

ST. MARK'S REMARKS

1008 Franklin Rd. SW ● Roanoke, VA ● 24016 (540) 344-9051 ● office@stmarksroanoke.org



God's work. Our hands.

Sunday, September 13, 2020 is "God's work. Our hands." Sunday when congregations throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America celebrate who are we: one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. This year, our life together as the church, like so many other aspects of our individual lives, has been drastically changed by COVID-19. But the need for our service is still very much present. So this year, we'll be trying something different – kits for Lutheran World Relief.

Lutheran World Relief (LWR) was founded in 1945, and one of its flagship programs since its founding has been the quilt and kit program. Quilts and kits (personal care, baby care, school, and fabric kits) are assembled by congregations across the United States and sent to those in need through LWR. These supplies are provided to over 500,000 people in more than 20 countries. This year has been especially challenging for LWR as 3 shipping containers full of donated goods destined for struggling refugees were lost in the tragic explosion that rocked Beirut earlier this summer.

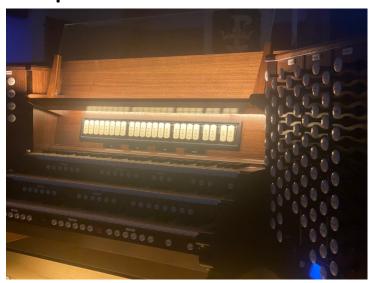
Our goal is to make 100 kits in total – 50 personal care kits and 50 school kits. Here's how it'll work:

- 1. Go to www.stmarksroanoke.org and follow the link on the home page to sign up to donate items for the kits. You'll be prompted to select which item(s) you'd like to donate, how many of each item, and then to enter your name and email address, so we know who's signed up.
- 2. Drop your items off at the church between 4 and 7 p.m. on either Monday, September 14, or Monday, September 28 (please do not leave donations at the church without prior arrangements as church staff continues to work from home).
- 3.A small group will assemble the kits in early October and send them to LWR.

In addition to donations of items, we also welcome monetary donations, which can be used to help purchase items for kits or to ship the donations to LWR (a donation of \$20 will cover the supplies for one kit). Please include "LWR Kits" in the memo line of your check.

If you have questions about signing up to donate, what specific items are needed, or when to drop off donations, please contact Jacob Gordon.

St. Mark's Organ Project Nearing Completion



Work on St. Mark's new organ (pictured above) is nearing completion. In fact, as of this mailing, we have been told that it's about 95% complete. There are a few more small "tweaks" that the organ company needs to do yet before the instrument will be ready for any public (in person or virtual) performance.

You may recall that St. Mark's first organ was built around 1910 by the M. P. Moeller company of Hagerstown, MD, for the church's first downtown location in Roanoke. When the congregation moved to its current location at the corner of Franklin Rd. and Highland Ave. in 1953, the organ was completely rebuilt, reusing the pipes from that original instrument. In 1965, several ranks of the original pipework were replaced and two new ranks were added.

Our new instrument replaces the console which was becoming very unreliable but keeps all of the pipework and adds some additional digital organ ranks.

Thank you to everyone who is making this project possible!

September Worship Plans

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, we will continue



to worship online on Sunday mornings. **HOWEVER**, we will also have worship in the Miller Garden on Sunday, September 27, at 11:00 am. That's right, we will worship in the Miller Garden in the morning on Sept. 27.

In good Lutheran speak, "What does that mean?" Well, we will prerecord a service for that Sunday which will be broadcast online at 11:00 a.m. just like normal for those who cannot be present in person. While that pre-recorded service is being broadcast, we will also have a in-person service of Holy Communion in the Miller Garden for those who can be present. All of this is weather permitting, of course).

What are the expectations for us to worship in person?

- bring your own chair
- bring your own bread
- bring a mask
- maintain at least 6 feet of physical distancing.

The Need for Caution Is Still Great



It has been a long, long six months since we stopped gathering inside for worship! I (Pastor Armentrout) couldn't have guessed that at the start of September we would still be unable to gather inside but here we are. There are a couple of things that I want to lift up for you as we wrestle with this reality.

