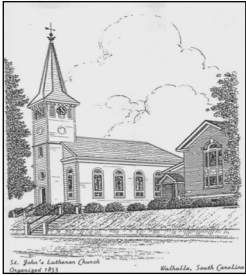


THE CHIMES — JANUARY 2024



St. John's Lutheran Church, ELCA

Mission: Embracing a changing world in Christ's love and service.

Email: stjohnsluther@gmail.com
Website: www.stjohnswalhalla.org
864-638-6363

Biggerstaff Christian Retreat
biggerstaffretreat@gmail.com

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

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Isaiah 60:1



When they (the Wise Men) had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Matt.2:9-10

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mk 1:9-10

Dear Friends:

As we share in our January CHIMES news at St. John's, we come near the end of the Twelve days of Christmas. The feast of Epiphany ("manifestation") on January 6 concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people. (excerpt from Sundays and Seasons, 2024)

"Epiphany" can also be defined as "a moment of sudden revelation or insight". As we celebrate the belief that God is revealed in the birth of Christ at Christmas, we give thanks that God has entered into our world and into our lives. Epiphany asks the questions: *Where do we see God to be present among and in the world? What are the signs of the sacred among us?* It is with that quest, that search, that discovery, that we concern ourselves as we begin the Epiphany season of revelation, witness and gift-sharing.

The Scripture texts from Isaiah, Matthew's story of the Wise Ones, and Mark's record of Jesus' baptism help guide us in this quest. The story tells us that the Wise Ones came to Jerusalem in search of the King...because they wanted to worship Him. In other words, they, like us, were searching for the object of their worship...the most revered thing...the true light that would glorify God. Likewise, when Jesus was baptized by John, we hear God's voice from heaven, expressing favor on his Son.

These passages challenge us to see what the Lord is doing in our own lives. To look beyond the tedium and the mundane. To worship with joy and to go boldly forth reflecting the radiant light of Christ. There is a call for our own baptismal affirmations and quests that rekindle and reveal to us where God might be leading us to serve and share our gifts in the name of Christ. During Epiphany, I invite you to reflect on how you might recommit yourself to your family and friends, to the family of the church, to the family of all humankind.

This Sunday at St. John's, we will celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, install new council leaders even as we recognize the gifts of those who have served the last three years. We look forward to a great year of mission and ministry as we heed the call: *Arise Your Light Has Come!*

In Christ's Light and Peace,

Pastor Rachel Connelly

P.S. Thank you for the Christmas gift from the congregation as well as the many individual gifts, cards, prayers, and warm greetings following surgery and during the Advent and Christmas seasons. What a privilege it is to serve you as pastor!

Hello, 2024! How does it feel to welcome this new calendar year? I know that, for myself, 2024 will be full of challenges and changes, and I will be spending, as is my practice, a lot of time around Jan 1st, reflecting on the past, and setting intentions for the year ahead.

From the Vicar



One thing I'm looking forward to is that our book club will meet **Tuesday, Jan 9th at 7pm** at the parsonage to discuss **Diana Butler Bass' book, *Grateful***. If you would like to join us, please text or email me and I will send you all the information you need. Even if you can't join the group or read the book, here is a link to a seven-day reflection and spiritual practice so that you can benefit from Bass' work, and grow in your own awareness and practice of gratitude:

<https://dianabutlerbass.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/7-day-guide.pdf>

And *one thing I am super grateful for* is all of the ways you, my St. John's family, shared the joy of Christmas with me—**thank you** for your beautiful cards, your thoughtful gifts, and your generous good wishes. May this new year bring us numerous reasons to rejoice, may God lift our hearts and help us find gratitude for God's many gifts and blessings. *Vicar Olga-Maria Cruz*



Thanks to all the volunteers who helped decorate our church for this Advent and Christmas season. This year it seemed to come alive with lights and color thanks to the many people who used their gifts. Altar Guild (Diane and Chuck Rawlins) and Lynn Pode made our Sanctuary, Gathering Area and outside entrances a warm and welcoming place for our congregation and all in the community who shared in Tour of Churches, Wreathes Across America celebration and our Christmas Eve worship services. Our Chrismon Tree is steeped in the tradition of our faith thanks to the volunteers who helped decorate it. This year we added a St. John's family tree in the Fellowship Hall.

