

*Our calling is to reach all people
with the life-changing power of
God's Love and Grace available to
all through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

The Westby United Methodist Church
welcomes **everyone** with open arms and open
hearts as indicated in Romans 15:7 (NIV):
*Accept one another, then, just as Christ
accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*



Westby United
Methodist Church
March 2024

IN THIS ISSUE

The Journey to the Cross Takes Us to the Empty Tomb

by Pastor Erika Martinez-Flores

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who
believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in
me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

~ John 11:25-26

Who doesn't like to be given another chance in life? Personally, I always appreciate it when I am given an opportunity to begin and reflect. Lent is a time of new opportunities; it is forty days to reevaluate how you connect with God.

In a special way, we have an opportunity to exercise self-control and spiritual discipline in the face of the material things of this world. Hence, many practice abstinence, fasting, stop eating meat on Fridays, do charity work, give their time to others, and others return to the Church to pray in community. And all this has one objective, to prepare us for the celebration of Easter. Thus, at Easter you will be reborn in the life of faith with the Risen Jesus Christ. So, let's see how we can walk our journey to meet the risen Him again.

First Sunday of Lent

I believed that temptation and trial were the same thing; However, I learned that temptation seeks to make you fall, get lost, and destroy what you have built spiritually for many years. The test, on the contrary, seeks to make you grow and demonstrate what you have learned. Have you ever wondered why the more you want to get closer to God, the more you want to do good, the more you want to live a new life is when temptations appear?

In the Gospel of Matthew 4.1-11, he presents you with a human Jesus. This is the Jesus with whom you can identify. This is a Jesus who fights the temptations that you and I have to face every day. Temptation, whether power or fame, is intended to make you forget God and doubt his divine providence. What I like most is that at the end of the Gospel Jesus triumphs and overcomes temptations because he was guided by the Holy Spirit.

Second Sunday of Lent

I always imagine that the season of Lent is like the experience of climbing a mountain, as we walk week after week until we reach the summit, which would be Easter. That is the moment in which, after a long path of forty days of

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climbing with your prayers, sacrifices and abstinence, you meet the Risen Jesus, the living, resurrected Son of God, who conquers death, who has the power to transform you, which is present and gives meaning to your existence at all times. And knowing this truth is the best experience you can live and share with others.

Third Sunday of Lent

Human beings could survive days without eating but we cannot go days without drinking water. In the gospel of John 4.1-15, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman. And as you know, in the Gospel always, always, the encounter with Jesus is a transformative encounter. The Samaritan came to the water fountain because she knows that she needs water to survive. And it is in this natural experience, in the search for something basic like water, that the profound encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman occurs. The Samaritan woman, because of her sincere dialogue and because of her total openness to Jesus, receives a gift more valuable than the water itself that she was looking for. The most important thing is that she not only discovers who Jesus is, but she asks him to give her that living water to quench her spiritual thirst.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

It is a gift that you can see the sunset, the faces of the people you love, and the beauty of the world around you. It is said that there is no worse blind person than someone who does not want to see.

The encounter with Jesus touches and transforms the heart of those who allow themselves to be embraced by the grace of God. In the Gospel of Mark 10.46-52, a blind man wants to see. Although the blind man asks Jesus for the ability to physically see, Jesus gives him more than he asks for. Jesus restores his dignity as a son of God, and his integration into the community. It is interesting how the others who could see, did not see the blind man with dignity. On the contrary, they saw him with eyes of contempt, they judged him, they blamed him, and they did not recognize the possibility that a change could occur in him. Faith in Jesus is a gift He wants to give you so that you can see the world and others through the eyes of God.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

I wonder, what would our life be like, how would we live our sufferings without the experience of faith and without the experience of Jesus? The gospel of John 11 presents us with a very human Jesus, close to pain, who loves and cries at the loss of a friend, Lazarus. Jesus is present and gives comfort to his friends.

But, the most fascinating thing about this story is that Jesus gives a definitive and unique response to the experience of death that will mark the history of the believer. Jesus identifies himself as the resurrection itself, and as life itself. Jesus reveals that we do not have to wait for the future; that in Jesus, God is life itself in the here and now; and that those who believe in Jesus live forever. This message gives hope and changes the way we think and feel about the experience of death.

