

# St. Matthew Newsletter

*Our Vision:* Connecting the world with Jesus Christ

*Our Mission:* Faithfully living as the Body of Christ, and sharing the Gospel that brings salvation

## ❖ *Pastor's Message*

*Rev. Craig Otto*

### **Lutheran Christians in the Dominican Republic**

In recent years I've learned there is growth of Lutheran congregations in Latin America. Churches are forming in Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, the Dominican Republic (DR), and other countries.

Due to the increasing interest, and the need for theological education of their pastors and teachers, a seminary was built in the city of Santiago in the DR. I visited there March 8-10 to meet their pastors, see a few congregations, and consider if ours might partner with them in evangelism and planting churches.



Concordia the Reformer Seminary trains pastors, teachers, and deaconesses. Since 2017 they served students from 14 countries, graduating 99 deaconesses and 12 pastors.



Pastor Idjon Fritz led our opening worship using the Order of Matins from the Spanish Lutheran Service Book. Our singing was accompanied by guitar, keyboard, and flute.



Our Saturday was mostly meeting pastors, missionaries, and deaconesses who are serving around Santiago. They speak in Spanish, while we listen through earpieces to the translator speaking in English.



Our forum was attended by ten people: five from an LCMS church in Oconomowoc, WI, three from an LCMS church in Beverly Hills, MI, and two of us from St. Matthew. These forums are held twice a year at the seminary.



Our crew of ten all stayed in one hotel. The rooms were small (bedroom size), but we had normal beds, normal bathrooms, and normal food. We were taken from place to place on a minibus by a local driver named Rowdy.



This is a new congregation building in the city of Lisey. The church door is open (much needed for air circulation!) for our Sunday worship service. We sang liturgy and hymns in Spanish, including “God’s Own Child, I’ll Gladly Say It.”



The Dominican Republic government asked if they could share the church site with the Lutheran congregation in Lisey. The DR then built school classrooms on the property. The church’s pastor, Rev. Yban Navarro, serves as School Chaplain during the week and meets local families.



This is the back porch of a home right next to the Lisey church. The economic status in the DR is higher than in neighboring country Haiti, and there is growing support for education, but most communities would generally be considered poor.

Deaconess Sarah Longmire and I attended the Spring FORO at Santiago in the Dominican Republic. Why is it called a FORO in all capital letters? That is the name they give their “get acquainted” forums here.

The education portion is held at the Seminary which was built in 2017. But this site is not just the confessional Lutheran seminary, whose classrooms and professor offices occupy the second floor... the lower level classrooms are used for a Lutheran school during the week for 60 students from Preschool age to third grade... and the school chapel serves as a sanctuary for the Palmar Arriba Lutheran Church led on Sundays by Rev. Fritz... and they have built a home for six children with disabilities on the seminary site... and on the hillside they built a dormitory where single seminary students and missionaries can live.

Each church in Santiago is using the basic tools we use—*Lutheran Service Book* for worship, Luther’s *Small Catechism*, and the Bible—yet each congregation has a unique outreach depending on where they are. One church holds meetings after school on a baseball field, another holds monthly family events with food and devotions, while another offers home visits by the pastor (for the fathers) and deaconess (for the mothers). They bring Christ through their care.





This is the Lutheran Good Shepherd home. Many parents are unsure how to care for their children with disabilities, so they often are placed in government facilities. Our Lutheran churches are trying to provide an alternative with this home, providing personal care, teaching, and giving responsibilities to the six young men and women who live here. We got to meet them at the FORO.



Here is a small tobacco farm on a home property across the road from the Good Shepherd home. The country is known for its tobacco industry, and Dominican cigars are a coveted commodity. Many Caribbean nations are known for their export of cigars, coffee, vanilla, and rum. These nations usually operate tourist areas which hide the poverty in which most residents live.



While growing up in the 1970's, I learned that two nations sharing the same island were very poor: Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Being in grade school, I really didn't understand the situation beyond seeing pictures.

The island historically named "Hispaniola" was first colonized by Spain. The western third was ceded to France in 1697 and eventually the people declared their independence in 1804, becoming the nation of Haiti. Those who lived in the eastern half continued under Spanish influence, eventually declaring their independence from Spain in 1821. While Haiti struggles, the DR has become the fastest-growing economy in Latin America since 1992.

I've now seen both sides of the island as a visitor. I went to Saint Marc in Haiti from 2013 to 2017 to provide theological education (teaching the Small Catechism and basic Christian doctrine) to pastors and teachers there. Due to violence in Haiti since 2018, I've been unable to return. Now I have visited the Dominican Republic for the first time, and have discovered there is real resonance with Lutheran Christian outreach among the people.

