



# St. Mark's Lutheran Church

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## From Pastor Rodney

See Pastor's report.

E-mail: [Pastorrodney@midtel.net](mailto:Pastorrodney@midtel.net)

Pastor office hours will be  
Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 to  
1:30 and every other Saturday. Please  
call ahead to be sure he is in.

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## New website

Our new webpage is up and running.  
Check it out. It is awesome! Thank  
you Angela. The address is  
[www.stmarkslutheran  
middleburgh.com](http://www.stmarkslutheranmiddleburgh.com)

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## Looking for new members!

If you would like to become a  
member of St. Mark's Lutheran  
Church please speak with Pastor  
Rodney.

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Ongoing bottle and can drive.  
Please leave **clean** bottles and cans by  
the garage door. Proceeds will be  
used for the mortgage.

## Prayers Concerns

Please lift the following people up in  
prayer:

Debbie Brigadier  
Debbie Hagadorn  
Liz VanDyke  
John Palmer (Conesville Church)

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## Upcoming Events

Jan 17 - Council meeting 1:00

Jan 17 - Youth Group 6:30-8:30

Jan 25 - Annual meeting

Jan 28 - NET dinner at St. Mark's

Every Thursday 6:00 - Prayer  
meeting in sanctuary.

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Annual Meeting January 25th  
following the worship service.  
Please bring a dish to pass.

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Vision Day - Saturday,  
January 31st - 10:00 a.m. in  
St. Mark's fellowship hall.

## **New Year's Message.**

“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” ( Luke 2:15-20).

It's hard to believe that another year is over and we are beginning a brand new year, 2015. For many we are left asking the question, “ Where did the time go?” With that in mind, it's important for us to note that time moves on, even when we refuse to move on. This is a perfect time for us to reflect upon all the things that happened to us this year. There are many joyful things I am sure happened moments of celebration, moments where we were thanking God for his mercy and love. But in the same way, I am sure there were sad moments, moments that occurred that put our faith to the test, but in all those moments God was with us.

As your pastor, I want to thank you for your faith in Jesus, that you demonstrate by your love for God and his church. I pray that you will be blessed this New Year. Please know, that God is always a prayer away, and He is waiting to hear from you. Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has taken place, Jesus is born, may we keep him alive in our hearts and our home. Merry Christmas and a Blessed 2015. May this be your year, for a breakthrough, may this be the year, that you answer God's call and be faithful to what he is telling you. Be safe, be blessed be happy. Merry Christmas!

Submitted

Pr. Royan Rodney

Pr. Royan Rodney



# St. Mark's Lutheran Church

## Servers for Jan

### January 4:

Acolyte - Morgan/Madison  
Ushers - Jeremy/Kobe  
Reader - Marie  
Greeter - Jessie  
Prayer - Beth  
Counter - Diane

### January 11:

Acolyte - Hannah  
Ushers - Maurice/Ginny  
Reader - Ethel  
Greeter - Debbie  
Prayer - Gene  
Counter - Carrie

### January 18:

Acolyte - Dylan  
Ushers - Nikki/Albert  
Reader - Sharon  
Greeter - Pat  
Prayer - Ginny  
Counter - Debbie

### January 24:

Acolyte - Logan  
Ushers - Pat/Dennis F.  
Reader - Lori  
Greeter - Janet  
Prayer - Chris  
Counter - Diane

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## Happy Days !!!!!

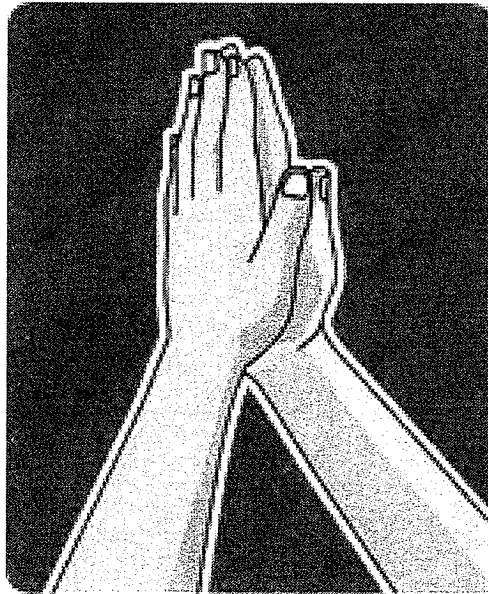
### Birthdays: January

January 4 - Brenda Varella  
January 5 - Tom Nesbitt  
January 18 - Ted Langenbahn and  
Morgan Gordon  
January 20 - Lisa Bartholomew  
January 21 - Breanna Palmatier  
January 22 - Pastor Rodney  
January 24 - Patti Turner