EASTER SUNDAY

This is the most important day for every Christian, since with the resurrection of Jesus is when our faith gains meaning.

Let us go out to meet the risen Christ, let us celebrate with joy and joy the wonderful promise of enduring life. Let us prepare our hearts, bodies and souls to live the day when the Lord showed us his light.

May God be with all of you,
Pastor Erika Martinez-Flores

Pastor Erika's Schedule:

Thursday at Westby UMC – 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

- 3rd Thursday of the month (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

Sunday morning before worship – 8:30 AM – 8:50 AM

Contact Information:

Cell Phone: 919-478-3584

Direct Office Phone: 608-638-7627

Parsonage Phone: 608-637-7614

Email: pastor@virouqawestbyumc.org

March Birthdays

March 14 – Sharon Sharratt

Happy Birthday!



Sunday School News

SAVE THE DATE : Easter is early this year! That means the kids will be presenting their message during the church service on ***Palm Sunday, March 24th***. We are already working on our skit and special music to share with our church family. We

won't have Sunday school on Easter Sunday March 31, but will resume classes on April 7.

Check out the newsletter for the special events planned for Holy Week.

Thursday Morning Prayer Group

Please join us on Thursday, March 7th at 9:00 AM and help us flex our “prayer muscles” by coming to our monthly Prayer Group for a time of fellowship with our Lord through prayer. Prayer is a powerful resource, so it's important that we pray together to combine our prayer strengths. There is a prayer request box in the narthex for prayer requests.



Growing in Faith Study Group

Since we continue to have Lenten Services on Wednesday evenings this month, this group will not be meeting during March.



Mission of the Month – Cemetery Mowing Fund

About two miles east of Westby is Pleasant View Cemetery. That cemetery belongs to our church, and it is our responsibility to maintain it. We need to replenish the cemetery fund in order to have money in the bank to pay for the mowing and trimming this summer. We will also need physical help, later in the spring, when we hope to do some landscape trimming and other cleaning at the cemetery. We will be asking for your help with that later. During

the month of March we are only asking for your financial support. Please make checks payable to the church with “Cemetery Fund” on the memo line. Thank you.

Thursday Morning Bible Study Group

We will continue studying the Epistle of Titus during our morning Bible study group. Please join us at 9:00 AM on Thursday, March 28th as we learn to be the church that our Father expects us to be, and that Jesus has called us to be. We invite you to join our study and together we grow in knowledge of his Word to strengthen our faith and our commitment.



March Online Study – Easter: The Worship Initiative

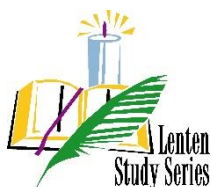
The month's online study will be a continuation of the Lenten study we began in February. This study commemorates and meditates on Jesus in the days leading up to Easter. If you haven't started this study yet, we invite you to join us on this Lenten journey as we deepen our faith in Jesus and encourage each other as we reflect on His life, death, and resurrection.



Here is the link to join this Lenten online study:

- **Easter: The Worship Initiative** (40 days) – begins Feb. 14th
<https://bible.com/p/64054829/7ef4faab8152d3bf3fef40ba84a82855>

This online study and more can be accessed through the Bible App or [bible.com](https://www.bible.com) website, which are free resources. In addition to wonderful devotional and reading plans, they provide a verse of the day, and you will be able to read the Bible in a wide variety of versions. The Bible App is available in your app store on your mobile device, or accessible online at www.bible.com.



Wednesday Evening Lent Studies

We will continue to have Lent studies on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 PM this year. Each service will be centered around a topic relating to Lent. The topics for March are solitude, temptation and preparation. Please come and join us as we delve into these topics related to Lent.

Food Drive for Lent – March 3rd -24th

"We give because God gave His Son to us." Lent is a time to grow closer to God and a time to practice generosity. One good way to show generosity to others is by supporting a local food pantry, so we're going to have a food drive during Lent this year. We've decided our food donations will go towards the Cashton Cupboard & Closet Food Pantry and Bethel Butikk.

