

BETHESDA LUTHERAN

NEWSLETTER

April 2026

Volume 26 | Number 2

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

HOLY WEEK JOURNEY

By Pastor Grant Vanderford

Dear Bethesda family,
Holy Week is nearly here, and I want to warmly invite you to make this journey together as a congregation. This sacred week draws us deeply into the story of Jesus' Passion — into the joyful waving of palms, the shared meal and washing of feet, the stripping of the altar, the stark sorrow of the cross, the stillness of the tomb, and at last the joy of resurrection morning. As we gather day by day, we are not only remembering these holy events; we are being immersed in them, so that the story of Jesus takes shape in us and our lives become more and more cruciform — marked by love, mercy, self-giving, and hope.

I hope you will join us for worship throughout this Holy Week. Here are the times of the week's services:

- Palm Sunday — March 29 at 9:30 am
- Maundy Thursday — April 2 at 7:00 pm
- Good Friday — April 3 at 7:00 pm
- Vigil of Easter — April 4 at 7:00 pm
- Resurrection of Our Lord / Easter Sunday — April 5 at 9:30 am

Come and walk this holy way with us. Together we will follow Jesus through the Passion and into the new life of Easter.

Peace,

Pr. Grant



2026 ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

The meeting was called to order by Marty Ohren, Acting President, with 55 voting members present.

The motion to accept the agenda as amended, adding a discussion of building security upgrades was approved.

Pastor Grant Vanderford led an opening prayer. The minutes of the 2025 annual meeting were approved.

The nominating committee presented the nominees who were elected by an unanimous ballot.

Written staff reports are available in Annual Report. Treasurer's report, Ministry Team & Committee Reports, including Parish Life, Lifelong Learning, Outreach, Worship & Music, Stewardship, Property, Building on Faith Capital Campaign, and Bethesda Foundation as presented in the Annual Report were approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Building Security – Aaron Wenaas presented on goals for increasing building security in 2026. It is desired to update the South and West exterior doors to operate on the existing electronic locking system. This is expected to cost approximately \$11k for installation of the electro-mechanical systems required to synchronize the doors. This funding would draw from the Building on Faith building improvements. This project was, in part, at the request of BAS in order to enhance security for both the daycare and the church congregation. Based on its expected expense, this project would either require a separate congregational meeting for approval, or, can be incorporated as a part of the Building on Faith Phase II improvements

The entire annual report and the filing of the same with the minutes – approved. Closed with the Lord's Prayer. The full minutes will be published in the next Annual Report.