### Anniversaries: January

January 2 - Carolyn and Gene  
Wyckoff  
Dennis and Carrie  
Foland  
January 8 - Beth and Chris Cash  
January 17 - Sharon and Tom Nesbitt

# PRAYER MINISTRY



**on Thursday evenings**

**at 6:00 p.m.**

**in St. Mark's Sanctuary**

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**"Thinking of You" Card Shower** for Liz VanDyke and Debbie Hagadorn. Please take a few moments to send them a card to let them know they are missed by our congregation. Please keep them in your prayers as well. Their addresses are:

**Liz VanDyke  
Ellis Residential and Rehabilitation Center  
Room #305  
600 McClellan Street  
Schenectady, NY 12304**

**Debbie Hagadorn  
3473 State Rte 30  
Fultonham, NY 12071**

# Bishop's Report to the Convocation

***Following is the text of Bishop John Bradosky's oral report to the 2014 NALC Convocation.***

I count it an honor and privilege to serve as your Bishop and am grateful for the trust you have placed in me, thankful for this opportunity. I have continued to learn from our pastors, lay leaders, Deans, staff, former bishops and especially Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring. His encouragement, experience and generous sharing of his time and expertise have been a precious gift to me and to you.

Gifted individuals who are willing to offer their wisdom and sound advice surround me. The challenges and opportunities we face require a consultative and collegial style for effectiveness. In spite of such support, I am certain that I have made many mistakes throughout this past year, and I ask for your forgiveness, understanding and patience. I continue to trust in Christ, rely on Christ, follow Christ, and, in all I say and do, attempt to honor Christ.

My written report is included in your Convocation materials. The written report focuses on the past year. My hope in these few moments is to focus our attention on the future. The past has been difficult. The future is filled with hope and tremendous possibilities, but none of it is easy.

Over these past several years I have listened to the stories of our pastors and congregational leaders. They have shared their painful and grief-filled journeys. For some the loss was intense but immediate. For others it was as if they were a part of a long hospice experience. For all of us death is a part of life, an enemy, but a defeated enemy, through Christ. Yet, the experience of grief can overwhelm us. It drains us of energy and strength. It can consume our life. Grief can destroy relationships and undermine our sense of community, isolating us from one another. It can take away our sense of purpose and direction for living.

I see two clear paths for coping with the process of grieving. Our grief will either turn us in on ourselves and become destructive or it will be redeemed by Christ, drawing us closer to Him and to one another, filling us with compassionate love for others.



## *From the Bishop*

**Bishop John Bradosky**

I am certain there are many of you here today who have experienced the kind of grief that makes your hopes seem hopeless, your priorities irrelevant, your sense of purpose pointless, your dreams a nightmare, your future consumed with surviving the next minute, and all the things you thought you could count on in this life have vanished. God seemed distant and uncaring. Times when the truth doesn't reach us.

Kristi and I experienced that kind of grief at the death of our six-year old son, Joshua. It all happened in a moment when the emergency room doctor walked into the small family conference room and said "I'm sorry, we tried, but there was nothing we could do." It was all gone, my son and this life I had loved. The grief, the pain, the loss overwhelmed us.

Following our son's death my grief was all consuming and my depression so deep I could barely get out of bed. On one occasion I remember lying on my bed praying in my anger, "Lord, I am not moving from this bed until you show me what it is you want me to do. What is the meaning of life in such a hostile world? What is the purpose?" A few minutes later our four-year-old daughter, Jessica, came into the room and said, "Daddy, I want you to play with me." I said, "Not now, Jessie, Daddy's praying." I continued to pray, "Lord, if you want me to get out of bed, you had better show me what you want me to do because I'm not moving until then."