1. The church council has formed a special committee to prepare a plan for gathering together again in person. This doesn't mean that we are gathering together indoors soon. It means that we are making plans to do it safely as soon as it is safe to do.

Part of the frustration surrounding this virus is its unpredictable nature. It is deadly to some but not others. For some, it is not deadly but it is debilitating while seemingly harmless to others. For the wellbeing of our congregation, we must remain diligent. That leads to the second item.

2. On August 18, a colleague of mine here in the Virginia Synod conducted a small, family-only graveside funeral service. The pastor has been very cautious throughout this pandemic. He has had very limited contact with anyone other than his spouse and has been very careful every time he has left his home. Moreover, he was clear about expectations for this service—everyone needed to be masked, if they were COVID positive or had any symptoms they needed to stay home, everyone needed to maintain at least six feet of physical distance.

Following the service, a masked family member approached the pastor and said that they wanted him to know that they were COVID positive and symptomatic. He immediately self quarantined. Last week he began to experience COVID-19 symptoms and tested positive. Fortunately his symptoms are categorized as mild to moderate.

My point is that even when we do everything (or most things) right—the service was outside, the gathering was small, everyone wore masks—it doesn't mean that we can't pass the virus on to someone else or become infected ourselves. There are always risks so we do the things we can to minimize those risks. Wearing masks, maintaining six feet of physical distance, limiting our exposure time to one another, staying home if we have been exposed or are feeling symptomatic, and keeping our gatherings outside are all crucial practices to help keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. We will be together inside again when it is safe to do so.

Follow the 3 W's











Financial Stewardship Is Still Important

One of the wonderful things about St. Mark's is that ours is a generous congregation. That has been proven true through this pandemic. Lots of members have stepped up to take advantage of the empty building to do some long-overdue maintenance and repair work. Furthermore, while other congregations struggled financially out of the gate, St. Mark's has been able to care for the expenses that didn't go away with the pandemic. What's more remarkable is that we have been able to do so while (temporarily) losing a significant source of income when our tenant unexpectedly vacated the Guinther House and we had to cover more than \$20,000 in financial obligations from the preschool.

Yes, we did take out a PPP loan in the amount of \$25,500. But the loan in and of itself hasn't been what has enabled us to meet our financial obligations. Your financial generosity has been a huge part of it. Thank you for your generous giving!

As this pandemic wears on and we exhaust the money we received from the PPP loan, it will be important for us to continue our generous ways. When we do gather together inside again, we want to be able to hit the ground running!

Guinther House Rental Update



St. Mark's rental property, the Guinther House, (above) has been vacant since June.

Mr. Dirk Padgett, the attorney who was leasing the Guinther House from St. Mark's, unexpectedly ended his lease agreement in June because his business dried up as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rental income lost for the church represents about \$40,000 per year.

While the house is actively listed on the market, our listing agent has informed us that this is one of the worst periods for commercial office real estate he has ever seen. He has assured us that we will get a new renter in the Guinther House but it will likely take some time before it happens. His encouragement is to be patient.

St. Mark's Preschool Embezzlement Update

A number of you have asked about the status of the case against our former preschool director, Keisha Christley. At this time there isn't very much new information to report but here is what we do know.

Pastor James spoke with the Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney who is prosecuting the case to clarify the legal process following Keisha's indictment.

- 1. He said that she does have a hearing scheduled for September 8.
- 2. He said that he would be in touch with the pastor to talk about restitution when the case got to that point.

That's where things stand. We continue to pray for her and her family as well as for the staff who had to find new employment and the families who had to find new child care. It has been a difficult time for everyone involved.

STAY INFORMED

You can access old St. Mark's email updates, worship bulletins and view worship services online.

Go to www.stmarksroanoke.org.

- click the "worship" link at the top of the page and then click "online worship" to access old worship bulletins.
- click the "news" link at the top of the page and then click "email updates" to access old emails.

Go to www.youtube.com and search for "St. Mark's Lutheran Church Roanoke VA" to find and view old worship services.

ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH 1008 Franklin Road, SW Roanoke, VA 24016 stmarksluth@yahoo.com (540) 344-9051

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