



# SMLC VOICE NEWSLETTER

## Winter 2024-25



### Pastor Brian's Preponderant Business

This fall has been full of activity here at St. Matthew! Rally Day was full of excitement and our Sunday School and Confirmation programs have been thriving. Our children and youth have been engaged in learning about the theme of the Characteristics of God and the Old Testament this fall. As part of our fall stewardship campaign, we heard temple talks highlighting various ministries in our congregation. Adult Forum also focused on these ministry spotlights, sharing how God uses the resources of St. Matthew to be a blessing both in the lives of our members and outside our walls to our neighbors in the community. The fall we celebrated the Installation of Rev Ryan and had other wonderful events like Music at Greenwood, the Harvest Dinner, Trunk or Treat, and Operation Christmas Child. We welcomed the community to our Tag Sale and were happy to welcome back the Christmas Cottage to use our building for their annual Christmas craft fair. Worship has been a Spirit-filled experience; we were blessed to celebrate two Baptisms this fall and I presided over two weddings. We also celebrated special festivals like Reformation Sunday and All Saints Sunday in meaningful ways. We are truly blessed to be church together, and I am privileged to serve as your pastor with Rev Ryan and our fantastic staff.

As we approach the end of the year and the season of Advent and Christmas, I am deeply grateful to serve as your pastor. I admire the many ways God is at work at St. Matthew. We are looking forward to our Sunday School Christmas Pageant on Sunday December 22 and to Christmas Eve services December 24 at 4:30, 7:30, and 10:30. In the new year we have a lot to look forward to as well. I thank you for your partnership in the ministry we do in this community of faith, and I look forward to this coming season where we will celebrate our Savior's birth!

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Brian Rajcok

## **Rev. Ryan's Reflections**

In the United States, the fall months are a time when we are encouraged to give thanks. As you receive this newsletter, the United States will have just celebrated the harvest and the bounty of the land with a massive festival called Thanksgiving. Families and friends traditionally gather around a table to feast on the harvest bounty. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century world this holiday has turned into a giant consumer holiday. Advertisements for Christmas shopping are becoming common on our televisions in the days after Halloween. We are encouraged to watch huge spectacles including parades, football games and TV specials. Our five senses are totally filled with the smells, tastes, sights, sounds and textures of pumpkin spice, sweet potatoes and stuffing which will soon mingle with the scent and sappy stickiness of balsam trees and cinnamon.

It's a season that is at the same time exceptionally fun and yet very exhausting!

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to many ancient communities including the Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians. You and I call these letters "books" and they are found in our New Testament titled 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians (creative titles!). All of Paul's letters begin with words of thanksgiving and of blessing. The letters I listed above begin with this typical thanksgiving: 1 Cor 1:4-9; 2 Cor 1:3-4; Galatians 1:3-5; Philippians 1:2-11.

As the season of Fall comes to an end this year and you are looking at displays of the earth's abundance in store windows and even on your own table at home, I encourage you to look at Paul's letters and read his words of thanks and blessing. Ask yourself: Why is Paul giving thanks? Who is Paul blessing? What are the themes in each of his blessings? For what can I give thanks? Who can I bless this year? Who is the God we give thanks to?

I hope that taking a moment to engage with Paul's words of thanks and blessing can help slow you down as we move into the season of Advent. A season of waiting through beautiful, calming darkness of winter for the birth of the Light of the World: Jesus Christ, the new born child of God for whom we give all our thanks and praise.

I pray that Paul's words of thanks and blessing can balance the constant pull of the ads that will tell you to buy more, eat more, and be more as the holiday season ramps into full swing. Yes, you *can* buy lovely gifts for your loved ones, and you *should* eat of the delicious bountiful harvest the earth provides. You can do all those things rooted in thanks to God's abundance! Enjoying the holiday season rooted in thanks to God will help the traditions, sights, smells and tastes shimmer in a new light this year.

Have fun and give thanks and praise to God for the abundance of our world and the ways we get to celebrate.

