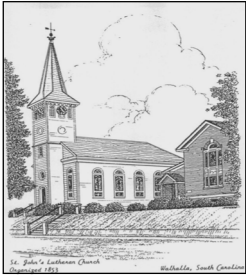


THE CHIMES — DECEMBER 2023



St. John's Lutheran Church, ELCA
Mission: Embracing a changing world in Christ's love and service.

Email: stjohnsluther@gmail.com
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Biggerstaff Christian Retreat
biggerstaffretreat@gmail.com

PLEASE NOTE: Office Hours: Monday—Friday 8:30am-1:00pm

WELCOME TO THE ADVENT WAITING ROOM

Waiting rooms—they are a part of our lives. Hospital, doctor's offices, automotive repair shops, schools, and a variety of other places provide spaces for us to wait for whatever we are present to experience.

The season of Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. It is a time of yearning and hoping. We are called to re-enter the story of God's Incarnation, to celebrate Christ's coming in the past, even as we await the Lord's coming again in the future.

As we take time to enter into Advent, we might discover a purpose to our waiting. Think about God's chosen people of old and their waiting of hundreds of years for the king whose eternal reign would end the oppression of the world? What do we think about thousands of people hoping and praying for something to happen fervently, while successive generations are born and pass away, without a hint of fulfillment? I am speaking here of the ancient Hebrew Patriarchs and Matriarchs, kings, prophets, and priests, who waited expectantly for the coming of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah expresses this hope and yearning

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:2).

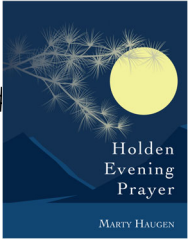
Then, hundreds of years later, born in Bethlehem, a small town in the Roman Empire, their hope is finally realized, even if in an unexpected way. And even then, the final realization of the Messiah's eternal reign is still yet to be seen, coming in the future. All of this makes our own waiting seem insignificant. And yet we all have those times of waiting in our lives where we need feel Emmanuel, God is with us.

During the Advent season, I invite you to find God's grace and love in the "waiting". For as we await Christ's coming, we are given the gifts of hope, peace and joy. The Advent and Christmas seasons are also great times to invite people you know who are experiencing that yearning, or who don't have a church home, to come — to the "waiting rooms and spaces" we share as Christians. To worship and pray and see the glory of the Lord revealed.

Living in the "waiting" and Christ's peace,

Pastor Rachel Connelly

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Happy Advent, friends!

From the
Vicar

This is one of the most special seasons of the church year. I'm very much looking forward to preaching twice this month, both Advent 1 and 4, and I'm also excited to invite you to join me for two new offerings starting now: I will be leading a three-week **Advent Study and Prayer series** called *Pause, Prepare, and Ponder*, on Tuesday mornings in Advent at 11am in the Sanctuary. We will start December 5.



And the following week, I am reviving the **Book Club** on **second Tuesdays at 7pm** at the Parsonage. We will be reading spiritual memoirs, beginning with the bestseller *Everything Happens for a Reason & Other Lies I've Loved*, by **Kate Bowler**. Please reach out to me with any questions, via text, email, or in person—and let me know if you're interested in participating! I trust that both these programs will be a blessing to all who attend, and a wonderful opportunity for me to get to know folks more deeply.

Advent blessings,

Vicar Olga-Maria Cruz

It's hard to believe we are here at Advent again!

Time flies. You'll want to get out your pencils and mark your calendars! **December 9th at 2:00 PM** there will be a **concert** at St. John's as part of this year's Tour of Churches. The Chancel Choir, Praise Ringers and our Vicar Olga-Maria and I will be performing some beautiful seasonal music at this concert. We had a really good turnout last year, so come join us and bring your friends and neighbors! Special holiday events and services are a great time to invite people to visit our beautiful church — someone you have wanted to invite, but just haven't done it yet; someone who may need cheering up (there will be yodeling); or someone you haven't seen in a while. You can then go on to visit the other churches on the tour as well.

