

St. Mark congregation,

Let me begin my first letter to the congregation by saying that I am very surprised and humbled that you elected me to serve as your chairman. I have many flaws that will make this role challenging for me, but perhaps there is one quality I possess that will help me do the job well enough – a deep love and concern for the ministry done at St. Mark through the church and school. Every day, I think about the well-being of the buildings and grounds, the amazing staff, the spreading of God's word through preaching and teaching, and the many other blessings God has showered on St. Mark over the years. With your prayers, and by leaning on God's word for wisdom and direction, I will keep our mission statement in mind as I serve you to the best of my abilities.

To keep you informed of things happening at St. Mark, here are some highlights from the past month...

A new pastor was installed at Concordia on July 16. Big thanks to Pastor Naumann for supporting their vacancy over the past 6 months. Our bible information classes have been very fruitful, adding multiple families and single members to the flock who continue to worship regularly. Keep pastor Hollmann in your prayers as he continues to deliberate a divine call to serve as an associate pastor in Chino Valley, AZ and Prescott, AZ.

The Elders continue to support the congregation and pastors as they faithfully carry out the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. They encourage the congregation to invest their time / talents by serving on the Altar Guild, the building committee, ushering, and assisting with video production / distribution.

The Stewardship committee is looking into fundraising strategies to help support the upcoming building project. They are also putting together an easy-to-follow guide that will demonstrate how to make donations through our online giving platform - Vanco. The guide will show members who already use Vanco for their regular giving how to change their contribution amounts as well.

The Board of Education has been working with staff to determine how to best support students with special needs. They are exploring options that could utilize skills both from our current staff and possibly outside sources. St. Mark will begin the school year with 135 students in 4K-8th grade (as of 7/31). Please welcome new Principal Training Program Candidate - John Niebuhr (upper grades), and his wife Brianna, and also welcome Ann Marohn (1st grade) and family! John and Ann will be installed at the 8am service at St. Mark on Aug. 20. Cornerstone high school has 9 students enrolled in 9th – 11th grades and will be holding classes in the basement of Our Hope Church in Chippewa Falls for their first year. The called workers for Cornerstone High School will be installed in a special opening service at 3pm on Aug. 20, at Our Hope. Please keep all our teachers, aides, and pastors in your prayers as they teach and encourage students this year.

On 7/23, voters decided to reconsider the previous decision to rent classroom space from Peace Church and voted to keep all students on St. Mark campus instead. Factors that led to that decision include: Increase in projected costs, no contract had been signed yet, potential legal concerns, and the recent approval of phase .5 building project. This means that the meeting rooms and narthex will be used to hold classes during for much of the weekdays. I ask for your patience, flexibility, and understanding as it will feel a bit more crowded, and some groups may need to find alternate spaces to hold their functions.

Phase .5 building project is marching forward with design completed, and engineering drawings and bid estimates expected by the end of October. Phase .5 includes 2 additional classrooms, bathroom, and storage room extending from the upper wing. We are on track to have final plans / bids ready for approval at the January 2024 voter's meeting. I'd like to add that additional phases are being planned as well. Phase 1.0 will include a new sanctuary, offices, and auxiliary rooms for meetings, special groups, etc. It is necessary that we complete Phase .5 first because the Phase 1.0 does impact current classroom space. I urge everyone to financially support each building phase as you are able, so that the physical space on St. Mark campus continues to keep up with increases in church membership, school enrollment, and the many programs / opportunities that utilize spaces within our building.

The Building and Grounds group has been busy working on a new key card policy that will improve security during the school day. Look for those changes to be communicated to all soon. There haven't been any major repairs / expenses in recent months. Many thanks to our custodian Chris Schultz for the effort put into carpet/floor cleaning over the summer!

The Board of Technology had a recent workday to remove / upgrade laptops, install local printers, and other various network maintenance duties. Much of what they do is behind the scenes but is very critical. Door security, classroom education, and data management are a constant focus for this group.

The Board of Finance reported that general fund weekly giving was up 4% for June when compared to last year. However, general fund giving was down -2.2% for the year when compared to the previous year. My prayer is that God helps us realize and value the many blessings we have and move our hearts to increase our support of the ministry at St. Mark as it continues to grow.

I'll close this letter by saying please don't hesitate to give me a call with any thoughts, advice, questions, or concerns about things happening at St. Mark. While I certainly don't have all the answers, I will work to get them and keep you as informed as possible.

In Christ,
Steve Hahm
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