

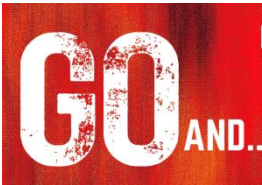


VOLUME 55

November 2023

NUMBER 11

## December Chatterbox Newsletter



### Go And Be "Present"

I've been hearing a lot of conversation lately about how "Christmas" seems to encroach on the other holidays earlier and earlier each year. Halloween was still two weeks away when the retailers were already putting stuff on clearance and making room on the shelves for tinsel and flashing strings of lights. Many stores made a big deal about "Black Friday" events starting the first week in November, instead of its usual place on the Friday following Thanksgiving Day.

Normally, this kind of conversation happens with a negative tone of voice, and there are tons of comics out there picturing Santa sitting on a Turkey holding a jack-o-lantern as if Christmas was silencing all the holidays that come before it. And, usually, I am right there with everyone else who considers this a "bad" thing. I even have a good friend and colleague who refuses to sing Christmas Carols or put up his Christmas tree until Advent is officially over on Christmas Eve. But, as I read the summary for this month's "Go and..." topic, I think I am changing my opinion on this issue.

The first line of the summary reads *"As we await and celebrate Christ's birth, we remember that God is present and shows up."* The word "present" here is used to mean that God's eternal essence dwells with us in the here and the now. But, the word "present" might also be used in terms of receiving a gift, which would also be an appropriate understanding of God at Christmas time. So this dual interpretation has made me stop to think about how we generally celebrate the Advent and Christmas holidays.

Many of us start our Christmas shopping the week after Christmas with all the great sales, just to pick up a few "extra" types of gifts that can be kept in storage for most of the year so that you will have them ready to fill stockings and hand out to your friends at Women's Bible study as next year's celebrations begin to ramp up. And then we continue picking up a few other things throughout the year to **PRE**pare for December's big event. So, it's really not surprising that retailers jump ahead in stocking their shelves with Christmas types of gifts – and in fact, it could even be considered quite considerate of them, by folks who like to plan ahead.

Also, have you ever tried to book a party room for your big family Christmas celebration or your office holiday party in December? You can't get one. You would have had to have reserved it the year before to get the perfect spot, and even then, everyone else seems to be hosting parties on that same evening, so you end up competing for your families attention and the priorities of the folks you work with. So, lots of offices and families have decided to get ahead of the game by gathering their employees or relatives sometime other than December. I once went to a staff Christmas Party for our church on Valentine's Day! (trying to plan a

party for church staff during the weeks of Advent/Christmas is a nightmare! I suppose the same would be true for any of the airlines or folks in the travel industries.)

And, really, what's so bad about trying to get people into the "Christmas Spirit" throughout the whole year instead of just during the month of December? Aren't we all just a little bit nicer, and a lot more generous, with one another during the holidays? Why wouldn't we want more of that? And if we are really only looking for God to show up around Christmas time, why wouldn't it be a good thing to celebrate Christmas all year long? Aren't we hoping for a God to show up a lot more often than just at Christmas?

And that whole warm fuzzy feeling you get when you are among friends and/or family during these intentional gatherings at Christmas time? Wouldn't we want **MORE** of this? Whether you actually exchange gifts or not at these events, just being together is it's own gift. Being "present" with one another is something we intentionally do around the holidays, that I wish we could do a lot more often throughout the year.

So maybe the encroachment of Christmas, isn't really such a bad thing, at least for those of us in the Christian faith tradition. In fact, maybe we should intentionally try to schedule in more times throughout the year to celebrate this Spirit whose presence is truly among us **ALL** the time. And, in this expanded Christmas Spirit, perhaps we can intentionally learn something about the other 27 holidays that are celebrated by other cultures and faith traditions during the month of December, like the Mexican tradition of Las Posadas, or the Jewish tradition of Hanukkah, or the celebration of the African American culture of Kwanzaa?

God shows up for **ALL** of God's people **ALL** around us, **ALL** the time. What so bad about the possibility of all of us showing up and being present for God, as we gather together every day, living generously with our neighbors, seeking to know more about the strangers in our lives, loving our enemies, being the gift of life to someone who spends most of their days alone?