2026 ELECTION RESULTS

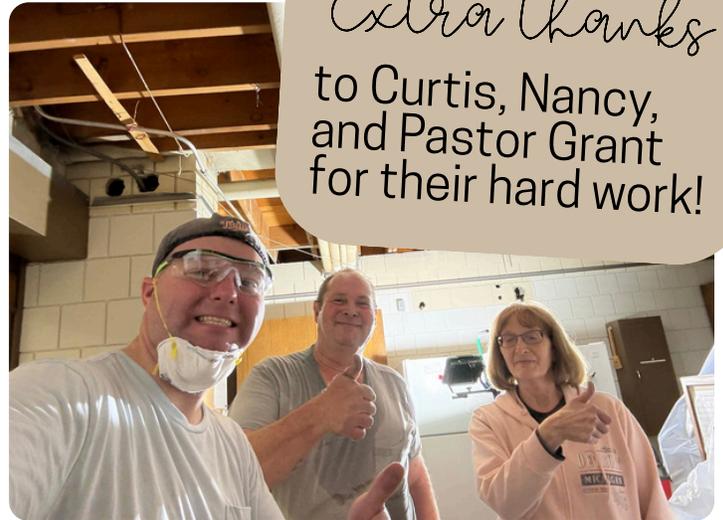
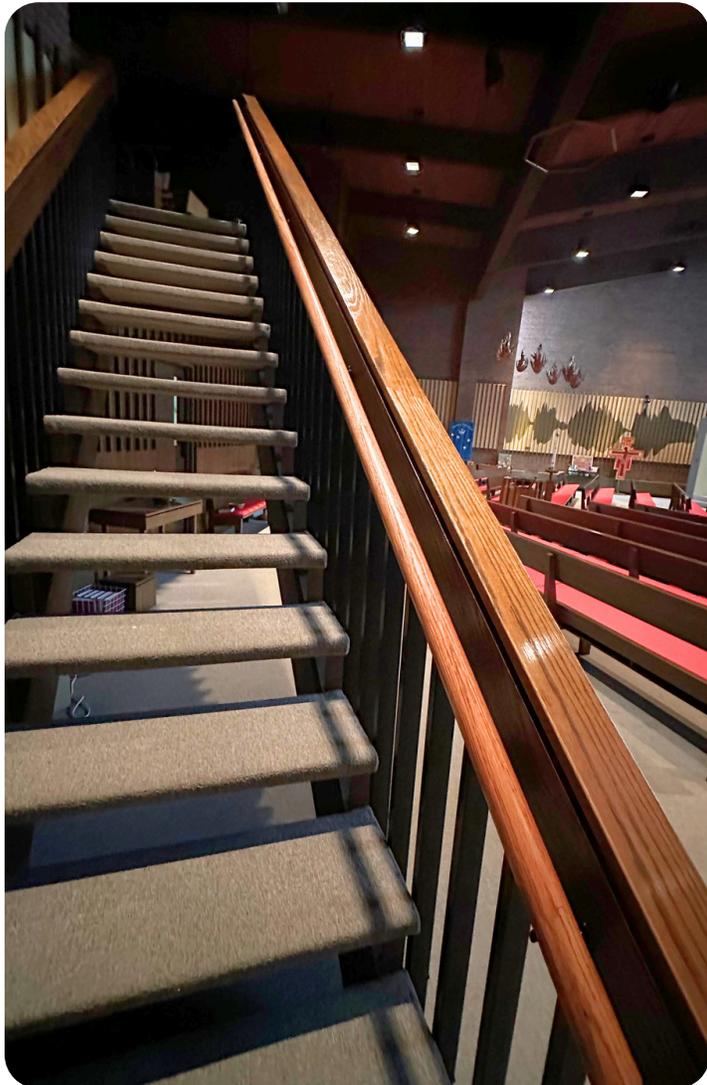
CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL	SHARON BUNGUM-OLSON (2 ND 3-YEAR TERM) LIBBY STERNHAGEN SCHWENK (1 ST 3-YEAR TERM) HEATH BAXTER (1 ST 3-YEAR TERM) MATTHEW BENSON-TUFF (1 ST 1-YEAR TERM)
NWMN SYNOD ASSEMBLY DELEGATES	RICK & SHANNON VANDERFORD
NOMINATING COMMITTEE	BECKY ERICKSON JULIE PHILLIPS MARY WALLUM
PATHWAYS REPRESENTATIVE	EMMA TENNYSON
EVENTIDE REPRESENTATIVE	TERRI JO WOLD
BLC FOUNDATION TRUSTEES	KENT COSTIN EDDIE BERNHARDSON JEFF KNUTSON

PROPERTY UPDATES

Recently completed projects include updates to the kitchen ceiling and handrails in the sanctuary!

Upcoming Building on Faith projects as part of Phase II include:

- Upgrade front signage near the street
- Replace ground-level windows
- Replace sanctuary carpet
- Resurface parking lot



Extra thanks
to Curtis, Nancy,
and Pastor Grant
for their hard work!



COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY 9, 2026

ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS:

President: Marty Ohren
Vice President: Aaron Wenaas
Treasurer: Nancy Lund
Secretary: Drew Robinson

MOTIONS PASSED:

- Motion to approve 2026 Building on Faith tithes of 10% to be split between Youthworks and Dorothy Day Food Pantry. (Nancy/Sharon/approved)
- Motion to approve 2026 Lenten Supper free-will offerings donation to Moorhead Area Public Schools (MAPS) Homeless Outreach (Joel/Nancy/approved)
- Motion to approve 2025 net income distribution of: \$10,500 to Building on Faith, to be used for additional building security, and \$25,000 to the Bethesda Foundation to repay funds previously used for operating expenses. (Aaron/Drew/approved)
- Lounge Tables: The recurring bible study has grown in participation to a size that additional space is needed. The current tables in the lounge do not facilitate easy rearrangement. An anonymous donor has offered to purchase new tables. These new tables would be more mobile, provide for increased seating, and the existing tables were previously purchased; not donated. Motion to accept the in-kind donation. (Aaron/Sharon/approved)

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Vision 2030 Task Force / Strategic Planning
- Constitution Review Process Joel has volunteered to head the constitutional review process. One additional participant will be needed, in addition to Pastor Grant.



New council members (from left): Matthew Benson Tuff, Libby Sternhagen Schwenk, (Pastor Grant), and Heath Baxter

MINISTRY TEAM ASSIGNMENTS:

- Parish Life: Sharon Olson
- Worship & Music: Heath Baxter
- Outreach: Joel Westby and Matthew Benson Tuff
- Property: Aaron Wenaas and Nancy Lund
- Lifelong Learning: Sharon Bungum-Olson
- Stewardship: Drew Robinson
- Evergreen Cemetery Liaison: Libby Sternhagen Schwenk and Drew Robinson
- BAS Liaison: Marty Ohren

FUTURE BUSINESS:

- Discussion of committees for member auditing, financial auditing, and mutual ministry
- Discussion on modifying/reverting the church newsletter schedule
- Major Gift and Donation Policy
- Sabbatical Policy

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COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS - CONTINUED

The following motions and reports were passed:

- Agenda Motion to approve agenda as amended (Nancy/Matthew/approved).

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Motion to approve the January minutes (Joel/Heath/approved).

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Currently, annual revenue is short by approximately \$11k. This closely aligns with what was pledged. However, it is too early to 'sound any alarms' about a potential shortfall for the year's income. Motion to approve the treasurer's report (Drew/Joel/approved).

PASTOR'S REPORT:

He is looking forward to meeting with the Mutual Ministry team on 03/11/26. Motion to approve the pastor's verbal report with anticipation of a written report to come (Joel/Sharon/approved)

MINISTRY TEAMS:

- Parish Life Blood drive will be held on 04/30/26. A potluck is being planned for New Member Sunday.
- Worship & Music Bell choir has been going well, with leadership by Rachel and Heath, providing positive renewal of that ministry. Four people went to the Cities for 'Bell Fest' this last week.

MINISTRY TEAMS:

- *Outreach* - No meeting since last Council meeting, next meeting will be on 03/16/26.
- *Property* - The kitchen ceiling work has been completed, along with cleaning and organization. HVAC work will be completed later in the year.
- *Lifelong Learning* - Grief counseling was cancelled; rescheduling is desired. Confirmation for three confirmands to be held on 10/25/26. A talk by Tom Pence about pre-funeral planning scheduled for 03/15/2026. On 05/03/26 will be a talk by

Mayor Shelly Carlson, about being good neighbors with people of other faiths. Working on WoW for next year. Expect more stories from the Camel in the Newsletter.

- *Stewardship* - No meeting held since last council meeting. Stewardship will be involved with new member class.
- *BAS* - The next meeting 03/12/26. A contractor has been selected to paint their cabinets. Communication between BLC and BAS has been going well.
- *Cemetery* - The next meeting is scheduled for 03/19/26

Motion to approve ministry team reports en masse (Joel/Heath/approved).

