

January 2023



Breeze Thru the Leaves

Tree of Life Lutheran Church

“The Wonderful Exchange”

Recently I had a conversation with somebody who was struggling. It is a conversation that I have had more than a few times as a pastor. A tough situation is occurring. There is pain and confusion in the midst of an overwhelming trial. Our frail, human minds can sometimes go to dark places. This beloved child of God remarked to me in the midst of their pain and in reflecting on their own mortality, “I hope that Jesus is pleased with me”.

I want to repeat to you what I repeated to this dear child of God in the midst of their wondering....

Child of God, God is pleased with you because of Jesus. In your baptism Jesus placed all of His righteousness upon you and He paid the price for all of your sin on the cross. You are forgiven and redeemed. God is pleased with you in Christ. When God looks at you now, all He sees is Jesus and His perfection. You have been made righteous completely by what God did for you in sending His Son to die for you and me. That’s why they call it amazing grace!

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”*.

Martin Luther referred to this as the wonderful exchange when he said, “That is the mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ’s and the righteousness of Christ not Christ’s but ours. He has emptied Himself of His righteousness that He might clothe us with it, and fill us with it. And He has taken our evils upon Himself that He might deliver us from them.” (Werke, 1883)

The Apostle Paul writes about it in God’s word when he says, ““But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” -Romans 3:21-22a

Again Luther wrote of this wonderful exchange in a letter to a perplexed and disturbed friend, “Thou hast taken upon thyself what is mine and hast given to me what is thine. Thou has taken upon thyself



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You can reach Pastor Mark Couser at 214-908-0242 or mark.couser@gmail.com

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A Word from the Pastor, *continued*

what thou wast not and hast given to me what I was not." ("Instructions to the Perplexed and Doubting, To George Spenlein, April 8, 1516")

So rest in this reality, child of God. Continue to confess your sins to God and know that you are forgiven fully. You are completely covered by the blood of your perfect Savior, Jesus. You are righteous forever, not because of anything you've done but completely and wholly by what Jesus has already won for you and me on the cross. You are holy in Christ's sight. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus....and that is simply amazing! Heaven is ours forever.

Men's Breakfast

Men's Breakfast
Saturday, January 14th
8:00 am at TOL

Come enjoy fellowship, Bible study and potluck style breakfast. Talk to Bob Green or Pastor Mark for more information.



Dear Tree of Life Family,

Thank you so much for your generosity and kindness at Christmas and throughout the year! We are so thankful for all of you, each and every day, but especially at Christmas!

We are extremely blessed to serve the Lord with you at Tree of Life! May we continue to work together in 2023 to serve our community and share the joy, love and peace of Jesus Christ with all we meet!

In Christ,

Pastor Mark, Kara, Andrew & Allie

From the Grulkes—Bible Translators

Merry Christmas to all of you! We hope that you have had a wonderful Christmas, a chance to celebrate the birth of our Savior, to gather with family and friends, and to prepare for the beginning of the new year. We have enjoyed our chance to see family, rest and recover; we are looking forward to being back home in Botswana in just a few more days. We think that God has some exciting things in store for 2023 and we can't wait to see what happens in the new year.

We are so thankful for your prayers and support throughout this year. 2022 was a challenging year in many ways and having you all on our side has been an incredible blessing. 2023 looks to be a year of lots of opportunities and we hope to keep sharing this adventure with you for many years to come.

Keep us in your prayers:

- Thanksgiving for a restful and restorative home assignment
- For safe travels back to Botswana
- For wisdom and discernment, as we consider middle and high school education options for Mary Jane, followed by the other kids
- For the Shekgalagari community, that they would continue to persevere in their careful proofreading work
- For the Wayeyi community, that they would engage deeply with their newly translated scriptures
- That God would continue to provide for our ministry through partners like you.



Worship & Bible Study Opportunities at TOL

Please join us for worship – Sundays at 10:30 am in person and on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/TreeofLifeLCMS/>

The Adult Bible Class

Sundays at 9 am in person in E 7/8 and via Zoom.
"A Study on 1 Peter"

The Thursday Morning Bible Class

10 am in person in the Narthex and via Zoom.
The book of Galatians

All are welcome to join these classes in person or on Zoom. Please contact the church office for the Zoom link.

Children's Sunday School

Elementary students meet at 9 am in E3.
Youth meet at 9 am in E5

MEN'S BREAKFAST

All men are invited to this potluck style breakfast with fellowship and Bible study in the Narthex at 8 AM on the second Saturday of each month. Please contact Bob Green for more information

LADIES FELLOWSHIP

The Ladies' Fellowship meets monthly for a variety of activities and events. For more information about the group and what is planned, contact Megan Kortze or the church office.

Offerings and Attendance for November

DATE	SS	10:30	General Offering	Growing To the Future	Mission Tithe
11/6/22	NA	84	\$4,825	\$500	\$483
11/13/22	NA	80	\$6,153	\$500	\$615
11/20/22	NA	64	\$4,295	\$500	\$430
11/27/22	NA	63	\$7,022	\$100	\$702
Total for November			\$22,295*	\$1,600	\$2,230

*Planned for in September—\$21,942

Offerings and Attendance for December

DATE	SS	10:30	General Offering	Growing To the Future	Mission Tithe
12/4/22	NA	127	\$9,385	\$0	\$939
12/11/22	NA	77	\$6,741	\$0	\$674
12/18/22	NA	72	\$13,500	\$0	\$1,350
12/24/22	NA	118	NA	NA	NA
12/25/22	NA	41	\$3,957	\$0	\$396
Total for December			\$33,583*	\$0	\$3,359

*Planned for in December—\$21,942

General Offering	Planned Offering
\$289,989	\$263,304

Board of Youth

The Tree of Life youth group has grown in the last year. This is a wonderful blessing! Amanda Maddox, chairman of the Board of Youth, is looking for fresh ideas for the youth group in 2023. If you have a heart for youth and are interested in being part of the board of youth, please contact Amanda.