Learning to wait, and preparing oneself for things to come is a good thing too, it gives us time to pause a bit and take in the full meaning of what is most important in our lives. But if we are constantly telling the story of God being present with us, in the here and now, why would we have to wait to start living it in our everyday lives? So, I say, get on out there everyone! Turn the Christmas Carols up loud and strong! Play some Hanukkah songs too. Ask your friends where they see God showing up in their lives. Give a gift to someone... just because. Celebrate the presence, and the present, of God in our lives!

Merry Christmas!

Pastor Chris

PS – Our Advent Sermon Series this year is all about how Christ is revealed in our Christmas Carols! So come and help us sing and celebrate these carols with us!





**Advent / Christmas 2023**  
**Christ Revealed in Carols**  
**5 Parts**

Join us throughout the month of December to contemplate the significance of Christ through Advent and Christmas Carols, both familiar and unfamiliar. Each service features a carol, its scriptural and historical background, and a reflection on what the carol tells us about Jesus and his significance for our world today. You may find something old and familiar about Jesus in an unfamiliar carol, and something new and exciting in an old favorite.

**“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”-Dec. 3rd**

**“O Morning Star”-Dec. 10th**

**“Mary’s Magnificat”-Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>-also special music by Donna Jaixen**

**“Joy to the World”-Christmas Eve**

**“A Stable Light is Lighted”-Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>**



**GO AND...**

**BE PRESENT**

As we await and celebrate Christ’s birth, we remember that God is present and shows up. The babe in the manger, God Incarnate, is God’s gift of deep love for us. We are invited to pause, be still, and be fully present in this holy season. Society calls us to a different place where busyness, spending, and rushing about are marks of success. God, in Christ, offers another way: Emmanuel – God with us.

**Questions to Consider:**

- What can I add to this season that would truly allow me to pause?
- What tradition do you have that nurtures being present at this time of year?
- As you are on the GO, how are you going to practice being present?

**Prayer:** Emmanuel, you are present with us. Help us be present with each other. Amen.

**Suggested Song:** O Come, O Come Emmanuel (ELW 257)

**St. John's Lutheran Congregational Church**  
**November 20th, 2023**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Opening**

St. John's Lutheran Congregational Council met with Pastor Chris, Brian Bunkers, Larry Wennekamp, Dave Groteluschen, Bethany Wilke and Denise Stevenson. Tracey Moore was absent. Vice President Brian Bunkers called the meeting to order and led the opening prayer.

**Minutes/Financial Reports**

Larry made a motion to approve the last meeting minutes. Dave seconded it. Motion carried. The October financial reports were reviewed. Dave made a motion to approve them. Bethany seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Beginning Monthly Balance \$18,929.47  
Monthly General Income \$9,327.92  
Monthly General Expenses \$10,460.69  
Ending General Balance \$17,821.07  
YTD Income required to meet budget \$131,265.50  
YTD Behind 2023 Budget -\$22,487.60  
Memorial Fund \$942.95

**Old Business**

\*Church Cleaning-We are looking for a part time church cleaner. This consists of every other month. This will be a paid position. Please contact Pat Cuda if interested in this position.

\*Date for candy sacking-The candy sacking for the Christmas program will happen on December 10<sup>th</sup> right after church. We would love all the extra set of hands. We plan to do 100 bags.

**New Business**

\*Communion-It's been considered to have communion twice a month. The 1<sup>st</sup> and third Sunday of each month. We've had some input from others and council has discussed this and we are passing this on to the worship and music committee. The worship and music committee will make a recommendation to us by January. If you have any input on this matter, please talk to someone on the worship and music committee.

\*Acceptance of new members-By proclamation we accept Karol Swan and Jordan Runge as new members of our church. Denise made a motion to accept them into our St. John's official roster. Dave seconded the motion. Motion carried.

\*Pastor's insurance-The congregation election of benefits was not filed in time to meet the deadline. So, the billing will be different but the amount will still be the same. It will not be costing us anymore. Brain requested that we "flag" October of next year, so we have a reminder for Pastor's insurance. Denise made a motion to pay the up fee. Larry seconded the motion. Motion carried.

\*Cleaning & Organist Contracts-The finance committee will figure out contracts for each to sign.

\*Plant Gifts-Pastor Chris will be delivering plant gifts to all the shut-ins the week of the 17<sup>th</sup>. This is a special time for many of them and their families. Thank you, Pastor!

\*Nominations for council members-Please reach out if you are interested in joining council. We will have our semiannual meeting on January 28<sup>th</sup>. We have two council members that will be going off at this time.