Rev. Ryan Heckman, Associate Pastor

# SMLC CALENDAR



## REGULAR OCCURANCES

### **Sanctuary Worship (9am)**

- Every Sunday

### **Sunday School (10:20am)**

- Every Sunday

### **Adult Forum (10:20am)**

- Every Sunday

### **Confirmation Class (10:30am)**

- Every Sunday

### **Choir Rehearsal (2pm)**

- Every Tuesday

### **Centering Prayer (2pm)**

- Every Thursday

### **Bible Study (10am)**

- 1st and 3rd Thursday

### **Men's Breakfast (8:30am)**

- 3rd Saturday

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### DECEMBER

#### **Sunday, Dec. 8 (Following Worship)**

- Intergenerational Homebound Christmas Card Event
- Poinsettia Reservation Deadline

#### **Sunday, Dec. 15**

- 5pm - Confirmation Caroling
- 6:30pm - Youth Christmas Party

#### **Tuesday, Dec. 17 (1-3pm)**

- Women's Fellowship Gathering

#### **Sunday, Dec. 22 (9am)**

- Christmas Pageant Service w/ Holy Communion

#### **Monday - Thursday, Dec. 23-26**

- OFFICE CLOSED

#### **Tuesday, Dec. 24**

#### **(4:30pm, 7:30pm, 10:30pm)**

- Christmas Eve Services

#### **Sunday, Dec. 29 (9am)**

- Lessons & Carols Service w/ Holy Communion

### JANUARY

#### **Monday - Thursday, Dec. 30 - Jan. 2**

- OFFICE CLOSED

#### **Sunday, Jan. 19 (Following Worship)**

- SMLC Annual Meeting

### FEBRUARY

#### **Sunday, Feb. 16 (Following Worship)**

- Intergenerational Valentine's Day Event

# LOOKING BACK

## Recapping the Fall at St. Matthew

### Rev Ryan's Installation



On the afternoon of Sunday September 29, we celebrated the Installation of Rev. Ryan Heckman as Associate Pastor. Conference Dean Pastor Elizabeth Cummings led the service and Pastor Brian preached. It was a celebration, culminating a year long process beginning with our call to Ryan as Director of Christian Ed, through his call process and Ordination, and finally this Installation service and celebration. We are so grateful to have Rev Ryan as part of St. Matthew and look forward to impactful ministry together!

### Harvest Dinner & Old-Fashioned Hymn Sing

On Thursday October 17th our Fellowship and Outreach Committees partnered to sponsor a Pennsylvania Dutch style Harvest Dinner at St. Matthew! We welcomed our friends from Grace Lutheran in Hartford and Trinity Episcopal in Collinsville. We ate chicken pot pie, pork, sauerkraut, and dumplings, as well as delicious desserts of apple pie, pumpkin pie, and "shoo-fly" pie. The evening closed with an old-fashioned hymn sing. Thank you to all who helped prepare the event and thank you to all who came!

## Music at Greenwood



Thank you for your support of our 2024 season of Music at Greenwood! We had a wonderful time at our five concerts this year. After an enjoyable hour of music, the fun continued at the receptions generously provided by the Fellowship Committee. This year was a resounding success, and we are thankful for everyone who made it possible -- audience members, performers, donors, and organizers!

Our performers this year were...

- Paul Bisaccia, pianist
- Hot Cat Jazz Band
- Michael Kelly Blanchard, singer/songwriter/storyteller
- Sarah Schiener-Redenz, organist
- Greenwoods Consort, madrigal singers

Looking ahead to our 2025 season, we have an exciting lineup of concerts in the works! First, on March 22, we will celebrate Johann Sebastian Bach's 340th birthday with performances of several of his compositions for different instruments and ensembles. Come join us for this Bach Birthday Bash!

Second, on May 17, virtuoso violinist Elliott Davis will perform the cycle of Eugene Ysayë's 6 Sonatas for Solo Violin. You can learn more about Elliott and watch a promotional video for the music on his website at [www.elliottdavismusic.com](http://www.elliottdavismusic.com).

More events will be announced as the season draws nearer.

## Grace Lutheran Meals



Graceful Cooks have prepared several meals for our friends at Grace Lutheran in Hartford. On Friday September 20 a group from St. Matthew helped serve at Grace's Friday night dinner. They also prepared and served full Thanksgiving dinner, with turkey and all the traditional sides, on November 22nd. If you are interested in helping cook meals or in volunteering at Grace, email George Reider at [gmcareider@cs.com](mailto:gmcareider@cs.com).