Again, Jessica returned to my room with the same request, "Daddy, I want you to play with me, and I want you to play with me right now." This time she grabbed my hand and pulled my arm. It just so

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happened that because of the way I was laying in the bed when she pulled my arm, I fell out of the bed onto the floor, flat on my face. This was the first redemptive moment in my grief. There was no doubt Jesus was answering my prayer by placing before me my daughter who needed me to invest in her life. What I was mourning was my inability to invest any more of myself in my son. The Lord said, "Don't you see this life in front of you needs you to invest in her?" And I did.

The redemptive love of Christ in the midst of my grief taught me that the only things with eternal significance in this life are relationships with Christ through faith and those He has given us to love and care for in Christian community. Everything else, Jesus said, is dust and rust. Through the grief Jesus began to direct my life to the pursuit of discipleship.

The Lord placed a man in my life who began to disciple me by helping me to focus on Jesus — the Jesus revealed in His Word. His name was S. James Kocsis. He was the first person to comfort us in the emergency room. Everyone wants to give you books and devotional material when you are grieving, but I told Jim I wanted to hear from Jesus. He told me Jesus was willing if I was ready. I said, "If he is willing why don't I hear from Him?" Jim asked me how much time I spent in the Word. I said, "A lot, after all I am a pastor in the Church." He said, "Well, I would like you to take a little time evaluating how much time you spend in the Word. I want you to keep track of everything you read including the Bible." The next day he showed up with a logbook, and said he would be back in touch in two weeks. I followed his directions and at the end of a week I concluded it must have just been a bad week. I wanted to rip out that log but I knew he would know, so I left in the truth it revealed. I spent more time reading the newspaper than I did reading the Word. The real shock was that the second week was not much different.

Jim helped me to change the way I read the Scriptures. Instead of reading them as though I was the authority, I read them as though I was seated at the feet of Jesus along with the other disciples listening intently to his every word. Jim showed up every other week to hold me accountable and to pray with me. There were times when I tried to hide

from him in my own office and he would sit and wait until I was ready to talk. I preached his funeral and confessed that were it not for his love and willingness to invest himself in my life I would not have made it through my grief.

In the course of our time together not only did I hear from Jesus but His Word began to transform my worldview. I went back and found things in Luther regarding the truth and wonder of the Word that I had not noticed before.

"The Bible alone is to be trusted because it is through itself most certain, most easily accessible, comprehensible, interpreting itself, proving, judging all the words of all." All leaders must subordinate themselves to its witness. "The pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven — these should not be masters, judges, arbiters but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture." Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word you will truly be my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (*John 8:31-32*).

This journey into discipleship began 28 years ago. I have never been less focused nor could I be more focused on this singular command by Jesus, this singular mission of His Church, and this singular commitment of my life of following Jesus, being and making disciples.

We are embarking on a strategy of leading an entire denomination of congregations to become disciple-making congregations. This requires a major cultural shift in the life of all of our congregations and a major change in values that is time consuming and anything but easy. However, nothing could be more important to the mission of the Church nor more essential in the redemptive process of renewal and reformation in the Church in North America or the rest of the world.

I know some are suggesting that moving in this direction will increase our grief and involve us in more change. You are correct, and there is no way around it, only a way through it that is redemptive. Some want to lick their wounds and be content to stay where they are, but I believe the Lord has more in mind for us. Transformation in the direction of discipleship is not life-destroying but life-giving.

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During our time together you are going to hear from both pastors and lay-leaders who are advancing this strategic initiative, growing stronger in Christ and even more focused on the true mission of the Church, the Great Commission.

I would also call your attention to our Scriptural text for this Convocation: "Putting on the full armor of God." The ministry of our congregations is to equip the saints for ministry, to help them put on the full armor of God in Christ Jesus. This is to put on Christ. That is the heart of discipleship. Putting on armor is a way of preparing for battle. It is not passive but active. It is not a matter of hiding but engaging. It is not a matter of retreating but advancing. It is not a matter of playing it safe but risking.

For those who fear losing our Lutheran identity, there is nothing in this strategy that even hints at compromising our theology or our heritage. In fact, in our work with CDM (The Navigators' Church Discipleship Ministry) our staff was welcomed at their national conference. I offered two keynote addresses. One of the most popular workshops was the one we offered on Lutheranism 101. We provided the worship for Sunday morning right out of *Lutheran Book of Worship Setting Two* with Communion.

