



/ DECEMBER 2021

DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH WISCONSIN

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”



BE BOLD AS STEPHEN!

It does not happen very often, but it will this year. Dec. 26 falls on a Sunday. Most likely it will not be one of your best attended services since it follows the celebration of Christmas the day before. I hope I am wrong, because it is a special day as we remember St. Stephen, a deacon and martyr. In fact, he was the first Christian martyr. Because he loved Jesus, he defended his faith and was stoned to death.

If you go to Acts 6-7, you will learn about Stephen. He was one of seven men chosen as deacons to take over some duties for the apostles so they could “devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). We are told:

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. **Acts 6:8**



Rev. Dr. Dwayne Lueck
North Wisconsin
District President

He shared his faith in Christ. The result was going before the Jewish leaders, who accused Stephen of blasphemy. He denounced them for rejecting Jesus. They did not like it; in fact, they were “enraged” and stoned him to death. His final words were:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” **Acts 7:60**

We are now in the season of Advent, leading up to the celebration of Christmas. Now is the time to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Advent is a time of preparation, of thinking about our sins and feeling sorry for them as we wait to celebrate the birth of Christ, and wait for Him to come again. Then Christmas arrives!

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1:14**

We celebrate the arrival of Jesus, who comes as God’s gift to us to redeem us through His death and resurrection. Through faith in this Jesus, we will be saved and have everlasting life.

That is why Christmas is a big deal for us as Christians. Jesus is the heart and soul of our faith. Without Jesus, we are sunk. That is why celebrating the birth of Christ at Christmas is significant. The culture in which we live, however, continues to push us in a corner. Displays of the Nativity scene cannot be on public property. Employees are told to say “happy holidays” as we certainly do not wish to offend the customer who is not Christian.

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God bless our principals

District principals gathered in Wausau for professional development, led by Rev. Dr. Paul Linnemann, president of the North-west District. The topic was "Leadership in Times of Crisis." Pastor Linnemann's experience, also as an educator and counselor, allows him to share meaningful insights for today's leaders. The principals also shared strengths and challenges they are experiencing in their schools.

A common thread discussed was the critical need for support. The most successful schools have healthy principals, which benefit from pastoral, board and staff support.

We give thanks for our Lutheran school principals. Pray for their leadership and their health.



125 YEARS of ZION, ANIWA

A hardy band of German pioneers in Eastern Marathon County 125 years ago found themselves in need of a church. Life was difficult on what was then frontier land, consisting mainly of stumps, rocks and mosquitoes. Even roads were in short supply. What they did have was faith and children in increasing numbers.

The difficulties of this life are evident in Zion's earliest records — almost all the burials were of infants and children. These frontier families found themselves in ever increasing groups walking five miles or more to church. After a particularly cold winter in January 1896, several of the men gathered to draft a constitution for Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. They would have a building that was closer for all the families.

Later that summer, many families contributed their "off hours" from farming to construct the first church building. By Reformation Day, the church was ready to be dedicated. It didn't yet have a basement, siding or heat, but it was beautiful to the new congregation. Here was God's house, where they could all

hear the Gospel, sing hearty hymns of faith and receive the Lord's Supper.

The small Zion congregation has lived through harsh weathers, difficult economies, pandemics, wars, switching from German to English and societal change. Now 125 years later, members still gather for the same purpose: to proclaim the Gospel to each succeeding generation.

Zion recently gathered to celebrate anniversary with a picnic and service.

Former pastor Rev. Dr. Nathan Meador preached and current pastor Rev. Ryan Fehrmann officiated. A special treat was choral music from the Bow The Knee choir, a musical presentation group started and perpetuated by Zion for over 17 years. Please rejoice with Zion in our Lord's faithfulness to generations past, present and indeed future - both at Zion and in the North Wisconsin District, the LCMS, and the world!



LWML

Christmas in danger?

The media has been reporting on the back-up of cargo ships at the harbors and thus are not able to unload because of a variety of reasons, poor planning among them. The media is telling us that Christmas is in danger, that the shipping issue is going to keep us from celebrating Christmas.



Joan Berquist
LWML District President

What utter nonsense this is to those of us who know the real meaning of Christmas!

This situation gives each of us the opportunity to share the story of our Savior's birth (Luke 2:1-21),

The media is also conveying a sense of urgency in regard to seasonal shopping. Don't wait to make your purchases! Shop now! Order now!

Each of us should feel that same kind of urgency, but not about shopping. Rather, we should be urgent in telling others about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Let us remember that the time to tell someone about Jesus is *now*. As the LWML in action, we are doing this by collecting mites for missions, meeting for Bible studies and participating in servant events.

So far in the 2020-22 biennium, the LWML North Wisconsin District has funded \$89,500 in mission grants. The four remaining grants to be funded this biennium totals \$20,500.

During this Advent season, let's keep the sense of urgency going. Be ready to share the real story of Christmas when opportunity knocks.

Wellness Corner

THE OPPRESSED OPTIMIST(S)

He was on the "top of his game."

He was a chosen man of God who had just achieved a major victory through Him. Elijah had room for optimism. Yet the risk to his life was real (1 Kings 19:2). Now we find this prophet in the desert asking God to take his life (v.4). Elijah felt dejected and defeated. God renewed Elijah's hope and gave him a new focus for his on-going ministry (v.15-18). Elijah's restored focus was on God and the victories yet to come.