## Trunk or Treat



This year's Trunk Or Treat event took place on the evening of October 25th. Families from St. Matthew and from across the Farmington Valley came to the church parking lot where we had 22 trunks decked out with Halloween decorations and passing out candy! Trunk or Treat is an event where families can come and have their kids participate in trick-or-treating but it's all in one parking lot. Kids go from trunk to trunk saying "trick or treat!" and they get candies. This event is a wonderful opportunity for the wider community to meet members at St. Matthew Lutheran Church who went all out on their trunk decorations this year! We had a "Haunted Carrot" themed car, a zombie grave yard themed car, a giant spider's web, and so many more designs. The atmosphere was like a fall carnival as the Confirmation kids set up yard games and kept the apple cider table stocked and ready for visitors.

A big thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Trunk or Treat! We look forward to next Halloween.

## St. Matthew Confirmation Visits Farmington Valley Jewish Community



Confirmation students were invited to the Farmington Valley Jewish Community (FVJC) on Friday, Nov. 15 for a tour of the synagogue and to attend evening services. We were blessed to receive this invitation from Rabbi Rebekah Goldman who also served as the Confirmation class's host. Our Confirmation students are pictured above with a special Torah scroll which survived the Holocaust. The evening was filled with learning about the traditions and practices of our siblings in the Jewish faith tradition. We are grateful for the invitation and hope to continue in community and partnership with FVJC!

## SMLC Tag Sale



Grace Lutheran Church in Hartford has a windfall! Proceeds from our Tag Sale will provide a lot of meals for their Friday community meal program. With the help of our faithful volunteers we raised over \$2,550. It takes a village and our village consisted of: Deb Brodeur, Sarah DeVito, April Brodeur-Fitts, Ann Eberhard, Ellen Ericson, Anne & Fred Fenn, Bob Hoffman, John Jarzbek, Kathy & Gary Kurtich, Anita & Wolf Mielert, Jim O'Herron, Jack & Robin Pietrick, Carol Reider, Karen Wright, Sharon Yanke. Gratitude and blessings to all! Our gratitude also to everyone who contributed items for the sale.



## Sunday School Insights

This year we have had three Sunday School classrooms each Sunday. Our Sunday School teachers have been faithful teachers who we are so grateful for! Thank you Margaret Byrne, Erica Connors, Elaine Menezes and Kelly O'Connell. We are also grateful for our youth helpers who've been a regular part of each classroom this year: Will Abbott, Ellie Mehler, Brooke Mehler and Mia Mehler.

Our Sunday Schoolers have been engaging in "Characteristics of God" this year. The kids are exploring their own creativity in describing who God is in our world including Creative, Faithful, With Us, Providing, Good, A Teacher, Powerful, Extraordinary. They will continue their exploration of who God can be in the world throughout the rest of the year as they read, watch, create and play through many of the most fundamental stories from the Bible!

Check out some of the pictures from the classrooms this year:



## Operation Christmas Child was a success!



The congregation participated in packing boxes for Operation Christmas Child again this year! Members from all generations of the congregation came together on Sunday November 17 for this service project. Operation Christmas Child is a program of the nonprofit Samaritan's Purse, which is a global poverty relief organization. This service project was exactly what we needed to get into the holiday spirit of serving our neighbor and giving to the community. Special thanks goes out to Missy and Hannah Lindquist, the mother-daughter-duo who made this service project possible! Thank you!!

# MINISTRY MINUTE

## An update from some of our many ministries

### Adult Forum

Adult Forum began the program year with an eight-week series of ministry spotlights: Christian Education, Worship & Music, Outreach & Endowment, Healing Ministries, Fellowship Ministries, Property Ministry, Technology & Evangelism, and Finance & Stewardship Ministry. Thank you to all who helped lead as part of this Adult Forum series!

In November Adult Forum participated in a meaningful forum led by Anne Fenn Veteran's Day weekend on God, War, and the Meaning of Suffering. The following week, Adult Forum joined with Sunday School and Confirmation to participate in Operation Christmas Child. On the final Sunday of November, Adult Forum welcomed Pastor William Carter to present on his book *But Mary Kept All These Things: Advent Devotions Rooted in the Christmas Gospel*.

In the month of December, Adult Forum will join Sunday School and Confirmation for an intergenerational event of Christmas card making for our homebound members on December 8. The following week, December 15, Sue Carey, our friend from Grace Lutheran Church in Hartford, will present on her book *More Than Merely Eyes Can See* which is about Grace's Friday night meal ministry. We are excited to share these upcoming Adult Forums and look forward to more great forums in the new year!

