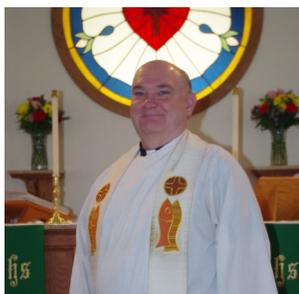


The Epistle

THE NEWSLETTER OF APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH

Gloucester www.apostles-elca.org | www.facebook.com/ApostlesELCA | February 2025

Our Mission is to be a Caring Inclusive Christian Community responding to God's grace through Worship, Service, and Sharing the Gospel



A Word from Pastor Jay

This month we enter into the season of Lent. Lent, of course, is the time in the church year calendar when we focus more

specifically on the cross and on the great foundational events of our Christian faith. We know the story. Jesus told his disciples that he would undergo great suffering and die at the hands of the powerful. He then rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, the event we celebrate on Palm Sunday. Then he endured the passion: the arrest, the beatings, the trials and, finally, the crucifixion. After he died he was laid in a tomb. These are the familiar events which we recall as we journey through the season of Lent and focus once again on God's amazing plan through which we have salvation and everlasting life.

When we think of the cross, however, what is it that we think, feel and believe? What does the cross mean to us? Is the cross merely a decoration for our stained-glass windows and altars, or a piece of jewelry which we wear because it looks nice, or is the symbolism and story of the cross still important to us?

Jesus foretold his crucifixion. Paul preached "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." The writer of Hebrews

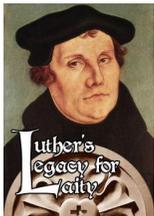
looked at the crucifixion and proclaimed Jesus as both the sacrifice and the great high priest. Most of those around Jerusalem at the time considered the cross to be the end, the defeat of Jesus and his short-lived prophetic movement. The disciples of Jesus were crushed by his death, but later proclaimed the cross as God's great victory over sin and death. Many still mock the cross as a relic of an ancient myth, while followers of Jesus today find in the symbol of the cross a powerful point of focus and a revealing of God's love and mercy for all the world.

In the ancient world in which Jesus lived and died, sacrifice was a common element in many religions in the Near East and all along the Mediterranean. The sacrifice of animals was a prescribed way of remaining faithful to God and offering God a gift of thanksgiving in the Jewish faith at the time, with sacrifices asked during life events and at different festival times during the year. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would conduct sacrifice to God on behalf of the whole nation to ritually call for God's forgiveness. It is no wonder that the early church, made up mostly of Jews, quickly combined the death of Jesus on the cross and the common idea of sacrifice to God together to envision the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. The blood of the sacrifice (Jesus), as on the Day of Atonement, moves God to forgiveness.

While the idea of the cross as sacrifice is

theologically intertwined with the Church's self-understanding from the beginning, theologians today see other ways of understanding the cross and its meaning for us. One such understanding holds that the cross is a power play, and indeed is the most powerful thing that human authority can exercise. In other words, Jesus, in his ministry and teachings, butts up against human power and authority and injustice. In this case, Jesus taught a new way of understanding God and God's actions and relationship with humanity through a God who becomes vulnerable, who enters into human weakness and suffering, who comes to us. These actions and teachings of Jesus were considered subversive by the power structures who ruled over Israel at the time, both Roman power and Jewish power. Jesus was seen as a threat because he taught a message of God which was accessible to everyone, didn't need intermediaries, placed God in the midst of the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, the sinners and the outcasts, and made the claim that this is where the fulness of God's life is to be found. Jesus was seen by the worldly leaders as a challenge to both religious power and authority and government (Roman) power and authority, and so the decision was made to execute him as a subversive. The cross, then, was used to exercise the greatest power we humans have- to kill, to destroy. So, the human power structures do the most they possibly can do. They execute Jesus. They kill him on the cross. So, Jesus loses. The worldly powers win. Then we come to the first day of the week.

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Luther's Legacy for Laity

Luther's Legacy for Laity be taking a break until after Easter. It will resume in May. Stay tuned!!

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Happy Anniversary to...

- Barbara and Bernie Runk March 1
- Don and Jane Garfield March 20

Happy Birthday To...

- Tina Britt March 11
- Makayla Hess March 15
- Judy Wright March 20
- Steve Hanson March 22
- J. Dillon March 27
- August Good March 27
- Margaret Grimes March 28

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Happy Baptismal Anniversary

- Kayla Hautz March 2
- Carson Riordan March 26
- Emily Riordan March 26
- Sean Riordan March 26
- Jack and Juliet Baur March 31

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Holy Communion Record

Please take a minute and fill out one of these cards and put it in the offering plate – they are in the pew rack. You only need to fill one out a year – this will help with the statistics needed for the parochial report that has to be completed once a year – thank you from the Worship Ministry Team!!