OLD BUSINESS:

- New Council Members received their packets and FOBs. Mailbox labels are yet to be updated. A new Council Person on Duty (CPOD) name tag purchased, with name inserts available for each Council member to use when on duty.

NEW BUSINESS:

- *Membership Audit*: This will be engaged by the Stewardship team in 2026. A member is defined by the ELCA.
- *Pastor Sabbatical Policy*: Bethesda currently does not have an accepted policy for Pastoral sabbaticals. The Executive Committee has recommended that the formation of this policy be entrusted to the Mutual Ministry team, as an ad hoc committee. Current members of the MMT are Mary Wenaas, Julie Phillips, and Arland Jacobson. It is requested that this be implemented prior to 2027. Motion to task the mutual ministry team with formation of this policy. (Drew/Nancy/approved)

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COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS - CONTINUED

- *Constitution Review:* Joel volunteered to begin planning for this process. An ad hoc committee needs to be officially formed. The goal is to vote to ratify the amended constitution at the annual meeting in February 2027. Motion to form an ad hoc committee, led by Joel Westby, to review and revise the constitution for Bethesda Evangelical Lutheran Church. (Nancy/Drew/approved). Discussion: This motion will be taken as permission to start the process with the aim of completion and adoption at the annual congregational meeting in 2027.
- *Council Lenten Meal:* Finalize planning for 3/11/26 meal.
- *Safe Sanctuary Policy:* This policy is in development by the Safe Sanctuary ad hoc team, which includes Pastor Grant, Ruth Denton Graber, Matthew Bensen-Tuff, Sharon Olson. They will be meeting on 03/12/26 and are close to completing this policy. They have identified Ministry Safe as a good organization for providing background checks and training for members.
- *Major Gifts and Donation Policy:* A policy needs to be crafted to govern what is done with major gifts. An ad hoc committee likely needs to be convened. An imminent need has developed for completion of this policy. Notice has been provided to BLC of a significant estate gift that will be given to the church. Completion of this policy is needed to guide its receipt and investment or distribution. This policy is in development by Stewardship and the Treasurer.

CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Vision 2030 Task Force / Strategic Planning: Marty has agreed to be a leader in this. Grant has several ideas regarding this, which need to be run by others in the congregation. Deb Fogel has agreed to be a part of the 'anniversary' part of the planning.

Adjourn with Lord's Prayer. Motion to adjourn (Drew/Aaron/approved)

FEBRUARY 2026

	MTD			YTD		
	Actual	Budget	over Budget	Actual	Budget	over Budget
Total Income	\$21,030	\$25,417	(\$4,387)	\$40,778	\$49,934	(\$9,156)
Total Expenses	\$32,461	\$28,930	\$3,531	\$54,157	\$53,310	\$847
Net Income	(\$11,431)	(\$3,513)	(\$7,918)	(\$13,379)	(\$3,376)	(\$10,003)

PARISH LIFE

CRAFTING DAYS AT SILVER LININGS

At Christmas time, several Bethesda members, including Santa and Mrs. Clause, gathered at Silver Linings (Churches United's housing unit for individuals aged 55 and older) for an evening of lasagna and Bingo.

We have asked our new friends if they would join us for some yarn crafts, and two residents took us up on the deal! Bethesda brought them some prayer shawls and told the story of why this ministry was being shared with them.

We also brought some yarn and needles to help them make their own creations! It was so fun that we even went back again in March.

If you love to craft or just love to visit with people that need our support, join us for our next gathering on April 16 at 4 p.m.



Bethesda + Silver Linings

Open Knitting & Crocheting Afternoon

Gather with residents to help them make a project, work on your own, or just visit

April 16
4 p.m.
Silver Linings
3350 3rd Ave NW
Moorhead

All yarn
enthusiasts
welcome



Chocolate

& THE BIG BAND EXPERIENCE

Bethesda has experienced something similar to what I think heaven would be like.