We can also reflect on a time in King David's life. Though undefined, his words infer that he was going through a period of oppression. Yet he offered words of renewal and hope as he reflected on God's plan for him.

Bless the Lord, O my soul who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. **Ps. 103:3a, 4-6**

God is in the "resiliency" business. He desires to "renew the bounce" in



Rev. Dan Kohn
District Counselor

those He calls into ministry. His Spirit works to realign the focus back to Him and restore hope and joy, which are elements of optimism.

One more example comes to mind. Now we shift to the New Testament. Here we find the apostle Paul, a man destined for suffering (Acts 9:16). He gives us a glimpse of the oppression he endured in 2 Cor. 11:23-28.

Yet from prison, Paul penned Philippians. In these pages we find 16 references to joy. This theme reaches a crescendo in Phil 4:4 as Paul says:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Paul adds to this focus. He had found contentment in all circumstances (v.11). His sustaining strength came through Christ (v.13).

We need to be mindful of the words of Christ Himself:

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." **John 16:33b**

As today's followers of Christ, stay focused on the Overcomer. In Christ find room for optimism in spite of the oppression. Boldly go forth, like David, with his timeless battle cry:

"The battle is the LORD'S."

1 Sam. 17:47b

Contact me at revkohn@gmail.com or 715-610-2400.

Hearts for Jesus 2022 selected

The 2021-22 district Hearts for Jesus project iHelping Hands Eastern European Ministries. The children of Radomir and Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and Kiev, Ukraine, will benefit from our offerings. The goal is to collect funds to send three sets of care packages, but maybe more and including Bucharest, Romania. Packages include food, literature, children's Bibles and nativity scenes.

More information will be provided this winter, including at the district website — nwdlcms.org — with chapel talks, activities and stories to help promote the effort.

My journey to Lutheranism

By Matthew Staiert
UWSP student

I had grown up in a Catholic household and we attended worship every Saturday. I also went to a Catholic elementary school. At school we had religion class in which we learned more about our faith, attended mass every Tuesday, participated in the Sacraments, prayed the rosary, and had talks with the priest to learn more about the Catholic faith. I never really took to any of it as it all seemed like a chore to me; just something that I had to do and I never really had any say in it.

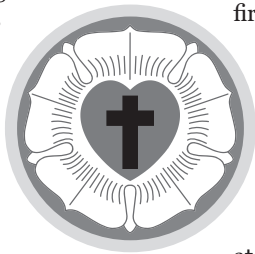
When I got to college I had a defiant mindset of “my parents aren’t here to make me go to church,” and so I just stopped going. My faith was not a priority any longer. As time went on though I began struggling with classes and the social life on campus. It always felt like something was missing, so I started attending some popular evangelical worship services. Then eventually through my girlfriend, I came to Peace Lutheran Campus Center. Never at that time would I have guessed in a million years that I would one day get confirmed in the Lutheran faith. But God graciously had other plans for me.

I arrived at Peace very much a Catholic Christian and things at Peace felt familiar enough, but there were still things that I didn’t like or agree with about Lutheranism. As time passed, I was beginning to take in more and more of what was being said every Sunday and started to have questions about my faith and Lutheranism. I brought some of these questions up to Pastor Andy (Weden) and he kindly took the time to sit down with me and discuss them. Never feeling pressured to get confirmed based on our conversations, I just wanted to continually learn more and more



about Lutheranism. Never had I thought so much about God and the Bible before coming to Peace.

After almost a year of talking about being confirmed, it was becoming real. Having gone over the Bible, Lutheranism 101 and the Small Catechism, I was beginning to understand more and more of what I actually believed. On Easter Sunday 2021 in front of my parents, who came to support me, other family, friends, and members of the Peace community, I was confirmed in the Lutheran faith.



I feel so blessed to have so many amazing and wonderful people in my life who have shaped my journey of faith and led me to where I am today. I continue to be amazed at God’s grace for me and all people. Whenever I think about how I came to this point of becoming a Lutheran, it is because I finally have an understanding of what God’s grace is really about and for that I am eternally grateful.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)



The reason for me to focus on Stephen is to give thanks for him and his defense of the faith, and to be a role model and encouragement to help us defend or speak up for what we believe. We believe in having a “Merry Christmas” because Christ is at the heart of Christmas. No Christ — no Christmas. We would not celebrate a holiday by traveling to be with family, and helping the commercial world with big sales after Thanksgiving, if it were not for Jesus. We want the world to have Christ in their Christmas so we will keep saying “Merry Christmas,” whether we are out shopping or at work or school or wherever. Christ came for those we encounter in those environments because of His love for them, even if they have no time for Him.

Stephen was not a professional church worker. He was not trained at the seminary. In fact, he was not a true Jew. He was a Hellenist (Greek speaking) Jew. He was a layman who was chosen to be a deacon in the church that spoke up for Jesus. Acts 6:10 says this about him:

They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

At our baptism, we were given the same Spirit. May we be just as bold as Stephen as we celebrate Christmas and share “Merry Christmas” with those around us. Be bold! I doubt if we get stoned to death!

Happy December 26 — St. Stephen’s Day! And Merry Christmas!