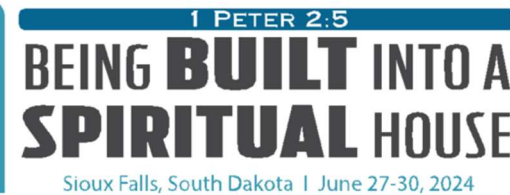
During the season of Lent we get the opportunity to have an extra big helping of Holy Scripture in our midweek services. And as we sing those Lenten hymns, chant those Psalms of Repentance, and we hear once again the story of Jesus' suffering and death; we are reminded of what we've done – that it caused Christ's suffering and death. But we're also reminded of what God has done – that in love he sent his Son and actually punished him rather than punishing us.

Consider Attending...

The **WELS Taste of Missions** event will take place at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in **Mequon, Wisconsin** on **June 15**. More information is available [HERE](#). Sue and I will be there.



The **Lutheran Women's Missionary Society Convention** – year in and year out the largest gathering of WELS Lutherans – will take place in **Sioux Falls, South Dakota, June 27-30**. Sue has been invited to participate in a panel discussion of present and former missionary wives at the convention. More information is available [HERE](#).



The **WELS International Youth Rally** will take place at **Colorado State University, June 24-28**. Registration runs from March 6-May 28. More information is available [HERE](#).



WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts will take place **July 30-August 2, 2024** at Carthage College in **Kenosha, Wisconsin**. More information is available [HERE](#).



National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts 2024

The 2024 **WELS Women's Ministry Conference** will take place in **Pewaukee, Wisconsin July 28-30**. More information is available [HERE](#).



WELS & Minnesota District Update

WELS pastors from the Red Wing Conference, which includes First Lutheran, met at Zion in Hokah on Tuesday, January 23.

Pastor Dennis Klatt passed on the sad news about the vacancy situation in the district and synod:

146 congregations in the synod are calling for a pastor
26 of those are in the Minnesota District

There are 180 teacher vacancies in the synod.
16 of those are in the Minnesota District

WELS will be celebrating the 175th anniversary of its founding next year, in 2025.

New model constitutions will be available soon for congregations – especially smaller congregations – to consider.

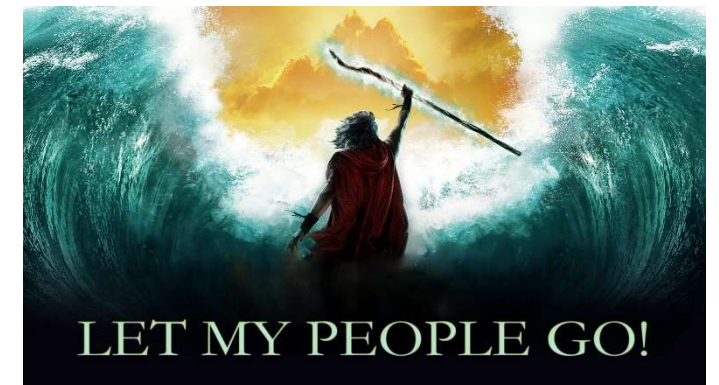
The WELS Conference of Presidents has prepared a Critical Theory Pastoral Brief which will be discussed at district conventions in June (the MN district convention is June 18 and 19 at Martin Luther College).

And the WELS Board for World Missions last week announced that two men have been called to begin mission work in Senegal in West Africa, and two members of the Asia One Team will be redeployed to do outreach work in Australia.

Lent Begins

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday**, February 14. Our Lenten worship services will begin at 6:30 PM. **Pastors Krueger, Schultz, Unnasch, and Wolff** will be preaching here again while I visit their congregations in Eitzen, Caledonia, and Hokah.

The texts for Lent and Holy Week will come from the book of Exodus, and are entitled *Let My People Go*. Here's an outline of what we'll be hearing:



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| <i>Ash Wednesday</i> | “Big Things with Small Stuff” | (Exodus 2:1–10) |
| <i>Lent One</i> | “How God Changes Us” | (Exodus 3:1–14) |
| <i>Lent Two</i> | “Stop Trying and Start Trusting” | (Exodus 14:1–29) |
| <i>Lent Three</i> | “Strike the Rock!” | (Exodus 17:1–7) |
| <i>Lent Four</i> | “Mine!” | (Exodus 20:1–17) |
| <i>Lent Five</i> | “Digging Ourselves into a Hole” | (Exodus 32:1–14) |
| <i>Palm Sunday</i> | “A New Beginning!” | (Exodus 34:1–8) |
| <i>Maundy Thursday</i> | “Access!” | (Exodus 24:1–11) |
| <i>Good Friday</i> | “Agnus Dei” | (Exodus 12:1–13) |
| <i>Easter</i> | “Against all Odds!” | (Exodus 15:1–18) |