In February, we were honored to host the Metro Gnomes Band, complete with two of our own members, Shannon Vanderford playing the flute and Sue Reinhardt on the saxophone. The band played songs that were both familiar and new for a combination of our Bethesda members and people from the community.

Following the band, the audience joined us for a potluck of chocolate! From fondue to a fountain, and fudge to cupcakes and candy - what a heavenly evening!



LIFELONG LEARNING

PRE-PLANNING FUNERALS

Funerals are often thought of with fear. It means that someone we love has left and we realize that this time will come for us also. How do we face this idea for ourselves? Have we given a loved one all the information they need to plan?

The recent adult forum, led by Tom Pence, formerly with Korsmo Funeral Home, helped to address these questions while taking the fear out of planning your own funeral.

Please know that Pastor Grant is willing to help with planning your funerals and can also keep those plans safely stored at church. Evergreen Cemetery can also provide a current price list.

You can start planning your funeral at any time, no matter what age you are! Plans can be modified throughout your life as things change. Your family and loved ones will thank you.

We hope you'll be able to join us for the next adult forum on May 3 with Mayor Shelly Carlson.



Tom Pence spoke during the March adult forum



ADULT FORUM

MAY 3 FOLLOWING WORSHIP

JOIN US FOR A CONVERSATION ON **"BEING GOOD NEIGHBORS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS"** WITH MOORHEAD MAYOR SHELLEY CARLSON

BELLFEST 2026

FINDING UNITY & COMMUNITY THROUGH MUSIC

By Libby Sternhagen Schwenk

On a recent melting weekend in March, four of Bethesda's handbell ringers traveled to Arden Hills, a suburb of the Twin Cities, to play in BellFest, a one-day handbell festival. Over one hundred ringers from all over the region came for a day of music and community!

One thing I love about handbells is that ringing a song is a team effort. Just as every key on a piano is needed to play a song, so a handbell choir needs every last one of its members for the music to be complete. Since Heath, Rachel, Andrew and I didn't form a complete choir, our rehearsals for BellFest had sounded very empty and stilted.

When we finally united with the other choirs at the festival, the music finally was whole and beautiful.

The day's sense of community extended past the music on the page. The festival's guest director, Matthew Compton, was visiting from out of state, and he commented on the particular resonance of one of our pieces: "Ascend subtitle of the piece is "Together We Rise!"

I think, is a very apt piece for the Minneapolis area and Minnesota as a whole, you have all gone through so much, in the last handful of months especially. But the unity of the

Minnesota community has really been admirable even from all the way across the country. I commend you all for being united as a community through tragic times and the challenges that you all face. You all came together as one people; it's an incredible thing."

At noon on the day of the festival, each of the 100+ ringers picked up a bell and rang for three minutes straight.

It is a tradition that one of the BellFest organizers started in January as a cry for peace and unity during Operation Metro Surge. Our random ringing didn't form a melody or a

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Libby, Rachel, Heath, & Andrew at BellFest 2026

CONTINUED...

chord, it was more of a cacophony. But in the chaos, we sought unity.

The day after BellFest, Andrew and I drove to a quiet neighborhood in Minneapolis to visit George Floyd Square.

Thousands of small offerings marked the site; teddy bears, marbles, paintings, poems. It was a heavy experience to stand in the place where George Floyd breathed his last.

Across from the memorial was a banner reading "Where There's People, There's Power." It was an important message to absorb. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them." During BellFest we used our gift of music to bring joy through song, and to seek unity in troubled times.



George Floyd memorial

Afternoon of fun & fellowship

Where: The Linden (1500 7th St S, Moorhead)

When: First & fourth Tuesdays of the month

Time: 1-4 p.m.