And, starting December 6th...If you haven't come to the evening prayer services on Wednesdays during Advent in the past, these are very calming and beautiful services where you can sing along with our chancel choir and cantor; pray; and listen to brief meditations from our Pastor and Vicar. They are a perfect way to slow down during a hectic holiday season and a wonderful time to share with friends and family. I was moved by these services last year and am looking forward to doing them again. I think these are a hidden holiday gem and would encourage you to come join us. This means that our choir practice will be from 6:00 until 7:00 on Wednesdays, so the Advent services can begin at 7:15.

And now, I guess I need to quit writing and get started practicing! Wishing everyone a peaceful Advent season,

Carla Padgett.

Music Director



Stewardship for all Seasons—Report on Generous Giving, Faithful Living program

To paraphrase St. Paul, *We give thanks to God in our remembrance of you!* The Stewardship Team is happy to report the current results of our *Generous Giving, Faithful Living* stewardship appeal. To date we have received 61 intent cards to support our ministries in 2024! THANK YOU! Of those cards returned, 43 show increases or 70%. New money pledged is now up to \$41,082. In an effort to reach our goal of \$45,000, a generous and anonymous donor has offered a challenge to those who have not turned in a commitment card and will donate \$100 per card, for new cards returned, up to a total of 20 cards. Since this challenge had been made, we have already received 7 cards, making the challenge total \$700. Please help us make sure we are able to receive the full generosity of our challenge donor -- to write the check for the full \$2,000 -- and that we meet our goal by turning in your intent cards.

We also want to thank those who shared in temple talks: Bill Brackett, Cathy Plowden, Patty Shepard and Raeyanna Chapman, and Mark McLean. And we thank all who have participated and "put into action" their faithful generosity as a part of this appeal. We are truly a blessed congregation!

"And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ." Philemon 1:6 (NLT)

WELCA REPORT



Thanks to outgoing officers and all in WELCA who helped to have a successful last two years. And now to the officers for 2024-2025; President--Jan Long; Vice-President--Andrea Carlson; Secretary--Cathy Plowden; Treasurer--Frieda Cobb, congratulations!! Plan to be a part of our very active **Women** of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**.

KNITTERS & CROCHETERS



Would you like to learn how to knit or crochet? Do you need help to revive your skills? One-on-one teaching is available. Only one meeting this month on **December 13th** at 10 am. Enjoy a break after a very busy year of outreach projects. Questions? Call or text Barbara at (864) 723-3376.

Gloria Shealy Circle



THE GLORIA SHEALY CIRCLE

The Gloria Shealy Circle will be meeting on **December 19** at 5pm at the home of Fredi Hallman. Please bring finger food and there will be a Christmas stocking gift exchange. Contact Anne Craig for more information.

LUCY KLAREN CIRCLE



The next meeting is scheduled for **December 14** at 6pm at the home of Patty Shepard. There will be light refreshments and an ornament exchange.

THE SURVIVORS GROUP



Survivors Group

The Survivors group will meet for lunch on **Monday, December 11** at 11:00 at the Lighthouse. After lunch we go over to Duke Energy to the Festival of Trees. Then on **Sunday, December 17** after the 11:00 worship we will go to lunch at Puerto Nuevo and then go to the Winds Christmas concert at Walhalla High School. All widows and widowers are welcome to join us at any time.

2023 MISSION ENDOWMENT FUND REPORT



MISSION
ENDOWMENT FUND

The Mission Endowment Committee met on November 6 and approved five grant requests totaling \$7,650. This amount is a little less than 4% of our resources. Total grants considered was awarded to grant requests made to the following organizations and groups across Oconee County and the SC Synod.

- \$1,400 St John's Christmas Outreach / Dinner
- \$2,000 Lutheran Homes of SC Foundation—Rose Crest senior living worship space
- \$1,500 Lutheran Clemson Campus Ministries—for Mission Trip
- \$1,250 Baby Read
- \$1,500 St. John's Youth/Children's Ministry — Lutheroad Day Camp Scholarships

Members of the Endowment Committee our: Jan Long (acting chair), Chuck Rawlins, Lois Sharpe, Cathy Nowell, and Pastor Rachel.



WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Calling all Veterans . . . Wreaths Across America will be held at St. John's on **Saturday, December 16**. Any veteran who would like to participate in this special ceremony can contact Jane Harris, harrisjaner@gmail.com or 864-882-3043.

Annual Congregational Meeting & November Council Abbreviated Minutes



The Annual Congregational meeting was held on November 12th. 75 members were present. President Greg Harris called the meeting to order at 10:00am. Pastor Rachel welcomed all and lead us in prayer. A Quorum was declared. Minutes from the previous year were approved.

Nominating Committee presented 4 people for the 4 open Council positions; Bill Brackett, Stan Gartner, Pilar Riddle & Patty Shepard were voted on and elected. The 2024 Budget was voted on and approved. A Strategic Planning update was given. A report from the Mission Endowment Committee and 2023 grant distributions was shared. Joes Sears was also recognized for his many years of service as the Mission Endowment Chair. Meeting was closed with prayer at 10:55am.

November Council meeting held on Nov. 20th. Meeting called to order by President Greg Harris at 6:00pm. Prayer Requests taken and Pastor Rachel led members in prayer. Devotion/Dwelling in the Word by Cathy, using the scripture from 2 Corinthians. Strategic Plan Update:

Accessibility: Greg reported the surveys have been completed and he will be contacting the architectural firm tomorrow to discuss next steps.

Biggerstaff: Stephanie stated they have entered Stage 2 which will include an on site visit to help determine the various options for using the space.

Eldercare: Greg stated this committee will be meeting again soon.

Families with Youth and Children: Jeremy reported that all their events have gone well and they continue to work on their goals.

Stewardship for all Seasons Jan reported that 59 giving commitment cards have been turned in so far, with 42 of them indicating an increase for 2024. A member has generously volunteered to match \$100. per card received from November 19th until the end of the year, up to \$2,000. Pastor Rachel stated we received 3 cards since then, so we are off to a great start.

October Meeting Minutes: Minutes approved.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Rachel stated Oct. and early Nov. have been full of meetings, gatherings, events and pastoral care, including the funeral service for Betty Sosebee. She attended Lutheridge for the Rostered Leaders Convocation.

Vicar's Report: Vicar Olga-Maria reported that she enjoyed attending the Synod Convocation and also attended the Interns Fall Retreat the following week. Vicar is planning an Advent study on Tuesday's at 11am and planning is also in the works to start a monthly book club which will meet at the parsonage.

Treasurer's Report: During the month of October income exceeded expenses by \$11,367. Expenses YTD are under budget by \$23,742. General Fund checking account balance is \$46,245. John Hewell, Outreach committee, noted that there are a few spots available to be a bell ringer on December 4th outside the Ingles, the sign up sheet is available on Joan's table. The Christmas Eve meal will be put together and delivered on Saturday, December 23rd. Pastor Rachel suggested that the matching money donated for the giving cards might best be spent in fixing our sound issues in the Sanctuary. Cathy moved that the matching funds be used to fix the sound issues in the Sanctuary and John second. President Harris called for a vote - Motion was passed. Dwelling in the Word, next meeting, will be done by Vicar Olga-Maria Cruz.

Next Council Meeting is December 18, 2023 at 6:00pm.

Meeting Closed by praying the Lord's Prayer. Adjourned at 6:55 pm

YOUTH IN DECEMBER

Hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving holiday and are over your "turkey coma"! I have been thinking and praying for you all as we leave Pentecost and start into Advent as we wait on our Savior's birth and the Hope and Peace He brings. Hope to see you and your families helping with the Christmas Eve meal packaging and delivery on Saturday December 23rd . Starting at 10:00 am. I will put out an email when we will be putting up the Nativity Scene.

"Don't shine so that others can see you—shine so that through you, others can see him."
Love in Christ, Patty

