



First Things ~ March 2025

Dear friends in Christ,

This month, you will notice a change in the placements of the elements for Holy Communion as they are returned to the altar. First of all, we must understand that where we place the elements for the Lord's Supper is not commanded to us in scripture. We can have them on the altar, on the small table the we have been using, or anywhere else without an intrinsic sin involved or having one place being more holy than another.

However, we do have to place the elements somewhere and so we ought to use our Christian freedom to make a good judgment about where to place the elements. In this way, whatever we do, we do it to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31) So, why place them on the altar?

To answer this, we must first understand what the altar is. Most people know that an altar is a place where religious people make sacrifices to their god or gods. It is not only believers in the true God who have used altars. In the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal from 1 Kings 18, Elijah builds an altar to the Lord and the prophets of Baal make an altar to Baal. So what is an altar for a Christian?

Martin Luther commented on this topic as he wrote regarding Abram creating an altar in Genesis 12, *"Now for the first time, he builds and altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. That is he appoints a definite place where the church should come together to hear the Word of God, offer prayers, praise God, and offer sacrifices to God. For this is what it means to build an altar...This must be the one purpose both of altars and of temples, that those who gather there hear the word of God, pray, give thanks to God, praise God, and carry out those forms of worship which he has commanded."* So, for Christians, an altar is not simply the place where sacrifices are offered, but is the place where Christians gather together for the preaching of God's Word, the hearing of it, and believing it.

This understanding of an altar leads us to another important question, which is "What is worship?" For Christians, worship not an act that we do for God. Instead, the "worship service" is God's service to us where he offers us his gifts through his Word and sacrament. The German word that Lutherans used for centuries (other than "Mass." In German, "Messe") was "Gottesdienst" which is commonly translated "Divine Service." But sometimes English just doesn't do justice to a word and this is that case. In the German, it's pretty clear that, again, this is God's service to us. In English, it can still come across the other way, unfortunately.

With all of this said, there is still a sacrifice involved for Christians when we gather together to receive God's gifts, that is, to worship, but it's not a sacrifice done to gain God's love or favor in any way. Rather, it's a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise, that is to receive his gifts with joy and to respond to these gifts with thanks

and praise (Hebrews 13:15). So even this sacrifice of offering our thanks and praise to God is something that he has worked in us through the sending of the gifts of his Holy Spirit in Word and sacrament.

All this then leads us to this special way in which God offers us his gifts of forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation which is the Lord's Supper. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus instituted this new meal of his body and blood "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. He says "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink. This is my blood." Believing Christ's words, we understand that the bread and wine are Jesus' very body and blood, a teaching we call the "Real Presence." It leaves us with a question, though: When we gather together, where should we place these earthly elements?

Since 1) we have chosen to include an altar (which we have established as our visual symbol around which we gather and where God comes to us to grant us his gifts) and since 2) the altar in the Old Testament was the place of sacrifice and now we offer no sacrifices on the altar because Jesus was the sacrifice "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10), and since 3) that one time sacrifice was of Jesus' body and blood which now to this day he offers to us in this Supper, what better place to place the elements through which God comes to us and we touch, taste, and see him than on the altar?

We've said much already, but there is one more good reason for placing the elements on the altar: To confess that this is Jesus' true body and blood. After the Lutheran Reformation, there were some other Reformers who did not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood. They saw the Lord's Supper as nothing more than symbolizing Jesus' body and blood and that this was primarily a meal to remember Jesus, not a "Means of Grace," not a way that God gives, offers, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins. And so, to protest the belief in the Real Presence (and the Roman teaching of Transubstantiation which we won't get into here), some chose to do away with the altar altogether and to simply use a table. And so, the use of the altar becomes for us a confession of our faith in Jesus' very words regarding this meal.

I don't want us to walk away from this worrying or even thinking that we have been doing something "wrong." We haven't! In fact, I've said that with our stair situation, when I become older or if I were to suffer an injury at some point, I too would probably move the elements down the stairs for the sake of safety and to respect the elements Jesus has given. I think it's fair to assume that a greater disgrace is brought to the Supper by dropping the elements all over the floor as I trip and fall than is brought by placing them at the bottom of the stairs. No, there is nothing wrong with what we have done in the past. However, there is something good about moving the elements to the altar so that this piece of furniture in our worship space may be put to its full use and we can all receive a benefit from it.

It might be hard to believe, but there's more that could be said about this. I will leave that to you to come and ask me. Better yet, attend our upcoming Bible classes on Lutheran Worship and the liturgy and we can discuss it there. I look forward to the upcoming Lenten season and to serving you with God's precious gifts as your shepherd under our Good Shepherd Jesus. To him be all the glory!