### **Pastor's Report**

It's been a good Fall season at St John's. Lots of fun things happening, as well as special times of remembering.

The Quilters boxed up all their talents to be delivered to Lutheran World Relief who sends them around the world to comfort those with our warm thought and prayers, so we sent them off with a special blessing in worship. It is always so great to see how our congregation reaches far beyond our own walls to connect with God's children across the world.

The Junior Choir presented names and lit candles for those from our community who have died this past year, as well as the names of all those who remember as "Saints" in the faith, as we celebrated All Saints Sunday. It was a moving tribute made extra special coming from the voices of our youth. Special thanks to Sharon Hartman, Pam Goering, Ben Rocheford, Karley Killham, Arabella Luchsinger, Vivienne Runge, and Lennox Martin for making our worship a special remembering of our ancestors of Faith.

The Stewardship Committee also designated Nov 5 as Stewardship Sunday and offered a community lunch. Thanks to Karol Swan, Tracey Moore, and the whole Stewardship Committee for bringing us all together over BBQ sloppy joes (or "Taverns" or "Made rights") potato salad, chips, and tons of great desserts. It was a terrific time of fellowship and conversation.

A very sad moment in our community came with the death of our long-time member Renae Ernesti who has been struggling with cancer for the last 4 years. We celebrated her life with a service at St Luke's United Church of Christ in Columbus, and a Burial Service at Martin Luther Church in Johnson NE. Our prayers continue for Renae's husband Andy Ernesti and her children Cassie and Blake Rathbone, Cevahn and Carter Ernesti. Renae has been a great source of faith

and inspiration for me in the two years I have served St John's, and her presence will be greatly missed.

I continue to teach Adult Bible Study and Confirmation, as well as visiting and delivering communion to members from our congregation who are unable to attend worship on Sunday mornings.

Looking forward to Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas - We are excited to gather again with our Ecumenical Partners in Columbus to offer a Thanksgiving service on Sunday November 19 at St John's at 4:00pm and a "Blue Christmas" Service scheduled for Thursday December 14 at Federated Church in Columbus at 6:30pm.

Our Children are beginning practices for their Christmas Program on Sunday December 17, and because Christmas Eve happens on a Sunday this year and we are planning 2 services on Sunday December 24: 10:00am Worship, and Christmas Eve service at 5:00pm. Church council, after discussing the decision with the congregation, has decided not to hold a worship service on Christmas Morning.

I also want to say a special Thank you to the Church Council, the Senior Choir, and the whole congregation for your love and support celebrating Pastor Appreciation on Reformation Sunday. The cards and the gifts are greatly appreciated, and remind me yet again how lucky I am to serve such a terrific community of Faith. Thank you all. Pastor Chris

### Committee Reports

-Christian Ed-The Sunday school kids are gearing up for the Christmas Day program.

-Worship & Music-no updates

-Evangelism-no updates

-Finance Committee-The committee is still sticking with Tim Koch through North Star. The committee would like the picnic shelter and the shed in the back of the church raised for insurance. They are wanting to change our \$1,000 deductible to \$5,000. Our premium will go up. Larry made a motion. Dave seconded the motion. Motion carried. If you have any questions about the insurance side, please talk to Brian Bunkers.

-FYI: The finance committee will be meeting within the next two weeks. If you need to increase your budget per committee, please talk to Brian. The council will need to approve it first.

-Stewardship Committee-no updates

-Property Committee-The committee met and had great discussions. Brad Luchsinger will be the contact for all funerals now. Snow removal and mowing duty is set up. Thank you to Fletcher and Ethan Schmid for agreeing to continue to mow for St. John's. If you have any concerns about

something that is not working properly in the church, please reach out to someone on the committee.

-Social Ministry-Please join us after church on December 10<sup>th</sup> to help with candy sacking! ☺ We plan to do 100 bags for the Christmas Program. Big shout out to Kendra Bunkers for getting all the candy and Kathy Brunt for getting all the yummy peanuts and apples.

### **Adjournment**

Bethany made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Larry seconded. Motion carried. We closed with the Lord's Prayer.

November Council Reps-Tracey Moore & Bethany Wilke. Next Meeting-December 11<sup>th</sup> @ 7:30.

### **Angel Tree Ministry**

The St. John's Social Ministry Committee has our church registered again for the Angel Tree project. It is a Prison Fellowship program that connects parents in prison with their children through the delivery of Christmas gifts for them. It begins Sunday, November 12<sup>th</sup> thru Sunday December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We will be serving area children.