The Cookie Walk on December 11th raised \$654! Thank you everyone who helped bake the cookies and treats for this event. It would not have been possible without your help. Thank you to the Pankoniens for the Thrivent Action Team gift card to fund this event. Thank you volunteers (Lewis family, Annabelle Maddox, Pastor) for setup and clean up. Thank you to everyone that purchased tins at this fundraiser for the National Youth Gathering. In addition to the sales, 10 tins were filled for Pastor Mark to take on his home visits this week and 3 tins were filled for the last Wednesday night Advent service.



Not sure what to do with all the Christmas cards you received? Donate them to Tree of Life. We have a crafty member who works magic with them! You can drop them by the office any time. Thank you!

Angel Tree

Thank you to everyone who donated to the Angel Tree. We collected 64 \$10 Walmart cards for Good Samaritans of Garland. They use the cards year-round to assist their clients. Thank you so much for your generosity!



Thursday, January 19th
Join us for a potluck lunch at noon and then quilting after that. No sewing skill required.
For more information contact Lisa Theriot.



Tree of Life Lutheran Church is signed up as an AmazonSmile charitable organization. When you shop through AmazonSmile you can generate donations for Tree of Life! Shop at smile.amazon.com and Amazon will donate 0.5% of eligible purchases to TOL—no fees, no extra cost.



Would you like to raise money for the ministry of Tree of Life while you do your everyday shopping? It's easy with our RaiseRight gift card program! RaiseRight is not just physical gift cards. When you download the RaiseRight app, you have gift cards at your fingertips. And every purchase helps TOL. Here is a link to a short video to walk you through the setup:

<https://youtu.be/c-v65F0xr2c>

To see all the brands available go to:
<https://www.raiseright.com/brands>

See Kara Jander for more information.

Gift card order day is **January 15th** if you would like to order physical gift cards.

From the Seminary

Dear Tree of Life Lutheran Church,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I cannot believe that we are already to the end of 2022. Every time that I get to the end of a year, I find myself reflecting on the journey that the Lord has led me down the previous year. This last year was one that brought many joys into my life! The greatest of these was the birth of our daughter, Naomi. She is four months old and starting to smile and giggle all the time. She is such a joy for the both of us! We can't wait to discover more of her personality over this upcoming year.

This past year also brought the joy of concluding my Vicarage in Woodbury, Minnesota and starting my fourth and final year at Concordia Seminary—St. Louis. I had an incredible Vicarage in Woodbury and I miss the relationships we developed there dearly. However the Lord has blessed us with a wonderful final year at the Seminary. It has been a joy to be back with old friends and reconnect with those relationships. Also, despite the weariness of entering another year of school, I have really enjoyed the classes that I have had. I think this is in part because I now have the concrete experience of Vicarage to apply the things that I am learning to. The Lord is using this year to continue to refine and mold me into the pastor that he wants me to be.

My wife, Kali, and I are getting more and more excited for Call Day that will be coming in April. We have enjoyed spending nights browsing through Zillow and looking at homes in different parts of the country. While the journey that we have been on together has been great, we both are longing for the day where we can settle down in a home and start building lifelong relationships that aren't temporary anymore. Kali has dreams of growing a garden and teaching our daughter Naomi all the ticks of the trade. However, in this time of waiting, we are both loving our time with Naomi as a new little family.

I continually praise God for your generosity that has allowed me to follow this path. I cannot express the joy that it is to not have to worry

about the financial side of following God's calling to be a pastor. Your generosity is not only blessing me, but many future pastors in the years to come. I thank God for your generosity and I pray that the Lord would continue to use your generosity to bless others and advance the Gospel into a world that so desperately needs it.

I pray that you would have a wonderful Christmas celebration as we live in the joy of God sending his Son on our behalf. Praise be to God!

In Christ,

Daniel Langewisch



Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you for your generous gift of **\$896.00** to Concordia Seminary! Your partnership blesses and encourages all of us here at the Seminary, especially our students as they prepare for their future ministry of boldly proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Our seminarians are truly inspiring in their passion and commitment to sharing the Gospel. They study diligently, meet the challenges of their coursework and increase their theological knowledge each and every day. They are keenly aware that donations from caring Christians like you help make their education here possible. I see firsthand how grateful and encouraged our students are by the generosity of donors like you.

I send my thanks again for the great blessing of your gift, along with warmest wishes for a joyous Christmas.

Most cordially yours,

Vicki Biggs

Senior Vice President, Seminary Advancement
Chief Communications Officer

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The loving family of Tree of Life, rooted
in God's Word, exists to share the joy,
love, and peace of Jesus Christ with you!



"So then, if anyone is
in Christ, that person is
part of the new creation.
The old things have
gone away, and look, new
things have arrived!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