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Ministry Team Meetings

The following ministry team will meet in March:
+ **Worship** - Monday, March 24th, at 7:00 PM

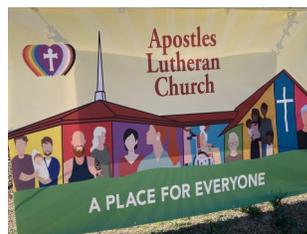
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Congregation Council Meeting in March

The Congregation Council will be meeting on Monday, March 17th, at 7:00 PM—anyone is welcome to attend.

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Look What's New at Apostles



We have replaced the old "A Place for Everyone" banner with a larger one—thanks to Thrivent for the funding for it!!

A Recap of the Annual Congregational Meeting February 2nd

What a GREAT meeting!! Thanks to everyone who participated!! Special thanks to Chris Hawkins, Congregation Council President, for leading the meeting and to Cynthia Lowe, Council Secretary, for taking the minutes. After a the call to order and establishment of a quorum, we received reports from Pastor Jay, the officers of Congregation Council and also from our Ministry Teams and the Mission Outreach Fund. Elections were then held for Congregation Council (elected for a 3-year term were Janet Gomez, Chris Hawkins and Pete Liljeberg), Synod Assembly Delegates (elected were Chris and Jennie Hawkins) with alternates Jason and Cynthia Lowe); Nominating Committee (Doug Dalager and Nancy Wagner are automatically members as outgoing Council members and elected were Irene Albert, Don Garfield, Jennie Hawkins and Judy Wright); and Mission Outreach Fund Committee (re-elected for another year term were Donna Ambrose, Doug Dalager, and Linda Hodges). The congregation approved the proposed amendment to the constitution (reducing the number of people of Congregation Council) and David Leunig was thanked for serving as Council President for the last 2 years. The new Council met immediately after the congregational meeting and elected Cynthia Lowe for another term as Secretary, Doug Dalager for another term as Treasurer and Heinz and Irene Albert for another term as Financial Secretaries.



Meet Your Congregation Council



Pastor Jay Serafin
Pastor



Chris Hawkins
President



Barbara Runk
Vice President



Doug Dalager
Treasurer



Cynthia Lowe
Secretary



Heinz and Irene Albert
Financial Secretaries
(Heinz—non-voting member)



Janet Gomez
Member



Pete Liljeberg
Member



Ray Schola
Member



Nancy Wagner
Member

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Sundays and Seasons



Sundays and Seasons is the program we use for worship planning and offers an expansive library of content and ideas for liturgy, music, preaching, and visuals in one convenient location. If you would like access to this wonderful program, please contact Janet Gomez for a login and password.



Jubilee Churches News

The Jubilee Churches of Gloucester, a coalition of 17 congregations in Gloucester (including Apostles), will be meeting again in April on

April 9th, at 9:30 AM at Bellamy United Methodist Church. The Rev. Dr. Ed Walker, pastor of Bellamy United Methodist Church, is the covener of the Jubilee Churches of Gloucester. The Jubilee Churches recently helped prevent an elderly disabled woman from having her power cut-off. She called the same day that her power was to be turned off and Jubilee Churches were able to make a \$297.69 payment to her account and prevent her from losing power. She had applied to the PIPP program the same day and tried to make contact to other community resources like Salvation Army, Bay Housing, and Lighthouse; however, had not heard back from anyone yet. Jubilee Churches having access and ability to fulfill these requests as fast as we did is such an amazing thing for our community especially for vulnerable populations like this particular client.

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World Hunger Sunday



Don't forget your world hunger offering on Sunday, March 16th—UNTIL ALL ARE FED!

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Please Keep In Your Prayers

Heinz Albert, Rich Bitting, Manning Freeman, Don Garfield, Betty Hauch, Ellen Kendzierski, Ellen Quirk, Michael Schlemmer, Keith and Juanita Sturdy, George and Jewel Thomas, and Lena Woodlief.

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Save the Date!!

The Virginia Synod's annual Power In The Spirit event will be held July 17-19 at Roanoke College in Salem, VA. "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."



Apostles To Host GUEST Winter Shelter

Apostles will be hosting the GUEST Winter Shelter again the week of March 10th. There are still several opportunities to volunteer to help—manning the various shifts and providing breakfast and dinner. There are opportunities for everyone to serve. If you have any questions or you want to learn more about hosting the shelter, you can contact Linda Hodges, Barbara Runk, Nancy Wagner or Janet Gomez.