The Angel Tree with the children's information will be up by

November 12<sup>th</sup>. Please select a child from the tree and purchase the requested gift item(item) by spending a minimum of \$25. Each gift must be brand new. Place the gift in a Gift Bag only. DO NOT wrap. Be sure to attach the Angel Tree tag to the gift and place the gift under the tree. The gifts will be distributed to their caregiver on behalf of the parent.

Please have the gifts back to church by December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Thank you in advance for giving the children the joy of Christmas.



**Children's Christmas Program**  
**"Prepare for Christmas from Head to Toe"**  
**Sunday, December 17 at 10:00 A.M.**

**Christmas Children's Program Practice for all children on....**  
**Saturday, December 16 from 9:00-10:00 A.M. and**  
**Sunday, December 17 from 8:45-9:45 A.M. in place of**  
**Sunday School that Sunday**

## Christmas Candy Sacks

If you would like to help put together the candy sacks to hand out after the Christmas Program, Social Ministry will be making the sacks after the service on December 10<sup>th</sup>.



## Blue Christmas Service

*An Ecumenical service of remembrance and hope will be hosted by the Federated Church on December 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:30PM. Pastor Adam Lassen from St.*

*Luke's UCC will be preaching along with our other Ecumenical ministers.*



### 2023 Fall Cleaning - THANK YOU!!

Thank You to everyone who helped with this year's Fall Interior Cleaning. The following committee members generously gave of their time: Barb Welch, Diane Skiles, Brenda Dicke, Joyce Lindstrom and Clayton Brunt. Tracy and Emma Moore volunteered their time too! Everyone used the sign-up sheets and all the jobs were completed.

Please consider helping in April 2024 for the Spring Cleaning.

Jo Anne Marxsen  
Chairman of the Interior Cleaning Committee







**2023 St. John's WEE SINGERS SCHEDULE**  
**(KIDDOS AGE 4-GRADE 2)**  
**SAVE THE DATES...**

**OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL KIDDOS, WHO ARE ALSO THE ST. JOHN'S WEE SINGERS, PRACTICE SINGING SONGS DURING SUNDAY SCHOOL DEVOTIONS EACH SUNDAY. WE WILL BE SHARING OUR VOICES SINGING SUNDAY SCHOOL SONGS ONCE A MONTH IN CHURCH ON THE 2ND SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH.**  
**DECEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup>**  
**JANUARY 14<sup>TH</sup>**  
**FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>**  
**MARCH 10<sup>TH</sup>**

**Help Wanted-Custodian**

The church is looking for another person to share the duties of cleaning the church along with Deb Runge. Cleaning duties would be every other month. Please contact the office (402-564-8707), or contact a council member if you are interested.



**Women of the ELCA fall General Meeting-November 14, 2023**

Speaker for the evening was Lori Peters from the Columbus Habitat for Humanity organization. This group has been active in Columbus since 2010 helping families and individuals struggling to afford home ownership. The stories of the people helped is truly inspiring, in both the personal struggles and the number of people involved to make these homes possible.

Business meeting was led by **President** Chris Luchsinger and opened

with our mission statement. There were 13 members present.

**Secretary** Cindy Groteluschen read the minutes from the February 28, 2023 meeting. The minutes were approved as read. Thank you notes from seniors Josie Bentz and Emma Moore were read as well as a thank you from Youth and Families for Christ.

**Treasurer** Dona Henderson reported that we currently have a balance of \$2157.45

Motion was made by Barb Welch to purchase a Poinsettia for the sanctuary. Second by Pat Cuda.

**Action** committee, as reported by Brenda Dicke made and donated quilts as follows, 50 to be sent to Lutheran World Relief, 10 to Columbus Rescue Mission, 15 full-size to the Center for Survivors and Youth and Families for Christ. 24 smaller child appropriate quilts, as well as 8 comfort bags were given to Center for Survivors and YFCC as well. The group voted to donate for the transportation to Lutheran World Relief as we have done in the past.

**Community** committee member Pat Muhle reported on the 2 funerals served.

**Growth** Committee member Karol Swan reported on Grab Bag at Bible School, yearbook updates and the encouragement/ inspirational books given to the 2 graduating Seniors in May.

**Old business**

General discussion of our Spring Gathering Event on March 11. We are pleased and encouraged by the participation and result of our efforts.

