

DECEMBER 2023 / JANUARY 2024

# Faith Family News

PASTOR'S CORNER

By Pastor Bruce

*Yet, O Lord, you are our parent; we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:7*

We are entering a new church year. Advent is the first season, and it is a mixed season. It is one that is somewhat penitential, but hopeful at the same time. Advent is our time to prepare for Christmas as well as the second coming of Christ. Some churches have even elongated the season past the four Sundays we normally celebrate.

It is the season where we talk about waiting and being prepared. The first Sunday in Advent we hear about the second coming of Christ. Advent two and three talk about John the Baptist. Advent three in our advent wreath has a pink candle which symbolizes rejoicing. Advent four this year is talking about Mary's visit from the angel Gabriel.

Waiting and preparing takes planning and patience. There often seems to be more waiting in Advent when we are out in the community getting prepared for Christmas. Part of waiting is learning how to relax in the midst of it. Even during preparations, we often find things changing, due to variables.

Isaiah reminded the people who had returned from exile that it would take time and patience to rebuild the temple and their homes. God had brought them back home and what they saw was probably very depressing. Isaiah was suggesting that they continue to put their trust in God. He was suggesting that they were called to be clay and that God was the potter and would bring about new life for them.

To be the clay means to be flexible, to be vulnerable. So often we decide how something is going to go and when it doesn't go that way, we become angry and disappointed. Sometimes we have not considered all of the variables and we set ourselves up for this to happen.

As we move through this time of transition, I suggest that we not focus on how things are going to go. God has a plan for Faith, but it takes time for it to unfold. Part of being ready for it is to allow the Holy Spirit to work us through it. Since we are the clay, individually and corporately, we are called to be flexible and vulnerable.

We are called to listen and ponder. This is what waiting and preparing are all about. This is what it means to be the clay and allow God to mold us into the people that God wants us to be. When we start a process, we cannot fully know what the end the product will be.

During this Advent season, we are challenged to wait and prepare. We are challenged to relax into this in order to hear and see God in Jesus Christ at work. This is when we will experience the hope of new life.



# DECEMBER 24

## Advent IV

### 10:00 am:

This year, we will be doing Advent Lessons and Carols based on the “O Antiphons” or “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”. The O Antiphons are a set of medieval refrains originally used before and after the singing of the Magnificat. They were in use already in the eighth century. Each invokes the Messiah under a different title derived from the Old Testament. This title is then amplified and followed by an appeal to “come” and save us in a particular way.

Around the twelfth century, they were collected into a Latin verse hymn, which was later translated by John Mason Neale, finally becoming the beloved Advent hymn “O come, O come, Emmanuel” (ELW 257, LBW 34). (The version in Evangelical Lutheran Worship restores two original stanzas that were omitted in the LBW version.) These antiphons form the structure of this service.

They are pointed for chanting, but they may be spoken. The corresponding stanza of “O come, O come, Emmanuel” is sung after each antiphon.

### 4:00 pm

There will be a Children’s Sermon, Carols, Communion and Candle Lighting. There will be special music by Cody and Andy Boyan. Prelude Music will begin at 3:45 pm.

### 8:00 pm

There will be Brass, Carols, Chancel Choir, Communion and Candle Lighting. Prelude Music will begin at 7:45 pm.

### December 31 - 10:00 am

This will be a service of Lessons and Carols with Communion. We will also be doing stories and the background of the Carols.

# *The Advent Wreath*

One of the best-known customs for the season is the Advent wreath. The wreath and winter candle-lighting amid growing darkness strengthen some of the Advent images found in the Bible. The unbroken circle of greens is an image of everlasting life, a victory wreath, the crown of Christ, or the wheel of time itself. Christians use the wreath as a sign that Christ reaches into our time to lead us to the light of everlasting life. The four candles mark the progress of the four weeks of Advent and the growth of light. Sometimes the wreath is embellished with natural dried flowers or fruit. Its evergreen branches lead the household and the congregation to the evergreen Christmas tree. In many homes, the family gathers for prayers around the wreath.

## **Financial Update**

Income	\$ 254,784
Expenses	<u>\$ 277,303</u>
Net Income (Loss)	<b>\$ (22,519)</b>

As we enter December, our income continues to fall short of our expenses by **over \$20,000**. Please prayerfully consider if you are able to make a donation this month to help us end the year on a positive note and start 2024 with a clean slate.

Thank You!

# Shared Pregnancy Giving Tree

The tree is up and in the Narthex. Two options for giving this year!

- #1 - choose a tag, purchase the gift, and place it back under the tree (unwrapped). Please return the tags!
- #2 - A new option this year is for a monetary contribution - the money will be pooled to purchase a larger gift on their “wish list”. Contribute using Vanco via Caring Committee or cash/check in envelope marked to Caring Committee. On our bulletin board is more information about the non-profit and their mission. We will be collecting items and money until January 15th.

Thank you for your support!

*The Caring Committee*

# ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting will take place on Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> following Worship Service. A zoom option will be made available for those who cannot attend in person.