What did I take away from attending this forum? I met a dozen missionaries and pastors who serve people day after day in similar ways that I serve you here at St. Matthew. They lead worship and teach the community about Jesus Christ, opening the Scriptures with them. They interact every day with those who live nearby, listening and helping.

I learned that they are careful to remain confessional Lutherans who hold true to the Bible, study the *Book of Concord*, and use doctrinally pure materials in worship and teaching. I was so blessed to be in worship and hear the seminarians lead us through Spanish Matins from their *Lutheran Service Book*. Their sermons—spoken in Spanish and translated in real time in English—were spot on and meaningful, with both Law and Gospel.

I learned about specific ministries and projects our congregation might be able to support when we have mission funds available, or when we consider missionary support in an annual budget. It was good to see good news! We have a group of nine St. Matthew members going on a service mission trip in July, so more of us will see the DR in person. We have new friends in Christ (*amigos de Cristo*) to pray for.

*Yours in Christ, Pastor Otto*



Here is one of the classrooms for little ones in the school at Palmar Arriba. The students bring their backpacks and their own lunch each day. The banners in the background were designed and made by the young children.



We happened to be present on a recognition day known as “The Day of the Woman,” highlighting roles of women in history and today’s world. Note children are holding the sign M U J E R (in Spanish “mujer” means “woman”).

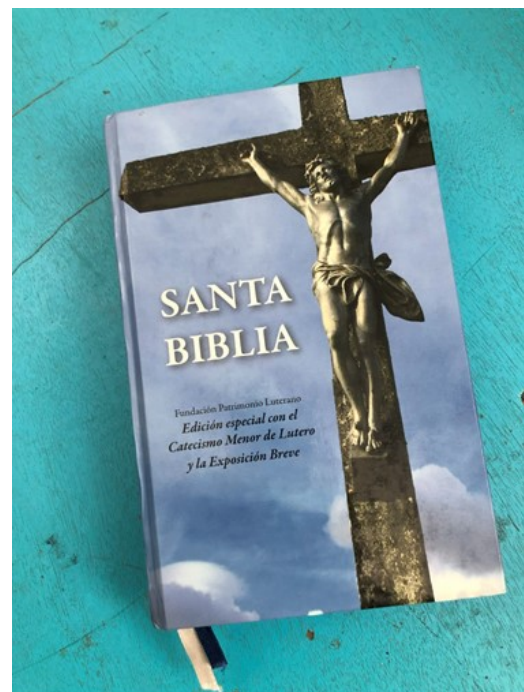


How is your Spanish? You might be able to guess what the banner at left says:

**Baptized in the  
name of the  
Father, Son, and  
Holy Spirit**

And what is the book at right?  
You might have guessed that  
Santa Biblia means Holy Bible.

This edition also includes  
Luther’s Small Catechism.  
These are used in Lutheran  
school and in the seminary.



## ❖ Altar Guild — *How to donate flowers for the altar*

The 2024 Flower Chart is on the bulletin board in the narthex. You may write your name in to sponsor flowers to be placed on the altar for particular weekends. After the service, you may take your flowers home. We can have up to three (3) arrangements signed up for on any given Sunday. The cost is \$25.00 per arrangement. Please place your payment in the little box below the chart. Thank you!

## ❖ Classics — *Thursday, April 4*

In March, we had a wonderful display of Dolls from Dale Kobel! And the stories were so great to hear. Thanks so much, Dale.

We have Ann Wesselschmidt to thank for setting up our April program. Jennifer Mitchell will bring her violin artistry for all to hear. Along with that, our Lead Hosts will be bringing Ham as our main course. So as you are able, please bring a side dish, salad or dessert to go with that. It should be another fine time to share beautiful music, fine food and great fellowship.

Our next Classics will be **Thursday, April 4 at 11:30** in the Family Life Center. Look forward to seeing you.

## ❖ LWML Mites Mission Grant... *for the month of April*

We are highlighting three Mission Grants this month:

- (1) \$100,000 for “Set Apart to Serve”—an LCMS initiative to form and recruit full-time church workers.
- (2) \$50,000 for “Equipping Young Leaders”—to develop projects that will help teens and young adults stay connected to the church and grow in faith in Jesus.
- (3) \$96,500 to LCMS Life Ministry—to provide materials for pastors, church workers, and lay leaders ministering to those suffering from mental illness.

The MITES box will be out in the Narthex on April 27 and 28.

*Luke 10:2 He told them, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest”.*

## ❖ St. Matthew Preschool News

Fall enrollment is off to a good start. Please refer family and friends to our very special preschool. We appreciate all the help we get.

