

St. Mark's Lutheran Church

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New website

Our webpage is up and running.
Check it out. The address is
www.stmarkslutheranmiddleburgh.com

**Please have your annual reports
to the ladies by January 10 so
they have time to prepare the
report for the annual meeting.**

Prayer Ministry

You are invited to participate in a new prayer ministry. We meet on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. in St. Mark's sanctuary. If you are unable to attend and have a prayer request you would like lifted, please contact the church office or feel free to place your written request in the prayer box located in narthex.

Council has adopted a new policy for anyone that wishes to use the fellowship hall for an event. Going forward all requests are to be sent to Lisa Bartholomew. She can be reached at 231-9494. She will handle all the arrangements, scheduling, paperwork and payments. This will allow for a one point person contact rather than having too many people involved.

Prayers Concerns

Please lift the following people up in prayer:

Ruth	Bo	Brenda
George	Austin	Bob
Skeeter	Carol	

Prayers for our new pastor

Upcoming Events

**Jan 9 - Men's prayer breakfast
9:00**
Jan 12 - Council meeting 6:00
Jan 20 - Net dinner 5:00
**Jan 31 - Annual meeting - pot
luck lunch**

Speakers for our upcoming
January services:

Jan 3 - TBD
Jan 10 - Tom Houghtaling
Jan 17: ~~TBD~~ Chris Cash
Jan 24: Ron Lower
Jan 31: TBD

If you are going to be working with any of the youth this is the website to do the mandated reporter training:

www.nysmandatedreporter.org

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Happy Days !!!!!

Birthdays: January

January 4 - Brenda Varella

January 5 - Tom Nesbitt

January 18 - Ted Langenbahn and
Morgan Gordon

January 20 - Lisa Bartholomew

January 21 - Bre Palmatier

January 24 - Patti Turner

Anniversaries: January

January 2 - Carolyn and Gene
Wyckoff
Dennis and Carrie
Foland

January 8 - Chris and Beth Cash

January 17 - Tom and Sharon
Nesbitt

**Mark your calendars:
St. Mark's annual
congregational meeting
will be held January 31
following the worship
service. We will have a
pot luck lunch so please
bring a dish to pass.
Meeting will start
following lunch.**

**Zumba Classes will be
Thursdays at 9:30 in the
fellowship hall. Check the
calendar in the hallway for
more details.**

**Did you know St. Mark's offers
the following opportunities for
you and your family to
participate?**

Phoebes - every Monday from 9-2 PM

Youth Sunday School - Held during
the worship service message

Adult Sunday School - Sundays from
9:15 - 10 AM

Prayer Ministry - every Thursday
night beginning at 5:30 PM

After School Program - every day
from 3 - 5:30 PM following school
schedule

Men's Prayer breakfast - second
Saturday of each month

Youth Group - every third Saturday of
the month at 6:30 PM

Creative Women's Ministry - Fourth
Friday of the month at 7 PM

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Servers for January

January 3:

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - Denise/Kaleb
Reader - John Cronin
Greeter - Maurice
Prayer - Gene
Counter - Debbie

January 10:

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - Debbie P./Marie
Reader - Nanette
Greeter - Pat
Prayer - Beth
Counter - Diane

January 17:

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - Dennis/Pat
Reader - Ethel
Greeter - Janet
Prayer - Ginny
Counter - Carrie

January 24:

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - Sharon/Tom
Reader - Ted
Greeter - Debbie P.
Prayer - Ted
Counter - Debbie

January 31:

Acolyte - TBD
Ushers - John/Gabby
Reader - Sharon
Greeter - Debbie B.
Prayer - Chris
Counter - Diane

Bishop's Christmas Message

Dearest followers of Jesus in the North American Lutheran Church:

Grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ with the words, "Christ is born! Oh, come, let us adore Him," I offer you a brief reflection on a subject that has preoccupied my thinking during the entire Advent season.

This persistent thought began with a devotional meditation based on Luke 2:9: "An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified." Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the following words of reflection based on that text.