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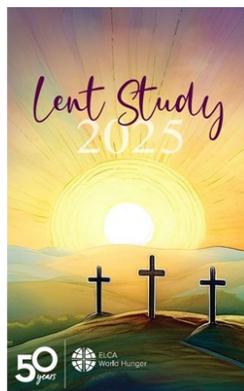
Health Kits for Guatemala



The Guatemala mission team will be leaving on March 30th this year. With a generous grant from Thrivent, towels and washcloths have already been purchased for 60 kits. The team is requesting donations of the following items to complete the kits: toothpaste, toothbrushes, bars of soap, and lip balm. Congregation members will have the opportunity to put the kits together during fellowship time on Sunday, March 16th. These kits are so greatly appreciated by the people attending the health clinics. It is a wonderful way to spread the love of God beyond our borders! The Guatemala Mission Team will be commissioned during the worship service on Sunday, March 23rd.

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Devotions for Lent



Please help yourself to the devotions for Lent—they are on the table in the narthex. ELCA World Hunger's 2025 Lent study will reflect on the work of ELCA World Hunger partners who are dedicated to ending hunger at its roots. Connecting with their stories of strengthening communities will inspire you to celebrate your place in your own community.!



The Season of Lent at Apostles

Please join us on Wednesday, **March 5th, at 7:00 PM** for the Ash Wednesday worship service.

The following Wednesdays, **March 12th, 19th, 26th, April 2nd, and 9th**, we will have a mid-week meal of soup and bread at 6:00 PM—you are welcome to bring a sandwich if you want—and then we will have a Service of the Word starting at 7:00 PM. There will be a signup sheet in the narthex for you to sign up to bring soup and bread. The theme of the worship services is “The Church in Time.” Pastor Jay, Pete Liljeberg, Ingrid Peterson and Janet Gomez will be leading the worship services. Please join us!!

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Mid-Week Lenten Offering



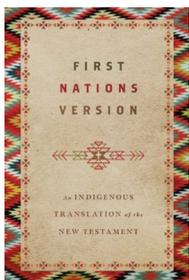
Global Refuge

The offering from our mid-week Lenten services has been designated for Global Refuge. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) will now be known to the world and the

people they exist to help as “Global Refuge.” The decision to rebrand as Global Refuge is rooted in the growing worldwide need for compassion and support. With millions of people displaced by war, famine, climate change, persecution, and more, their mission of providing the “long welcome” has become more crucial than ever. The accompanying growth in the demand for their essential, expanded suite of services has sparked the need to identify themselves ever more clearly and create a bigger table of supporters.

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Gospel from The First Nations Version



On March 2nd, the Gospel reading will be taken from the First Nations Version, An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament. We will be doing this periodically during the year.



Effective Practices for Innovative Congregations—2025

The Virginia Synod is hosting EPIC 2025 on **March 8th, at Our Savior in Norge**. During

EPIC 2025, we will explore what it means to have Strong Connections through Intertwining Hope with topics that explore how to have Intertwining Hope in God and Intertwining Hope with each other. This event is open to all people in the Virginia Synod and will feature times of worship and large-group presentations as well as small-group breakout sessions led by members of the Office of the Bishop Staff and local leaders from each hosting area. You can register at vasynod.org.

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Correspondence

“Dear Apostles Lutheran Church, As we welcome 2025, I’m inspired by the words of Rev. Helen Casey-Rutland, a former PPCC Board President. “When hurting people find healing, lives are changed. When pain in relationships is eased, families are made more whole. When apparent dead-ends become new starting points, communities grow stronger. A new year brings fresh beginnings and opportunities for our clients—and for generous supporters like you. Your contributions profoundly impact the lives of those we serve, enabling us to provide mental health counseling that integrates mind, body and spirit. The Board of Directors and Staff of Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center sincerely appreciate your contribution of \$300 reflecting your commitment to PPCC’s mission. Your support is making a meaningful different in the lives of our clients. Thank you for partnering with us to ring wholeness and healing to our community. With gratitude,
Ford McFall, Development Director
Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center”
(Editor’s note—Pastor Jay, Doug Dalager and Barbara Runk recently toured the PPCC—if you would like more information about PPCC, please contact one of them or Ingrid Peterson who works there.)

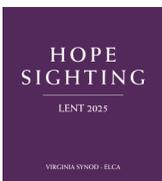
New Women's Group To Meet

A new women's group will meet on **Saturday, March 1st at 9:30 AM**. We would LOVE to have you join us!!