We have been blessed by this partnership, and we are a blessing to them. My challenge to you is to give up this concept or value that all we need is a defensive strategy in order to remain authentically Lutheran. Instead of trying to protect our Lutheran identity and heritage, we need to use it fully by sharing it with a world that desperately needs to know Jesus Christ and join us as His faithful disciples.

The image that comes to mind when I hear these concerns is this one: Imagine two people pushing on the Rock of Gibraltar, each with a toothpick in their mouth. One is pushing with the toothpick from one end and the other with the toothpick pushing from the other end of the rock. Each thinks the other is trying to destroy it while they are trying to defend it. Both efforts are equally fruitless.

The Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are immovable. Nothing can destroy them. They



***Bishop John Bradosky at 2014 NALC Convocation.***

are eternal and will outlast all of creation. The mission before us is living it, as disciples of Jesus, proclaiming it in word and deed and leading others into that same life-giving relationship with Jesus. Discipleship is about living our faith boldly and sharing it broadly, until the whole world knows.

We have important work to do within our individual congregations so that they become centers for nurturing and training disciples. Discipleship requires community. God designed us from the very beginning of creation for community with Christ and one another. God gave us the gift of marriage and family and His Body, the Church. Yet people live in isolation in our culture, searching and longing for community.

Think of all the social media sites. Think of all the internet sites for dating and connecting people. My youngest daughter, Jordan, reminded me that in spite of all her friends on Facebook, they really don't know her and she doesn't know them. She longs for those whom she can call on and be with in person, meeting face-to-face. We need to take advantage of the opportunity to meet the needs of our culture with Christian community — disciple-making community which is the nature of community in Christ.

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Some of you know by now that our son Jacob and his wife, Melissa, received the tragic news that their baby, Reagan Elizabeth, is not viable outside of the womb. The special ultrasound confirmed that she has a rare and life-threatening defect called Pentalogy of Cantrell. This little life that has been growing and kicking, whose heart is beating strong, has no rib cage or sternum, no diaphragm or abdominal wall. Many of her internal organs are free-floating. A one-in-6 million occurrence, a 60-70 percent chance she will die in utero and no chance for survival beyond the womb.

Melissa wrote, "It is difficult to describe those first moments and days following that news. We have been more heartbroken and grief stricken than we could ever imagine. We were in no way prepared or expecting that news. We were given several options including termination of the pregnancy, but we both feel strongly that it is not our call to make the decision when Reagan will go to her eternal home. So, for now, we will enjoy her every kick, the sound of her heartbeat and the great joy and responsibility that comes in carrying a precious life. We do not know specifics on how long she may be with us, but each day we will savor this journey even as we continue to grieve. We take great comfort knowing one day she will be restored to full health in heaven and have the best care there. We will meet again and get to see our beautiful daughter in her perfect, heavenly home. We have been so blessed by the support and prayers of many. We could not ask for more caring, wise parents; wonderful family, an incredible church and amazing friends to hold us near and walk with us through this experience. We are able to continue living with hope and expectation solely because of Jesus and His promises."

They long for community to receive and to give, to be prayed for, and to encourage others even in the midst of their grief. Even the anticipation of the loss of that connection with their daughter causes grief and the only solution for dealing with it is to enhance that connection with Christ and one another. So Kristi and I went to be with them to help them talk about their experience, to hold them, cry with them, and pray with them, to remind them they are not alone. Gathering for worship together, the hymns opened another round of tears as the words touched the depths of our faith and the tragedy of

this experience. The Word read and proclaimed brought hope and promise. The prayers and fellowship brought peace and renewed connection.

We need communities that can nurture and train people to walk along side of people like Jacob and Melissa.

I can tell you that what I have learned in my time spent with Dennis Blevins, my personal coach and our staff coach, was very helpful in dealing with Jacob and Melissa. I have learned to ask more questions and give fewer answers, to rely on the Word, prayer and understanding their pain and struggle and to help them see clearly God's will for them and not my will.