To make things more interesting, we'll be collecting specific groups of food items each week and have a place to stack all the food so we can watch the pile grow each week. Here is what food groups we'd like you to bring on Sunday mornings:

- Sunday, Mar. 3 – Proteins: peanut butter, canned meat, canned or dried beans (baked beans, pinto beans, etc.)
- Sunday, Mar. 10 – Pasta/Grains: pasta, noodles, rice, macaroni & cheese
- Sunday, Mar. 17 – Breakfast/Snacks: cereal, oatmeal, pancake mix, granola/snack bars, fruit snacks, trail mix, jelly, pancake syrup
- Sunday, Mar. 24 – Soup: canned soup, dried soup mixes, canned chili



Let's spread some generosity and work to help others by having overflowing piles of food on March 24th.



Palm Sunday Activities

On Palm Sunday, the Sunday school students will be doing a special presentation during worship. After worship, during our fellowship time, we will have a brunch. Please come and join us for these special activities on Palm Sunday.

There will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex and an email sent out if anyone is interested in helping to provide food for the brunch.

Holy Week Events:

- **Sunday, March 24th Palm Sunday** – The Sunday school students will be giving a special message during the worship service.
- **Thursday, March 28th** - Please join us for our Joint Maundy Thursday worship service for Viroqua UMC and Westby UMC on Thursday, March 28th at 6:00 PM. This service will be held at Viroqua UMC.
- **Friday, March 29th** – There will be an ecumenical Good Friday Service at Viroqua UMC at 1:00 PM. Several area pastors will be presenting during this service.
- **Sunday, March 31st Easter Sunday** – Come and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus during our 9:00 AM worship service!



Switching Rooms & Sorting Books

It was decided at a board meeting to switch the pastor's office and the library since the current pastor's office isn't heated very well. Before we begin to move furniture and books, we thought it would be beneficial to begin sorting through the books and videos in the library to determine what would be beneficial to keep and what could be donated. If you'd like to help with this project, we will be sorting on Sunday mornings after fellowship and on Thursday mornings.

Westby United Methodist Church – Board Meeting † January 10, 2024

Present: Tim Gaskell, Jane Gaskell, Tom Sharratt, Sharon Sharratt, Donna Perkins, Julie Fargen, Ann Shaw, Ardith Hoff, Jean Shore, Lois Gerling, Kelly Bjornstad, Jill Bjornstad and Linda Weilnau

Opening: Jane Gaskell opened with prayer.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the January board meeting were emailed to the board and published in the February newsletter, so they could be reviewed prior to the meeting. Ardith Hoff and Jean Shore motioned to approve the minutes. Motion passed.

Treasurer's Report: Verna Drake provided the official financial reports for December and Jan.-Dec. 2023, and an unofficial financial report for January 2024. These reports were emailed to the board prior to the meeting. Tom Sharratt and Ardith Hoff motioned to approve the official and unofficial treasurer's reports.

Old Business:

- † Review COVID Policy - It was decided to continue with the policy of masks being optional.
- † Meal Site Contract – Tim Gaskell sent the letter regarding the meal site contract amount and time period to ADRC. We haven't received the payment yet.
- † Safe Sanctuary Policy – Progress? – Tim Gaskell reported that this is in the reviewing stage.
- † Switch Pastor's Office & Library – Progress? – Lois Gerling and Jane Gaskell have started to sort the VCR tapes. Question came up asking if we want to install a phone in the new Pastor's office when it's ready. Jane Gaskell indicated that Pastor Erika is comfortable using her cell phone if needed. The current phone in the kitchen forwards to Viroqua UMC after 1 ring.
- † Wednesday Lenten Services – Leaders Needed – There are 5 Lent studies. These people volunteered to lead the studies: Feb. 21 – Tim Gaskell, Mar. 6 – Tom Sharratt, Mar. 13 – Ardith Hoff, Mar. 20 – Pastor Erika. We will need to find someone to lead the study on Feb. 28.
- † Chili Cook-Off – Preparation & Servers – We will be making the chili on Thursday, Feb. 15 at 6:00 PM. Julie Fargen and Verna Drake volunteered to help serve the chili at the Cook-Off. Donna Perkins, Julie Fargen and Ardith Hoff will be helping with the preparation.