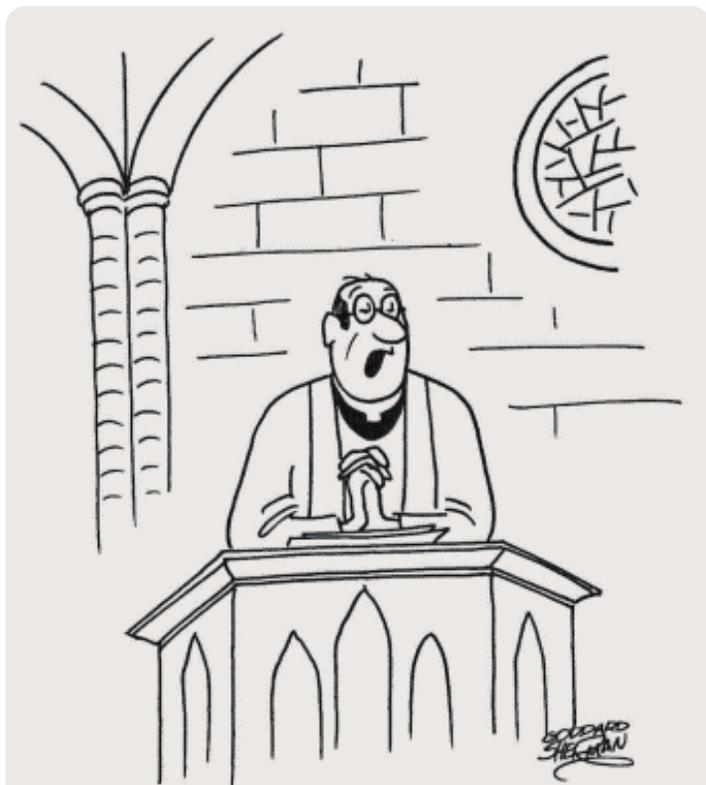
Come enjoy visiting & friendships!



APRIL IS NATIONAL VOLUNTEER MONTH

As April is National Volunteer Month, we want to recognize the many ways in which people volunteer at Bethesda! Our church thrives because of those who offer their time and talents in various ways.

First on the list are council members! These people tend to the business of our church - and they head up various teams of even more volunteers, including "Parish Life," "Lifelong Learning," "Outreach," "Worship and Music," "Property," and "Stewardship." The tasks they undertake are immeasurable.



"WE INTERRUPT THE ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT THE CHURCH BAZAAR, THE LADIES' AUXILIARY, AND THE YOUTH FELLOWSHIP TO BRING YOU A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR."

Next we have those who help with weekly services - choir and bell members, other musicians, an assisting minister, reader, altar guild prep, communion assistants, a clicker for the Powerpoint, someone to run the livestream camera, ushers, and those who host coffee for the week. *Do you ever wonder who makes the bread for communion each Sunday? Who picks up those wonderful donuts or cookies we savor during fellowship?* **Volunteers, of course!**

Then we have those who prepare meals for various events, including our current Wednesday lenten dinners. Others tend to the yard and gardens, trim trees, plant flowers, and mow the grass. We have those who show up to paint a room, change out ceiling tiles, count the weekly financial offerings, and switch the paraments. **All volunteers!**

We have people who plan fundraisers, blood drives, and musical offerings. There are quilters who meet weekly to create the beautiful quilts that are then gifted to others. **VOLUNTEERS!**

Whether you volunteer here or elsewhere, why do you do it? Volunteering certainly offers essential help to worthwhile causes, but it also can reduce stress, combat depression, and provide a sense of peace. Volunteering provides a connection and experience unlike many other activities in today's world. Evidence suggests that people who give of their time to others might even benefit from lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan.

Volunteering truly makes a difference, and we are grateful for all that happens at Bethesda through this work.

All are welcome for fellowship after worship on April 26 with cake and coffee in recognition of volunteer month!



“ADAM AND EVE DISOBEY GOD” THROUGH THE EYES OF A CAMEL

By Camel (a.k.a. Sharon Olson)

GENESIS 3

Hi again! This is the Camel from the Christmas Program. I said that I would write down some stories about my life several years ago. I thought I would tell you about when Adam and Eve got in trouble.