Imagine a congregation of disciples trained and ready to walk along side of hurting people in your surrounding area, people who are ready to develop relationships, build trust, offer compassion and care, share their faith in word and deed, open the Scriptures, pray with others and help them to experience the loving presence of Jesus, His promises, His forgiveness, and new life in Him. That is what disciples are ready to do: invest themselves in the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ and His mission.

The internal mission of the Church is the same as the external mission of the Church: to make disciples. You can't make disciples unless you have a community committed to nurturing disciples.

This is why the work of CDM is so very important. Integrating disciple-making into the DNA of the local congregation is the best way to insure the healthy development of disciples and the effective mission of the Church in reaching out to others not only to do good but to do the greatest good, to lead those we reach to Christ and to make them effective disciples, capable of discipling others.

Dennis reminded me that the focus on discipleship has parallels in the game of golf. It requires a variety of clubs — woods, irons and a putter. The woods represent the large-group activities, worship, fellowship, events and celebrations. The irons are programs and small groups, but the putter is the club that is used most frequently, and this

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represents life-to-life relationships. This is the place most of us live, next to a neighbor, co-worker, sports fan, family member, those with whom we share a hobby or interest, gym membership, etc. The problem is that we have lost our ability to put! Image if every member of your congregation was ready to engage in life-to-life relationships and share their faith, ready to disciple all those we just named. That is the nature of our intention, what it means to create disciple-making congregations.

It all begins by applying it in your own life. Let me conclude with one more story. A month ago, Casey — a younger person I baptized, confirmed, married and baptized his two children — called me. We haven't seen each other except for a brief visit in several years. In tears he began talking about what a failure he has been in his marriage and as a father. As I listened and questioned him, he told me that his son, James, came to him after seeing advertisements about the movie Noah and said, "Dad, who is Noah?" After James left the room, Casey said he could not get his question out of his mind. "How could he know? He has not been in church for years. He's never been to Sunday School and does not have his own Bible. He has never seen me read my Bible, and I've never really talked about my faith with him." He went on and said, "Maybe this is what is wrong with our marriage. Tanya and I have grown apart and are not able to communicate effectively. We never pray together, never ask about God's will in any of our decisions. I feel lost and abandoned by God."

So we talked about how God can manifest His presence. It is not always a fun and joy-filled experience initially. I asked Casey many questions and our conversation went even deeper. And he asked, "John, what should I do?" And in the perfect form of my coach, I said, "Casey, God has been speaking to you through this experience. What do you think God is encouraging you to do?" As he talked about what he was going to do, I made a list. After he finished what became a rather long list, he picked five of the most important things he thought he could accomplish in the next two weeks. We clarified what he was going to do, and I promised him that in two weeks I would call him to check in on how he was doing. I prayed for him, and we ended the conversation.

Two weeks later I called and left a message and wondered if he would call back. The next day he called. He had completed four of the five items on his list. They have started a family Bible reading and discussion time. It is only once a week, but it is a start. They have found a new church home and both of their children are involved in youth group and Sunday School. He and Tanya have started praying together. They are all busy people, but they committed to be together for one family meal, conversation and time together each week. The next item on his list was to get a good Bible and start reading and studying it. Casey was able to select several more goals including one that I offered, to lead him through the book *Growing in Christ*. We have our next session together next week. I called him to check in and wished him a blessed Easter celebration, and he assured me this was going to be the best Easter ever for his family. Casey has a long way to go but he is already far beyond that first conversation. The transformation is under way, and I am continuing to invest myself in Casey's life. That is what coaching is all about.

Being coached is what makes me more effective in coaching others. So I believe that this is precisely what Jesus had in mind from the beginning. It is the nature of His Great Commission, our mission. Only those willing to be discipled can disciple others. That is how our faith in Jesus Christ is passed on and how faith is nurtured and grows to full maturity. Nothing is more important and nothing more exciting.

No, this is not the easiest path, but it is His path, His command, and His mission. It is hard but exciting, demanding but life-giving, challenging but faith-strengthening. Put on the full armor of God, put on Christ and follow Him into the most important battle of all, investing the love He has given you in the lives of those who do not know Him or have yet begun to follow Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus) ... out of the realm of the finite into the realm of infinite possibilities in Jesus (which is the one liberating reality)" (from *The Cost of Discipleship*).

So may it be! Amen.