New Business:

- ✚ Food Drive – Where to place the items? – It was decided to place a table up front, underneath the projection screen area. This will allow everyone to see the progress as we bring in the food donations.
- ✚ March Church Board Meeting – What day? – Due to having the Lent studies on Wednesday evenings, it was decided to have the March board meeting on Sunday, March 10th during fellowship.

Business from Board Committees:

- ✚ **Trustees** – The urinal in the men’s restroom leaks and doesn’t flush. Tom Sharratt will look into the cost of possibly fixing it or replacing it.
- ✚ **SPRC** – Julie Farge reported that Pastor Erika has been invited to participate in the 2024 Institute of Congregational Development: Creating a Culture of Permanent Growth. It is a 10-month program which usually meets 2 days a month and begins in March. The cost is \$1700. Pastor Erika will receive a scholarship for ½ of the costs. Our churches have already budgeted for educational and travel expenses, which Pastor Erika hasn’t used this year, so between the scholarship and the budgeted items, it will cover the cost of this program. Ardith Hoff and Tom Sharratt motioned that we support Pastor Erika in proceeding with participating in this program. Motion passed.
- ✚ **Worship** – The Lenten services will be on Wednesday evenings at 6:00 PM on Feb. 21-Mar. 20.
- ✚ **Education** – The youth Snow Days activity at Living Waters was cancelled due to no snow.
- ✚ **Lay Leadership** – Ardith is continuing to write new articles for the website Reminders section. She is basing the articles on one word or one topic and has a goal of using no more than 450 words for each article. She now has over 50 articles written.
- ✚ **Missions** – The March mission of the month will be for the cemetery lawn mowing.

Pastor’s Report: No report since this meeting was held during Viroqua UMC’s worship time.

Jean Shore motioned to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned.

Minutes submitted by Linda Weilnau

**** Remember to join us at 3:20 PM each day for being unified in prayer to pray for our church ...**

“God, Give us the courage to dream big dreams. Please open our minds and hearts so we can have new breakthroughs to Your new possibilities. Amen.”

God is able to do much more than we ask or think, through His power working in us.
~ Ephesians 3:20 (NLV)

He is not here; he has risen!
~ Luke 24:6



March 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Pastor Erika's Sabbath Day	2
3 ☩9:00 AM – Worship Service (Communion) 10:00 AM – Fellowship & Sunday School Food Drive Sunday - Proteins	4 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site	5 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM – Strength Training Class	6 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 6:00 PM – Lenten Service	7 9:00 AM - Prayer Group 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM –Strength Training Class	8 Pastor Erika's Sabbath Day	9
10 ☩9:00 AM – Worship Service 10:00 AM - Fellowship & Sunday School & Church Board Meeting Food Drive Sunday – Pasta/Grains	11 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site	12 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM – Strength Training Class	13 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 6:00 PM – Lenten Service	14 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM –Strength Training Class	15 Pastor Erika's Sabbath Day	16
17 ☩9:00 AM – Worship Service 10:00 AM - Fellowship & Sunday School Food Drive Sunday – Breakfast/Snacks	18 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site	19 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM – Strength Training Class	20 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 6:00 PM – Lenten Service	21 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM –Strength Training Class	22 Pastor Erika's Sabbath Day	23
24 <i>Palm Sunday</i> ☩9:00 AM – Worship Service 10:00 AM - Fellowship & Sunday School Food Drive Sunday - Soup	25 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site	26 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM – Strength Training Class	27 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site	28 9:00 AM - Morning Bible Study Group 11:30 AM – Senior Meal Site 12:30 PM –Strength Training Class 6:00 PM – Maundy Thursday @ Viroqua UMC	29	30
31 <i>Happy Easter!</i> ☩9:00 AM – Worship Service 10:00 AM - Fellowship						