Reminder- on Friday, January 5th at 9am we will celebrate the Epiphany with prayer, followed by undecorating the tree. All are welcome to participate- Many hands make light(er) work!



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS EVE MEAL

Many thanks to the 100+ volunteers who helped make our Christmas Eve Meal Delivery a success. Meals were prepared and delivered to over 385 people this year—another record setting year. This included 50 meals given to the Tribble Center in Seneca, 20 meals to Hospice House, 60 meals to Christ Central Ministries men's rehab facility in Walhalla, 47 meals to the Sloan Street community in Seneca, 26 meals to Oconee Law Enforcement, Oconee Detention Center, Walhalla Fire and Police departments. Twenty-four were delivered to Lakeview Assisted Living. There were 127 meals delivered to Senior Solutions/Meals on Wheels recipients and we delivered 15 meals to our own shut-ins.

A huge SHOUT OUT to those who prepared the food. We can't leave out the 20 people who made the brownies, the 40 people who delivered and the almost 60 people who showed up to package and serve the meal. In 2023 we received a \$250 gift card from Thrivent which brought our meal cost to just over \$600. Mayberry's in Seneca donated several trays of brownies and Head Lee Nursery donated poinsettias. Once again, we worked as a team and exceeded all expectations for this ministry. It is also wonderful to get the local businesses involved, as well.

FROM DEBRA ANDREWS SALAVATION ARMY SERVICE CENTER DIRECTOR

I'm attaching the report for your dollars raised by St. John's Lutheran Church. WOW, your people were awesome! Thank you so much for participating every year! This amount should help provide heat/power for 3-4 families for an entire month! What an amazing return on a few hours of ringing. Thank you. We are so grateful!

Ingles Pharmacy entrance:	\$359.16
Starbucks entrance:	\$448.74
TOTAL RAISED:	\$807.90

Thank you, St. John's volunteers, for a great job. As expected, the Starbucks door won due to Anne and Grace singing to the crowds! The consensus from the volunteers was that we will be back again next year!

WELCA REPORT



The WELCA Officers will be meeting in early January to determine the meeting dates for the year. More information to follow. Any Lutheran woman is considered a member of WELCA and is welcome to attend any meetings or functions. Contact Jan Long with any questions janlong4999@yahoo.com.

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. Meetings are on **Wednesday, January 10 and January 24** at 10am. Questions? Call or text Barbara at (864) 723-3376.

Gloria Shealy Circle



THE GLORIA SHEALY CIRCLE

The Gloria Shealy Circle will be meeting at 5pm in the Fellowship hall on **Tuesday, January 16**. We will be sharing pizza which will be brought in by Frieda Cobb. Donations for the month will be school supplies for those students in need of supplies during the school year. Agenda will be organizing for the next year.

LUCY KLAREN CIRCLE



Patty Shephard hosted the December LKC meeting at her home that was decorated perfectly for the season. LKC paid to have the piano tuned at Lakeside Assisted Living as part of our community outreach. Also, on Thursday, December 21, we participated in the Feed the Children event at Walhalla Library. We provided a meal, a take home goodie bag, and assisted in handing out books and bags of groceries (provided by First Steps / United Way) to those in need. The remaining groceries were shared with the St. Luke community box, and Our Daily Bread in Seneca. Our next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, January 18 @ 6:00pm** at St. John's fellowship hall. Please join us as we firm up our plans for the 2024 Jubilee & Silent Auction.