## Confirmation Schedule JANUARY 2024

**Sunday, January 7 – 11:30 am – 1:30 pm – Old Testament**

**Sunday, January 21 – 11:30 am - 1:30 pm - Old Testament**

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**The Youth Retreat is scheduled for March 8 – 10 at Living Waters Ministry in New Era, MI**

- This will be for all youth – 6<sup>th</sup> grade and older.
- We will leave Friday after school and return Sunday afternoon.
- More details to follow in January.

# REDISCOVER ADVENT FOR A HOLY CHRISTMAS

In accordance with Jesus' promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.

**-2 Peter 3:13-**

With fighting in Israel and Ukraine, political gridlock in the U.S., worsening climate change around the world, and other deep problems, 2023 is ending on a sad note for humanity.

That's a good reason to embrace Advent this year. Lost amid the nonstop commercialism of Christmas, Advent is the church's traditional season of careful preparation and waiting – two things our instant, “have-it-now” culture abhors.

If we don't prepare our hearts and minds for the miracle of Jesus – Emmanuel, God with us – how will Christmas be anything more than just another secular shopping season? How can we expect the arrival of Christ to give us strength, courage, insight and wisdom to deal with these troubled times?

Embracing Advent helps us to be good stewards of the Christmas season by reminding us that it's not about Santa Clause or shopping or parties, but by the miracle of God arriving in human form to save us from ourselves.

Here are some ways to embrace Advent:

- Find – and follow – an Advent devotional.
- Increase your disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, and worship.
- As much as possible, hold off celebrating Christmas until December 25.
- Remember we need Christ to live fully as God intended.

Advent prepares us to receive Jesus with a full and joyful heart, to live in the abundance Jesus promises.

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[Click here](#) for a complete and up-to-date bio for Pastor Blezard.



## Pledge Cards and Online Giving

Thanks to all who have returned their **Pledge cards** for next year. Happy to receive more from those who have not responded yet. They are available on the table in the Narthex.

**In regard to Online Giving.** Many people already know how to adjust their online giving in Vanco/Vanco Mobile. If you want help in changing the amount of your recurring online giving (perhaps in light of pledge adjustments), feel free to contact Jon Harrison at [jon.harrison@comcast.net](mailto:jon.harrison@comcast.net) or call 517 349 4049, or catch him at church for assistance

Offerings can be made via the following methods:

- Contributions can be placed in the offering plate during worship services. Contributions can also be mailed to the church at 4515 Dobie Road, Okemos, MI 48864 or directly to our financial secretary, Jon Harrison, 3570 Chippendale, Okemos, MI 48864.
- Sign-up for Vanco Online (previously called Simply Giving) to make regularly scheduled electronic contributions. [Click here](#) to sign up. You can also complete the [Simply Giving form](#) and give to the financial secretary.

Use the Vanco Mobile app on your phone or mobile device. [Vanco Mobile Instructions](#). If you have questions regarding giving options, please contact Jon Harrison at [jon.harrison@comcast.net](mailto:jon.harrison@comcast.net).

Supporting God's work at the church, in the community, and beyond is always appreciated.

# YOUTH NEWS

## December 3rd Activity

### Confirmation and Youth (Grades 6 and up)

Join us for our “Special **Mystery Lunch**” and **Ugly Sweater Contest**. We will be putting together Care Packages for the college freshman to help get them through finals. Next, we will have holiday games until 1:15 pm, then we will go to Brookdale Meridian for volunteer fun with the residents. We plan to play Christmas music, and then play a Christmas game with them.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL (SS)

I am shortening the opening of Sunday School to 10 minutes, so we have a little more time in the classroom. Please come to the large SS room at 9:50 to pick up your child. The kids will be there, as they will need to return their coin holders and get a prize (if they have earned one).

Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>: We will talk about Advent and Christmas.

Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>: Crafts in the large SS room. We will also get the kids fitted for their pageant costumes. **The pageant will be during church on the 17th. Please let me know if your child will be gone on the 17th.**

**We will then have a break from Sunday School until January 7th.**

Jan. 7<sup>th</sup>: Regular Sunday school class. We will talk about John the Baptist.

## GIFT A GOAT PROGRAM

The kids have decided to use their offering money to buy a goat to give to a needy family. This is handled through the ELCA Good Gifts program.



You can help, too! As in the past, there will be a small tree in the Narthex that anyone can use to make a donation to this program. Simply take an ornament, write your name on the back, and place your donation in the offering basket. Please make a note that the purpose is for the ELCA Good Gifts Program. We appreciate your support!