Remember I told you about the oasis, the beautiful area that God created in the middle of the desert? An oasis has lots of plants to eat, beautiful flowers and trees, and this is where the animals hang out. An oasis is surrounded by lots of sand! There is no water, so nothing really grows there and the animals prefer to be around water. And it is hot in the desert!

So this particular oasis was very beautiful and Adam and Eve called it the “Garden of Eden.” I lived there and saw this next story as it happened. I have taken a picture of the Garden of Eden and attached it to the end of this story.

God said we could hang out anywhere in the Garden of Eden.

He told us that we could have anything in the whole Oasis, except one tree. He called this tree the “Tree of Knowledge.” He said if Adam and Eve ate the fruit from that tree, they would die.

Do you remember me telling you about the snake that God created? I knew that snake was trouble, in fact I think this snake was actually the devil. I tried to warn Adam and Eve, but they didn’t listen to me. You should have heard what that snake said!

One day Eve was walking around the Garden of Eden and saw the snake hanging in the tree. He started to talk to Eve. He asked her why God wouldn’t let her eat from the Tree of Knowledge. He said this tree had the best tasting fruit, the juiciest, sweetest and it would make them so smart, just like God.

The snake said he eats it all the time. I don’t know if this was true, but he was tempting them. He said to Eve, “Go ahead and take a bite, don’t you want to be like God”. Eve didn’t want to make the snake angry so she

picked an apple and took a small bite. It was so good so she offered it to Adam too. Suddenly they remembered. God’s warning, and they realized that they had no clothes. They were ashamed that they had disobeyed God. They tried to hide themselves from God but he found them. God asked them why they had disobeyed him. They tried to blame it on the snake and said it was his fault but they knew that they were wrong.

God wanted them to remember that they must obey his teachings. He had told them that they could have anything they wanted but the fruit from one tree. But they ate that fruit and because they had sinned, they would have to work very hard for everything they had for the rest of their life. God also punished the snake for his part in tempting them and he made all snakes crawl on their belly in the dust forever.

Well, that is my story. I’ll be back next issue to tell some more stories, “From the Eyes of a Camel.”



SECOND SUNDAY OF THE MONTH

NOISY OFFERING

NEXT DATE: APRIL 12

CUB SCOUT PANCAKE BREAKFAST FUNDRAISER

APRIL
19



FREE-WILL
DONATION

POST-SERVICE

COME SUPPORT THE NEW CUB SCOUT
PACK AT BETHESDA AND EAT PANCAKES
WITH US AFTER SERVICE ON APRIL 19.

BLOOD DRIVE

at Bethesda



THURSDAY, APRIL 30
3:30 - 7:00 P.M. BLOOD DONATIONS
+ ICE CREAM SUNDAE BAR FOR
DONORS & VOLUNTEERS!

SIGN UP AT
BETHESDAMHD.ORG/EVENTS

SIGN UP TO VOLUNTEER

ONLINE

**WORSHIP
ASSISTANTS
NEEDED!**

BETHESDAMHD.ORG/WORSHIP

nonviolent.

WALKING THE WAY WITH JESUS

holy week

MARCH 29 @ 9:30 A.M.
APRIL 2 @ 7 P.M.
APRIL 3 @ 7 P.M.
APRIL 4 @ 7 P.M.
APRIL 5 @ 9:30 A.M.

PALM SUNDAY
MAUNDY THURSDAY
GOOD FRIDAY
HOLY SATURDAY
EASTER SUNDAY

Easter at Bethesda

SUNDAY, APRIL 5

8:30 A.M. BREAKFAST
CARAMEL & ORANGE SWEET ROLLS

9:30 A.M. WORSHIP



SCALLOPED POTATOES

Time: 1½ hr.
Temp. 350°

1/4 cup Butter
2 cups Milk
1 cup Evaporated Milk
1 can Cream of Mushroom Soup
1 cup Celery, diced
2 cups Chopped Ham (about 2/3 lbs.)
1/2 cup Chopped Onion
1 tsp. Salt
1/4 tsp. Pepper
1 tsp. MSG

Combine above ingredients and heat to near boil. Thicken with 1/2 cup cornstarch and 1/4 cup water. Add 8 large sliced potatoes. Bake at 350° 1 to 1-1/2 hrs.