Save the Date...the evening of **Saturday, February 24, 2024**, LKC will be hosting its annual Jubilee and Silent Auction at the Walhalla Depot. There will be lively music, tasty food, a variety of beverages, and lots of great items to be auctioned off. Childcare will be provided at the church. Tickets will be \$25 each and will go on sale soon. All proceeds go towards scholarships for Walhalla High School seniors who demonstrated a passion for community service. If you're not able to attend and would like to be a sponsor, please contact Stephanie Champion at 864-710-2588 or any LKC member.

THE SURVIVORS GROUP



Survivors Group

The Survivors group is planning a trip to the Village Bakery in Pendleton on **Friday, January 12**. Look for an email for further details or contact Jan Long or Shonda Mahler. In January we will also be planning for events in 2024. We welcome any ideas. We look forward to 2024. All widows and widowers are welcome to join us at any time.

Council Abbreviated Minutes from December 18, 2023 Meeting

Members Present: Pastor Rachel Connelly, Vicar Olga-Maria Cruz, Jan Long, John Hewell, Stephanie Champion, Sandra Pruitt, Jeremy Chapman, Cathy Plowden, Scot Williams, Grace Schmeelcke, Bill Pickard, Allen Harding, Lynn Pode and 2024 Members elect; Bill Brackett, Stan Gartner and Pilar Riddle



Meeting called to order by Vice President Jan Long at 6:00pm. A Prayer was said by Pastor Rachel before members enjoyed the wonderful food Bill Pickard provided tonight. After the meal introductions were made around the table. Prayer Requests taken and Pastor Rachel led members in prayer. Dwelling in the Word by Vicar Olga-Maria, using the scripture from Luke 1:39-56. November Meeting Minutes: Motion to approve the minutes; by Cathy, second by Jeremy. Approved.

Strategic Plan Update:

Accessibility: Committee met last Wednesday. The surveys have been done but we are still waiting for the final reports to share with the architects. They plan to work with the architects after Christmas when the reports will be available.

Biggerstaff: They will meet January 10th and are looking forward to phase 2 with an onsite meeting with the landscape architect.

Eldercare: The committee will meet after the first of the year.

Families with Youth and Children: A Friday date night is currently being planned.

Stewardship for all Seasons: Jan reported that 68 commitment cards (\$45,953) have been received so far. Fifty of those show an increase in giving for 2024. Fourteen cards have been turned in which are eligible for a \$100 each match from a generous member - this will continue until December 31st (up to \$2,000. match eligible). Vicar Olga-Maria thanked the Stewardship team and those who gave Temple Talks, to make this possible.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Rachel thanked all those who sent cards, prayers and well wishes after her recent surgery and a big thanks to Vicar Olga-Maria and other members who filled in while she was off.

Vicar's Report: Vicar Olga-Maria reported she spent time recently with the Knitters and Crocheters and has enjoyed connecting with the various groups at St. John's. Her Intern Project will focus on issues/changes members have experienced as a result of Covid and the subsequent shut downs and change in worship experience. She plans to record oral narratives and written statements.

Treasurer's Report: During the month of November income was less than expenses by \$2,574. YTD income is still over expenses by \$5,394. Expenses were over budget for the month by \$2,972, due to new windows needed for the parsonage. YTD income remains under budget at this point by \$10,150. Mark reminded everyone that the special red offering envelope is for your Christmas donation. General Fund checking account balance is \$43,671.

Committee Chairs submitted their reports by email to the Council for review prior to the meeting. Sandra Pruitt (Worship & Music) attended the recent "Wreaths Across America" presentation and found it very moving and thanked all involved. New Business: Jan reported the Executive and Finance Committees reviewed staff bonuses which will be distributed shortly. Council Retreat date for January will be selected with members input. January 7, 2024, Council will be installed at both services and outgoing members will be recognized for their service as well. Next Council Meeting is January 15, 2023 at 6:00pm.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00pm by praying the Lord's Prayer.



FROM JOAN-

Thank you so much for all the wonderful cards, gifts, food and meals you shared with me this holiday season. You added a ray of sunshine to what could have been a sad and lonely time. You are all such a blessing in my life. I pray a happy, healthy and "mission filled" New Year for all of you.