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Hope Sighting—Lent 2025

Jesus' words in the gospels are one of greatest sources of hope. His words comfort us, tell us about God's promises, and help us envision God's love on earth. But Jesus' words aren't locked in biblical times. They are alive among us today. Each day during Lent, the Virginia Synod will be sharing some of his words of hope and ask you to reflect on where you have seen this hope around you recently. We can't wait to hear your Hope Sightings. You can follow along daily on social media, weekly in The Weekly Update, or print out the whole list of verses next week.



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Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Anders Don Peterson was baptized on Sunday, February 23rd. A big THANK YOU to Irene Albert for the beautiful baptismal garment and the baptismal "cake" and for everyone who provided food for the wonderful reception!!



Offering of Letters—2025

Hunger and food insecurity continue to plague our communities, country, and the world. Recent changes in federal policies have made accessing funds for hunger and nutrition programs more difficult. Rising food prices, especially eggs, a traditionally cheap source of protein, have made it difficult for some of our more vulnerable community members to make ends meet. Hunger of college campuses is a real concern for many. Jesus said "Whatever you do for the least of these you do for me." We do Christ's work when we act with and for people affected by hunger and poverty. God teaches us, through the prophets, that we are not to withhold nourishment from anyone (Nehemiah 5:1-13; Isaiah 58:6-10; Zechariah 7:8-10), not to harden our hearts, but to give and accompany one another with an open hand and an open heart (Deuteronomy 15:10). In the Gospels, Jesus invites potential disciples to "follow" him, making it clear that discipleship entails actions of solidarity and service. (Matthew 20:26-28). Jesus urges us to act on God's behalf and order our lives together so that all people have the necessities of life (Matthew 25:35-40) and are able to flourish. We continue Christ's work when we "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:32-38). The third Sunday of the month, Apostles remembers God's hungry people. We pray and offer our resources. This month members of Apostles will have the opportunity to make an offering of letters. Letters to elected representatives will let them know that we, as Christians, care about those who struggle to feed their families and the health of our communities. Please join in this ministry.

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Update on Apostles Pictorial Directory

The group putting together our Pictorial Directory met in February and are working to get it finalized—it shouldn't be much longer before we have our wonderful new directory!! If you have any questions, please contact Irene Albert.

News From The Pews



Jamie Serafin has had the opportunity to partake in the amazing Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) program from September thru March. They are the 18th Cohort. The VMN

Program is a state-sponsored volunteer service initiative that promotes environmental stewardship. Participants receive training in various natural resource topics such as evolution, native plants/botany, herpetology, ornithology, ecology, mammalogy, ichthyology, dendrology, climate/weather, mycology, forestry, and wildlife management. Once certified (Jamie's graduation is March 12th), she will volunteer by engaging in educational outreach, citizen science, stewardship activities, and chapter leadership. The program is supported by seven state agencies and aims to conserve and manage Virginia's natural resources through hands-on projects and community involvement. In these pictures her cohort was at Jamestown and Chippokes State Park for 2 of their many field days. You will also see the scallop shells which are the state fossil of Virginia (*Chesapecten jeffersonius*). These fossils are from the late Miocene epoch, which means it's approximately 8 to 12 million years old. They have significance not only due to their age but also because they were one of the first fossils to be described in scientific literature from North America. It was an honor to scavenge these from the cut out of the river bank. She would encourage anyone interested in this program to apply, it has provided her with a wealth of knowledge and built some wonderful relationships. A special thank you to Janet Gomez for providing one of the references for my application into the program.



Gene and Janet Gomez recently attended a North Carolina Synod retreat, Small, Scrappy and Vital Congregations, in Salisbury, NC.

Keynote speaker was Teresa Stewart, author of "The Small Church Advantage, Seven Powerful Practices that Work Best in Small Settings." Watch for a report in the April edition of The Epistle about what they learned!!



Pete Liljeberg announced during the Service and Sharing Ministry Team meeting last month that he is helping the Virginia Synod plan a trip to the US/Mexico border in El Paso, Texas in 2026—stay tuned for details!!

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Presiding Bishop Eaton Messages to "Church"

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton speaks to the church about the need to check in on one another during this time of great anxiety and fear for so many members. "We

may not know what tomorrow brings, but we have each other. And we have the promise of a God who meets us in our fear, who walks with us in our struggles, and who calls us to be bearers of hope." Bishop Eaton also addresses false accusations on X. Bishop Eaton says that despite misinformation and baseless doubt on funding that supports Lutheran organizations across our country, the ELCA remains steadfast in our commitment and work with our many Lutheran partners. You can listen to both of these messages on elca.org.

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Spring Forward— March 9th!!

Remember to set your clocks ahead on March 9th!!