### Women's Fellowship

On Nov. 12th around 17 women gathered for the third women's fellowship. There is always food, candlelight, socializing, praying, and this time we were treated to a demonstration by Robin Pietrick - as she showed us how to create a really cool Thanksgiving centerpiece.

Our next gathering on Tuesday, December 17th (1-3pm), will be a totally fun Christmas party! Those who enjoy baking Christmas cookies will bring some to share, we'll listen to Christmas music, maybe sing a few carols, and play a few Christmas games. This promises to be a really fun time! We would love to see many SMLC women at this next event!

### Men's Breakfast

The men's group has met regularly for breakfast on the third Saturday of every month. Rick Hanson has helped Pastor Brian coordinate and many men have helped prepare and cook the breakfasts. The group has continued to read *Seize the Day* with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a daily devotional reading for the year.

## **Centering Prayer**

Centering Prayer group has continued to meet on Zoom on Thursdays at 2:00 p.m. This meeting includes 20 minutes time of silent contemplative prayer, followed by the practice of lectio divina with either a passage from scripture or spiritual devotional text. All are welcome to join at any time. Ask Pastor Brian any questions you may have or simply click the link in our weekly email blast to join!

## **Bible Study**

St. Matthew's Bible Study group continues to meet faithfully every first and third Thursday at 10:00 a.m. in the conference room. All are welcome to attend. And if this time does not work for you but you're interested in a Bible Study please let one of the pastors know!

## **Healing Prayer**

On the first Sunday of each month, beginning Sunday December 1, healing prayer ministers will welcome anyone to request prayer during worship. During the distribution of Holy Communion, healing prayer ministers will be present at the back of the sanctuary to pray for you. We invite you approach one of them, share your prayer request, and join together in prayer.

## **St. Matthew Choir**

To better meet the needs of both current choir members and new interested singers, the St. Matthew Choir will now be rehearsing on Tuesdays from 2:00-3:00 p.m., beginning December 3rd. If you would like to start singing with us, please feel free to join us for a rehearsal!

# **LOOKING AHEAD**

## **Previewing the next few months at SMLC**

### **Poinsettia Season!**

Get into the festive spirit and help us adorn our Christmas Eve services with the beauty of poinsettias! Starting today, we are opening sign-ups for those interested in purchasing these lovely plants for \$21.50 each. Your contributions will enhance the holiday ambiance. Don't miss this chance to participate in our holiday traditions; the sign-up deadline is December 8th, so secure your poinsettias and let the Christmas spirit bloom!

You may sign-up by using the sign-up sheet in the Gathering Space, or emailing the office. Please try to write your dedications as clearly as possible, so they can easily be typed into the bulletin. The checks can be made out to St. Matthew Lutheran Church with "Poinsettia" written in the memo line.

## **Confirmation Caroling 5:00pm on December 15 | (before the Youth Christmas party!)**

Confirmation students will be caroling at the homes of members who can no longer drive to church!

Confirmands will meet at St. Matthew at 5:00pm – we'll go to 5 or 6 homes and then come back to the church for the Youth Christmas Party.

## **Youth Christmas Party | Sunday, Dec. 15**

The High School Youth Group is planning a Youth Christmas party for the evening of Sunday December 15.

All High Schoolers and Confirmation students are invited! The party will begin at 6:30pm and will conclude around 8pm. There will be pizza, soda and other snacks available, so come hungry!

The festivities will include:

- Gathering Space Christmas Tree Decorating
- Christmas Cookies
- Screening of the movie The Santa Clause
- Yankee Swap

## **Children's Christmas Pageant | Sunday, December 22 during worship at 9:00AM**

The Children's Christmas Pageant will take place during 9AM worship on Sunday December 22! Our rehearsal for the pageant will be on Sunday December 15 during the regular Sunday School time (10:20-11:30am). We hope your Sunday Schooler is able to be a part of this dress-up experience of the Nativity Story of Jesus Christ!

## **SMLC Annual Meeting**

Mark your calendars for St. Matthew's annual meeting on Sunday January 19 following worship. We will approve the church budget and discuss some important considerations in the life of St. Matthew. Thank you for your participation in this important meeting!

If you are the organizer of a ministry and you owe a write-up for the Annual Report, please send it in to Paul in the office by January 9th at the latest! Thank you for your cooperation.

## **St. Matthew Ride Assistance**

We are developing a list of members who are willing to drive other members to church. If you would be willing to drive someone, please write your name on the bulletin board, including your phone number and address or general location so that those in need of a ride can connect with someone close by.