Betty Gjerde

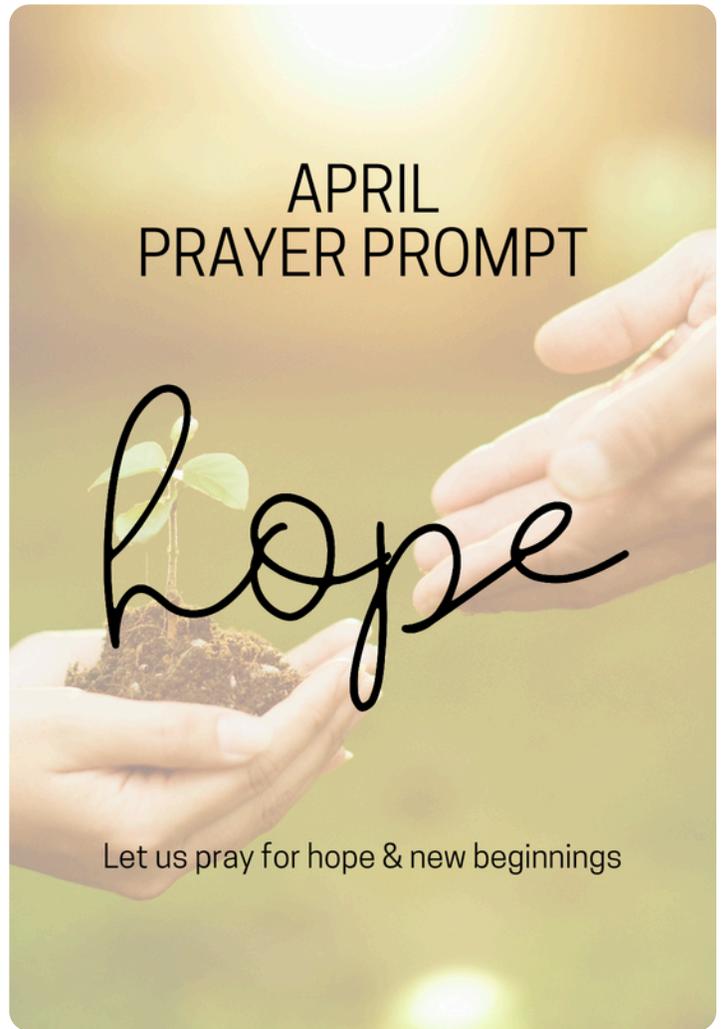
HASH BROWN POTATOES

Quantity: 9x13 pan Time: 45 min. to 1 hr.
Temp.: 350°

2 lbs. Hash Browns 1 pint Sour Cream
1/2 cup Melted Butter 1 can Cream of Chicken
1 tsp. Salt Soup
1/2 to 1 tsp. Pepper 8 oz. Grated American
2 Tbsp. Chopped (Dried) Onions Cheese

Mix top 8 ingredients in 9x13 pan. Top with corn flakes (grated) or potato chips and 1/4 cup melted butter. Bake 45 - 60 min.

Phyllis Martin



APRIL PRAYER PROMPT

Let us pray for hope & new beginnings

CHURCH STAFF

Pr. Grant Vanderford	Pastor
Jane Johnson	Office Administrator
Tyler Pyle	Pianist
Jillian Jaros	Choir & Handbell Director
Tammy Costin	Health Ministry
Billi Jo Townsend	Financials

OFFICERS

Marty Ohren	President
Aaron Wenaas	Vice President
Drew Robinson	Secretary
Nancy Lund	Treasurer

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