April 11 and 12 we need a couple of volunteers to help serve donuts and juice to children and their special guests from 8:45 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.

We need all Bible money turned in. The Bibles are \$20 each. We have about 40 students graduating, and Graduation Day is May 15, 2024.

For those who would like to support us by donating items, our school and teachers have Amazon wish lists:

- All-School - <https://a.co/08xWbcN>
- Children's Room - <https://a.co/0EYtGT6>
- Stable Room - <https://a.co/7opzzWA>
- Noah Room - <https://a.co/6zw0kWL>
- Ocean Room - <https://a.co/9WGFEyn>

## ❖ St. Matthew Prayer Partners

Do you have a prayer request? Are you interested in being on our e-mail list notifying you of prayers of the congregation? Contact Carrol McAllister at [cammac2@swbell.net](mailto:cammac2@swbell.net) or 816-763-4535.

## ❖ Sewing Group

The sewing group will meet in the library area at church on the first and third Mondays of each month. We're always looking for more volunteers! Contact Linda Patterson at 816-820-4464 or Marilyn Heineman at 816-729-7260 for more information.



## ❖ Lutheran Women in Mission — April 2024

**A HEARTFELT THANKS** to everyone that organized and contributed in some way to all of our events and activities this past year:

No-Bake Bake Sale; Honey Sunday; Vesper/Dinner; Soup-To-Go; Thanksgiving and Easter “treat bags” for our Shut-Ins; VBS meal, Pastor Conference Breakfast; Lenten Meal; Baby Bottle Drive and Diaper/Wipes (St. Matthew Community Outreach); and LUMAA Ingatherings.

Also “Thank You” to the generosity of the congregation which exceeded our goal with the MITE Challenge.

An incredible amount of work went into planning these events and activities and I am grateful for all we were able to accomplish together.

**Salad Luncheon / Elections / Installation of Officers** - Saturday, April 27 at 11:30 a.m. in the St. Matthew Family Life Center. After the installation of officers, we will have our salad luncheon and fellowship. Society members are asked to bring a salad or dessert to share, if you can.

**Zone Spring Rally will be at Holy Trinity**, 5901 E. 135<sup>th</sup> St., Grandview on Saturday, April 20. Registration begins at 9 a.m. The meeting begins at 9:30 a.m. Cost is \$5.00 (includes lunch). Rally theme: *Grace, Mercy, Peace (based on Timothy 1:2b “Grace, mercy peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord”*. Gifts from the Heart: monetary donation for MITEs.

**Please contact Darlene Coverdell by Wednesday, April 10, if you plan to go.** You can reach her at 815-931-4844 or dacoverdell.comcast.net (text, call or email).

*We are excited to have the LWML National President, Eden Keefe, as a speaker.* And our program will be the Lutheran Women in Mission Prayer Service. St. Matthew does have a small reading part in the Prayer Service, if you would like to volunteer to do this reading, please contact Darlene Coverdell.

**LWML MO District 28th Biennial Convention** – June 7-9, 2024, Stoney Creek Hotel & Conference Center, Independence, MO. If you haven’t registered, please do so before the end of April to get the early registration fee of \$190.00. This covers the cost of a Saturday boxed lunch and a 3-course plated dinner of roast beef or tilapia, vegetable and dessert, at the banquet. The entertainment for the evening will be Bible Trivia. Online registration can be found at missourilwml.org.

There are many reasons to attend a convention; not the least of which is spending time in worship and Bible study. But there are also some new things this year: You can participate in a mid-afternoon *Mission Walk*, join friends for *Friday Fun Fest*, plan to *Wake up in the Word with Deb Burma* or *Pastor Benkendorf on Saturday from 6:45 a.m. – 7:30 a.m.*, and enjoy a *Leadership Development Program Saturday afternoon*, just to name a few.

Newsletters will be printed and distributed during the convention. There is an LWML Store with lots of merchandise available. There will be a Mission Fair and First Aid Station. Don’t delay! Register today!

**LUMAA** – Next LUMAA meeting will be at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Independence on Wednesday, May 15 at 9:30 a.m. If you plan to attend, please contact Joyce Martin. Ingathering will be personal hygiene items. Items may be put in the LUMAA basket located in the Mission room.

## ❖ Mission Notes

The Project 24 and African Radio Ministries binders have been updated with the current Newsletters and personal letters from our sponsored students to our congregation. There is also information on how to send letters and notes to our 4 young ladies if you would like to do so.