## CHARGE

### Trip to Great Wolf Lodge

The Youth had a successful trip to CHARGE in November ... thanks to all the support by many in our wonderful congregation. The students enjoyed speakers, music, and small group sessions with others from Michigan in their age range. The groups had activities to build leadership skills and to form connections with others. Please ask the Youth about their experience. **A special thanks to the Kadrofske family for their help with transportation and chaperoning.**



The NOISY / PANTRY Offering for December will be on the 17th

## SUNDAY SCHOOL - HELP WANTED

We are always looking for volunteers ... Teachers, back-ups, and those who want to hang out with the 6<sup>th</sup> graders and older. If you think you would like to give it a try, let me know. Here is the sign-up link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094EA4AA23A2FAC07-iwantto>

### Transition Team Update

On October 29, 2023, the Faith Transition Team held a Leadership Conversation. In attendance were members of the Transition Team, Church Council Members and Committee and Group Chairs.

The objective of this meeting was to gather information to determine what duties/activities are conducted by the various Committees and Groups to determine "What Faith Should Look Like in The Future."

The information that was developed will be presented to the Church Council for evaluation and consideration. This review could determine the need to reconfigure or restructure these existing Committees or Groups.

Upon review of this data, a meeting will be held with the entire Congregation in early 2024 to gather their input to move forward with the Call Process.



The Caring Committee has partnered with Bring Smiles to Seniors card program. Bring Smiles to Seniors supports over 700 facilities nationwide (over 80 in Michigan) with Thinking of You cards. Handmade cards are received throughout the year, and many need a positive caring sentence or two written inside. This is a quick way to make someone's day and all it costs is time (but they

would happily take your monetary support). Pick up a packet of cards located in the basket near the steps. Once completed, please return to the "Done" basket. Please see information in the narthex about this wonderful program that brings joy to many of our elderly! *Thank you! From the Caring Committee*

# PRAYER list...

God our champion, you are our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.

Draw near to all who suffer especially: Dale

Halvorson, Marla Holle, Gene Miller, Joyce Thorsen,

Alice Hendrickson, Chip Pittman, Trudy Cook, Harry Nawrock, Lois Neves, Mara Lusia, Charlotte Rasmussen, Helen Brinkman, Bob Shorman, Joy Costar, Marilyn Hogan, Todd Barricklow, Eric and Karen Casler, Kenley and Allyson, and Richard Kemmler. Be their rest and comfort. **Amen**

**Everyone is  
Invited**

**Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>  
at FLC, 11:45 - 1:00**

**Hosted by Karen Fraser & Deb Borton-McDonough**

**LUNCH BUNCH**



This is an opportunity for fellowship and food. If you would like to host a month, please let Bob Nelson or Tammy Heilman know. Hosting would involve providing sandwiches, drinks, set up, and clean up. For anyone attending, please feel free to bring a salad or dessert. You can also bring your own lunch if you wish. We hope you can join us. Come and go as you need to during lunch.

# Serving Faith

We really need volunteers for Readers, Lay Assistants, and Greeters.  
Many hands make light work!! Please step up and volunteer!

To Sign up for Coffee Hour please use the sign-up sheet on the Narthex Kitchen Counter

Readers / Lay Assistants: Diane Hill: [Diane Hill Email](#)

Ushers: Brenda Kopf: [Brenda Kopf email](#)

Altar Care: Elaine Harrison: [Elaine Harrison Email](#)

Sunday School: Pam Williams: [Pam Williams Email](#)

Nursery: Jennifer Coe: [jenlynncoe@yahoo.com](mailto:jenlynncoe@yahoo.com)

Greeters: Mike Eschelbach: [Mike Eschelbach Email](#)

DATE	GREETER	READER	LAY ASSISTANT	USHERS	ALTAR CARE	ACOLYTE	COFFEE HOUR
12/3/2023	Lewis, J & C	Hirt, L	Weingartner, R	Hirt's	Mace, K	Wawrzynski, J	Heilman's
12/10/2023	Weingartner, R	Harrison, J	Sollenberger, H	Harrison's	Heilman, T	Nyquist, I	
12/17/2023	Hirt, D & L	Royalty, J	Royalty, R	Kopf's	Bowers, H	Webb, Maddie	Ed Committee
12/24/2023 10:00am 4:00pm 8:00pm	Milne, K & E Neves, Lois Fraser, K	Heilman, W Warwick, Alexa Harrison, E	Hereza, P Eschelbach, Mike Kopf, W	Kopf's McCracken/Milne Harrison's	Bowers, H Bowers, H Bowers, H	Nyquist, I Wawrzynski, J Herek, A	No Coffee Hour
12/31/2023	Holle, M	McCracken, J	Kopf, B	Holste/Robinson		Marquardt, Makayla	
1/7/2024	Eschelbach, Mike	Harrison, J	Thompson, R	Harrison's			
1/14/2024	Lewis, C & J	Hirt, L	Hirt, D	Hirt's			
1/21/2024	Weingartner, R	McCracken, J	Herek, R	McCracken/Milne			
1/28/2024	Milne, K & E	Heilman, W	Weingartner, R	Kopf's			

## CHURCH DIRECTORY UPDATES

Please send your directory updates to Connie by January 7. This includes new photos, address information, etc. [connie@faithlutheranchurch.org](mailto:connie@faithlutheranchurch.org). Thanks!

Our goal will be to have it completed by the annual meeting and have some hard copies available as well as accessing it online.