We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the world draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us. The coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for every one who has a conscience.

His words indicted my conscience and caused me to pause and question my own spiritual life and conviction. **"We are indifferent to the message..."**

When I was asked to write an article about the greatest threat to the Church today, Bonhoeffer's thought shaped my response. The Church seems to be under assault from within and without. The lack of Biblical and Confessional preaching and teaching, combined with a lack of interdependent mutually-accountable relationships and institutional preservation, has undermined our capacity for genuine outreach, evangelism and mission. Many within the community of faith are content to attend occasionally and to give sparingly.



The Annunciation to the Shepherds by Abraham Hondius (1631-1691), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. (From Wikimedia Commons)

In addition, our world promotes relativistic truth, and decides moral issues based on popularity and tolerance rather than Biblical mandates and transcendent truth. Freedom of religion is being relegated to freedom to worship. Traditional concepts of marriage and family are being redefined. Throughout the world Christians are being persecuted, displaced and murdered by the terrorist acts of ISIS.

Yet not one of those factors — or all of them together — are a greater threat than the one that Bonhoeffer suggests. The greatest threat to the Body of Christ is our indifference — our apathy!

It is so easy to blame others and retreat in fear but our own indifference or apathy is slowly eroding,

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weakening and undermining the faith of individual believers, as well as the capacity of congregations for vibrant ministry and faithful mission.

Apathy or indifference is manifest in several important ways: the loss of zeal, the loss of interest in the spiritual realm, the increasing secularization of both the individual Christian and the local congregation, and a hardness of heart, a state where our excuses replace faithful responses.

The Scripture has a harsh word about indifference and apathy. *"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth"* (Revelation 3:16). These words of warning are so severe because indifference is incompatible with love! It is impossible to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and remain indifferent toward Christ. We cannot love others with the love of Christ and remain apathetic toward them. We cannot say we love Christ or others and remain unmoved and unchanged in our attitude and disposition.

Elie Wiesel is a Jewish Holocaust survivor and a Nobel Laureate. Some years ago I heard him speak and will never forget several quotes from his message. He said, *"The opposite of love is not hate; it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness; it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy; it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death; it's indifference."*

When asked about whether he believed an individual could really make any difference in the midst of overwhelming problems, Wiesel said, "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. The Talmud tells us that by saving a single human being, a person can save the world."

Every act of love, every expression of encouragement, every word that proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes a difference. Every disciple of Jesus possesses power in and through Christ, the capacity to make such a difference. The Christian life has always been more than the struggle to survive. It is investing our life in Christ in the lives of others. Living and loving with the certainty that the only life worth living is a life of sacrifice and service for the sake of the ministry and mission of Christ.

We are not indifferent or apathetic about everything. We demonstrate our passion in concerts, in theaters, in football stadiums and basketball arenas, in celebrations with friends and co-workers. I believe the world is longing to experience passionate Christians who demonstrate a profound love for Jesus and for those to whom He has sent us with the Gospel. Love is always passionate toward the beloved. It is this passionate love that Christ has for us that is poured out on the cross for our redemption and salvation. What wondrous love is this! It is a love that compels us to love Christ and our neighbor as our self.

This wondrous love born in a cattle stall and laid in a manger is dispelling my indifference to my own apathy!

"What Wondrous Love is This," while not a Christmas hymn, has brought me consolation and hope.

What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul....

When I was sinking down ... Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb, Who is the Great I Am, while millions join the theme, I will sing...

And when in death I'm free, I'll sing His Love for Me ... through all eternity...

We cannot simply strive to change our own attitude and disposition. We cannot overcome our apathy or indifference by simply willing it. This Wondrous Love — this One who gave His life for my redemption and salvation, who gives me life that is eternal — is the One who transforms my indifference to passionate love toward Him and all those He came to save.

May the celebration of His birth, the wonder of His love, and the presence of Immanuel — God with us — overcome every manifestation of our indifference and transform it into manifestations of our passionate love for Christ and our neighbor. In the name of the One who comes to save us from our sin,

Bishop John F. Bradosky