Shut ins card list has been updated.

Pat Cuda reported on the prayer chain. There will be updates to the list to help insure accurate and timely delivery of information. Information will now be sent out via text IF this is a method used by the member. Traditional phones calls will still be used for those not using texting.

We were reminded there is a website for WELCA: [tinyurl.com/nebraskawelca.org](http://tinyurl.com/nebraskawelca.org)

### **New Business**

December Red Cross Cookie donation was discussed and approved. A list has been placed on the bulletin board.

Upcoming events include the November 19<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Service being held here at St. John's. WELCA will be serving the event and providing cookies or bars.

NSWO Winter gathering will be held at St Paul's in Grand Island on January 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Central Conference Spring Gathering 2024 will be held at St Paul's Lutheran in Grand Island on April 13.

The Spring Business meeting was set for March 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 at 7:00 pm hosted by Ruth Circle

Advent party will be held on Sunday December 3, 2023 at Wunderlich's. Ruth Circle is in charge of entertainment. It was decided that each circle be responsible for bringing a dessert to share.

### **Circle coordinators for 2024 as follows:**

Eve circle- Brenda Dicke, Ruth circle- Tracey Moore, Tabitha circle- Joanne Siefken

### **New officers for the next 2-year term as follows:**

President -Kendra Bunkers

Vice President- Chris Luchsinger

Secretary- Sharon Hartman

Treasurer- Pat Cuda

There was a motion by Karol Swan to accept the officers, second by Colleen Lutjelusche.

It was also suggested and discussed to review and amend our constitution to best fit the needs and intent of the group.

This was taken under advisement of the incoming officers.

The meeting was closed with a prayer, Eve Circle provided refreshments.

Cindy Groteluschen Secretary



## **Annual Meeting**

St. John's Annual meeting has been set for after the service on Sunday, January 28, 2024.

## **Advent Devotional**

For a weekly Advent devotional, the bishops of the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Anglican Church of Canada, and the Episcopal Church have each written a story with a prayer. These can be accessed at [Advent Devotions.pdf \(elca.org\)](http://Advent_Devotions.pdf(elca.org)) or you can pick up a printed copy in the church narthex.





# December



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>Office Hours</u> Tues. and Thurs 9:00 AM-1:00 PM  Pastor is in Columbus on Sun. to Tues					1	2
3 8:50AM Sunday School 10:00 AM Worship Service	4 No Adult Bible Study	5	6	7	8	9
10 8:50 AM Sunday School 10:00 AM Worship Service Wee Singers	11 Adult Bible Study 6:30PM Council Meeting 7:30PM	12	13	14	15	16 Children's Christmas Program Practice 9:00-10:00AM
17 8:50 AM Program Practice 10:00 AM Children's Christmas Program	18 Adult Bible Study 6:30PM	19 Tabitha Circle 7:30PM	20	21	22	23
24 8:50 AM <b>No Sunday School</b> 10:00 AM Worship Service 5:00PM Christmas Eve Worship Service	25 <i>Merry Christmas!!</i>	26	27	28	29	30
31 8:50AM <b>No Sunday School</b> 10:00AM Worship Service		<u>Council Reps</u> Tracey Moore Bethany Wilke	<u>Altar Guild</u>	<u>Lectors</u> Dec. 3 <sup>rd</sup> -Chris Luchsinger Dec10th-Clayton Brunt	<u>Lectors</u>	<u>Cleaner</u> Deb Runge

Congregation Officers 2023  
 President: Tracey Moore  
 Vice President: Brian Bunkers  
 Secretary: Bethany Wilke  
 Financial Secretary: Doug Hartman (income)  
 Treasurer: Pam Goering (expenditures)

Council members: Denise Stevenson, Dave Groteluschen,  
 Larry Wennekamp  
 Please put your committee and organization meetings on the  
 calendar in the Narthex on the information desk or send to  
 Pat Cuda at [stjohnshellcreek@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnshellcreek@gmail.com)



ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH  
10785 280<sup>TH</sup> ST  
COLUMBUS, NE 68601

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Email: [stjohnshellcreek@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnshellcreek@gmail.com)  
10785 280<sup>th</sup> St.  
Columbus, NE 68601-8745

From Hwy 30: 5 Miles North on 18<sup>th</sup> Ave 4 1/2 Miles east on 280<sup>th</sup> St.