Pastor Pilarski

Lent Begins

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday**, March 5. Our Lenten worship services will begin at 6:30 PM, with a Lenten meal served before. **Pastors Krueger, Schultz, Unnasch, and Wolff** will be preaching here while Pastor Pilarski visits their congregations in Eitzen, Caledonia, and Hokah. *There will be no Monday Evening Worship during lent.*

Ash Wednesday, 3/5: Pastor Pilarski
March 12: Pastor Tom Schultz
March 19: Pastor Jon Wolff

March 26: Pastor Todd Krueger
April 2: Pastor John Unnasch
April 9: Pastor Pilarski

Member Meet-ups with Pastor

Over the last month Pastor Pilarski has met with many First Families and is looking to meet with you! Meeting times are still available! Preferred meeting locations are at your homes, though other arrangements can be made if absolutely necessary. Please sign up using the calendar and sign-up sheet located on the table in the entry.

Fellowship Opportunities and Events

Saturday, March 1 Alter Team Meeting- Saturday, March 1 at 9 AM we will meet at church to discuss and go over some new information about Communion set-up and other details. Those interested in serving are welcome to attend as well. Hope you can make it!

March 14-16 Fiddler on the Roof: LHS Spring Musical – Luther High School presents *Fiddler on the Roof*! Showtimes are Friday and Saturday at 7PM and Sunday at 2PM. You can scan the QR code on the right to purchase tickets online, or click on [this link](#) for tickets online, or you can purchase tickets at the LHS Auditorium on the day of the show. Keep your eyes peeled for one of our own LHS students!



Monday, March 17 Women of First: Business Meeting- held after Morning Bible Study at 10:15 AM.

March 28-30 Camp Phillip Spring Teen Retreat: "Look around and Listen up! The diversity and beauty of God's creation is closer than you might think. Birds are all around us singing praises and displaying vibrant colors, but sometimes they may be a little hard to find. In a similar way, we will learn how to turn our eyes to God's word, dive deeper, and see the wonderful lessons he has in store for us. Retreat runs from Friday evening to Sunday morning; cost is \$80." For more information click [here](#) or type this address into your browser <https://www.campphillip.com/retreat-groups>.

Monday, March 31 Weist-Pieper Scholarship Fund Applications Due- We are blessed to have two educational scholarship funds available to our three WELS churches in La Crescent and Hokah. Applications for tuition assistance through the Weist-Pieper Scholarship are available on the peg board in the Narthex. Please complete and return by March 31.

Ladies, Look at What's Coming from LWMS!



The **Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) Spring Rally** will take place at Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church in Winona Saturday, April 26, with Registration starting at 8:00 AM with Speaker Eric Roecker from WELS Commission and Evangelism. Women of First will be carpooling and have room for more. Please contact the church office if you would like to join the carpool!

The **Lutheran Women's Missionary Society 62nd Annual Convention** – year in and year out the largest gathering of WELS Lutherans – will take place in **Tulsa, OK, June 26-29**. More information is available [HERE](#).



January

Summary of Financial Information 2025

Financial Summary				
	YTD	YTD	Difference	Comments
	Actual	Budget		
Net Income (Loss) Church	\$1,211	\$0	\$1,211	
Net Income (Loss) ELC	\$15,544	\$7,085	\$8,459	
Total	\$16,755	\$7,085	\$9,670	
Grants (net)	(\$2,222)	(\$1,321)	(\$901)	
Without Grants	\$14,533	\$5,764	\$8,769	

Total Deficit of ELC	
2018	(\$17,051)
2019	(\$23,087)
2020	(\$2,544)
2021	\$39,832
2022	(\$10,484)
2023	(\$8,202)
2024	\$10,716
2025	\$15,544
	<u>\$4,724</u>

Giving Summary				
	YTD	YTD	Difference	Comments
	Actual	Budget		
Offerings	\$22,890	\$24,194	(\$1,304)	94.6%
Debt Reduction	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Total	\$22,890	\$24,194	(\$1,304)	

Assets				
	2024	2025	Change	Comments
	December	January		
Checking Account	\$61,664	\$77,885	\$16,220	
Money Market	\$51,540	\$51,730	\$190	
Total	\$113,204	\$129,615	\$16,411	Net increase in cash balance

Liabilities & Equity				
	2024	2025	Change	Comments
	December	January		
Dedicated Funds Total	\$87,041	\$87,109	\$69	
Other Liabilities	\$1,830	\$1,417	(\$413)	
Assets less Liabilities	\$24,334	\$41,089	\$16,755	Net increase in equity
Mortgage Balance	\$269,096		Interest Rate	6.34%
Balloon Payment Due	11/1/2027			

Required Offerings		
February Offerings Needed	16,288	
February Offerings Received	18,928	
March Offerings Needed		22,840