A check for \$5,000 was approved and sent by the Board of Directors to GLO (Global Lutheran Outreach) in support of Heather and Nathan Pittman. We have been supporting them for the past few years. Some of you may remember their presentation during Bible study hour a couple years ago when they were serving in Nigeria. They will be leaving for Kenya to serve as Missionaries this April. Please pray for their safe travels and work there. They may have an opportunity to visit our congregation in person again.

Thank you so very much for all the prayers for my Dad. He is out of the hospital and recovering well. Thanks be to God!

*Blessings, Annie Femrite—Member at Large, Missions, [annfemrite@gmail.com](mailto:annfemrite@gmail.com)*

## ❖ Notes from Deaconess

*Sarah Longmire, Director of Family Life*

As March zooms by, I feel as though spring has somehow caught me by surprise. It seems as though my past planning included phrases like, 'when we get to spring, or 'once spring hits,' and I would say something that I wanted to figure out or finalize. It seems as though I have been treating 'spring' as an unused closet where I can store all my 'not-needed-now' thoughts or ideas. I'll get to those eventually...

And yet, spring has come. I look at my coming weeks and months with a deep breath: there is a lot planned! Perhaps you have these same thoughts and feelings...the end of school is coming, trips are being planned, work events are scheduled or deadlines are looming. The 'unused closet door' has been opened, and now a lot of expectations or actions seem to be tumbling out.

It is in these moments, when we struggle to not be overwhelmed or anxious, where it feels as though an easy thing to cut out (to save time, of course), is time in God's Word, in prayer, or by skipping church. And yet, I would encourage you to ignore that line of thinking and be even more intentional in reading God's Word, speaking to Him, and being in His House.

When we feel at our busiest, we often find ourselves wrestling with the First Commandment, even if we don't admit it: \*I\* need to finish this. \*I\* am handling this. \*I\* am in control. And yet, life is a gift and our relationships with others are gifts - all from God, the Gift Giver. Our needs are met in a loving and all-knowing God who spared not even His perfect Son in order to reconcile us with Him. In our moments of chaos and busy, God invites us to rest and receive.

Perhaps the busyness has already taken hold of your time and schedule and it seems overwhelming to start - how can I add one more thing, even an important thing like time in God's Word? Here are some things that I have found helpful and edifying, even in the midst of busy:

The Bible - *have God's Word open on a table in your home: read a verse or two as you go about your day; commit to reading a verse a day at breakfast, read a chapter after dinner, etc.*

Bible apps - *many of these will even read the Bible aloud to you (car rides, while cooking, caring for an infant in the middle of the night, etc.)*

Lutheran podcasts - *Higher Things, Lutheran Hour Ministries, KFUE...these are just some examples of Lutheran resources that will give you God's Word through electronic means (through daily devotional emails, podcasts that can be listened to, sermons, etc.).*

Other Lutheran devotional books: *Pastor Otto speaks about Bo Giertz' book (To Live with Christ) which has daily devotions. The Treasury of Daily Prayer has daily Scripture readings. Pastor Matt Richard has written a book, Minute Messages, which has short devotions for the church seasons.*

In short, *I would invite you to consider adding devotion and prayer time to the busyness of spring.* Remember that God is in control, His love and mercy are new for you every morning, your identity is in your Baptism, and it is in Him that you will have lasting peace and assurance.

Give unto the Lord  
the glory due unto his name;  
worship the Lord  
in the beauty of holiness.  
Psalm 29:2

# St. Matthew



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APRIL NEWSLETTER - 2024

*SEE INSIDE FOR A PHOTO ESSAY ON THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC*

## ❖ Prescription Bottle Collection

The Community Engagement Committee will be collecting prescription bottles. Please place used prescription bottles in the marked waste basket in the Narthex. All bottles must be empty with lids attached, clean inside and out, and labels removed-no adhesive residue. Thank you!

## ❖ St. Matthew Pickleball Enthusiasts

Weekly attendance has averaged about 16 men and women rotating onto the 2 courts for doubles play. Open gym will continue through April and beyond if enough people are interested in playing during the warmer months. Come anytime between 6:00-8:00 p.m. All skill levels welcome! Contact Lisa Keel ([lisakeel87@gmail.com](mailto:lisakeel87@gmail.com), 816-588-4111) if you have questions, and to be added to the contact list for updates.

## ❖ Ladies Tea Party

The ladies of the congregation are invited to a High Tea on Sat., April 13th, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Tea sandwiches, scones with cream and jam, and mini desserts will be served, along with an assortment of teas. All ladies are encouraged to dress for a tea party and wear a hat/fascinator, but not required! Call or text Heidi Tanner to sign up at 816-377-0544, or sign up in the Narthex. **Please sign up by April 7.**

