**Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church LC-MS**

Monthly Newsletter --- December 2023

699 Stambaugh Avenue, Sharon, PA 16146

Phone: 724.347.3620 (Opt. 2, Pastor Deal; Opt. 3, Office)

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“THE ROCK and THE SWORD”

“Built upon the Rock of Christ and wielding the

Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.”

**From the Pastor:**

**Thoughts of Baptism on Christmas Morning**

At Christmas Dawn of the Nativity of our Lord, we read in the Epistle lesson from Titus 3, *“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

We all should find this reading very familiar from its prominent place in our Small Catechism under Baptism. Have you ever considered thinking about Baptism on Christmas morning? Baptism is a new birth for us, which brings us what we could not ordinarily see. Christ Jesus said to Nicodemus, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). When the Sun of Righteousness dawned on the world that early morning, His star lit up the sky. The heavenly host appeared in bright light, but concealed under His perfect human flesh was the brightness of the glory of the eternal God. We celebrate Christmas because we see by faith that day as the coming of the Kingdom of God among us in the only Begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

There are many who will celebrate Christmas for a variety of reasons, but only the children born of the Spirit can see that when Jesus, the infant Child, born to the Virgin Mary appeared, it was God coming in His goodness and loving kindness to save the world from its sins. So, Baptism on Christmas morning? Absolutely, for in Jesus’s birth we should see our own new birth in the purity and holiness before God. We, ourselves, have been made in His likeness and the Holy Spirit daily conforms us to the image of the Son. Rejoice and sing for joy at the birth of Christ, for He is our brother and we are heirs with him according to the hope of eternal life.

In Christ,

Pastor Deal

**From Vicar Wessel**

**Peace, Goodwill toward Men**

“Glory be to God on high and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Although we hear this every Sunday morning, this proclamation is primarily at home in Christmas. This is the proclamation that the angels brought to the shepherds on Christmas night to tell them that their Savior – God in the flesh – had been born. Jesus’s birth brought peace and the goodwill of God to all us men on earth.

Far too often, we forget this fact about Jesus’s birth and the celebration of Christmas. Far too often, Christmas is reduced to little more than a necessary step along the way to Good Friday and Easter. After all, if Jesus was going to die, He had to have a body and life that was capable of death. But that is not what the Christmas angels proclaimed. They proclaimed that Jesus’s birth, the fact that God became man, does itself bring glory to God and peace to man.

Jesus is our Savior not just by His death and resurrection. He saved us not only by suffering the punishment we deserved for our sins, but also by His active, perfect obedience to the law of God throughout His life – beginning even with His conception and His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas. The simple fact that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, both true God and true man, is in itself a proclamation of the gospel and the saving work that Jesus accomplished for all of us. *“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons”* (Galatians 4:4-5). The very fact of the Son of God coming into the world is part of the reconciliation with God and how He adopts us as His beloved Children. In the person of Jesus, God and man are literally united. In the person of Jesus and His whole life, from conception to His death, resurrection and even until now, God and man are reconciled. It is absolutely true that we are given the peace and goodwill of God at Christmas.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God humbled Himself and truly did become one of us, to make us to partake in His own Sonship toward God the Father. It is only through this person of Jesus Christ and because He is the Son of God that we have peace with God. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” This is the glorious, joy-inspiring truth of the incarnation and Christmas.

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**Thank You for Serving in December:**

**Elder:** Jonathan Baisch; **Ushers:** Cheryl Fedele, Mike Flaugher, & Jesse Riffle; **Altarware:** *Sundays* (prior) Marie Flaugher (12.10 & 12.31) & Diane Riefstahl; (after) Marie Flaugher (12.10 & 12:31) & Elizabeth Haenftling; *Christmas Day ~* Diane Riefstahl.

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**REMINDER:** Please let the church office know of any changes to your address, phone, cell phone or your e-mail address!

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**LIKE & FOLLOW our Church’s Facebook page**

**(Saints Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church)!**

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**To listen to Pastor Deal’s sermons, phone 724-347-3620 (Opt. 6).**

**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AT A GLANCE**

Blue: Pledged as of 11.19.2023 $184,320 (92.16%)

Orange: Remaining

$15,680 (7.84%)

Total Contributions

as of 11.19.2023:

$184,804 (92.40%)

Previous: $181,702 (90.86%)

New: $3,102 (1.55%)

Remaining: $15,196 (7.6%)

*Amounts used are based on*

*weekly deposits reported.*

It’s not too late to submit a Capital Campaign pledge card! Pledge cards are available on the table outside Pastor’s office. If circumstances have changed and you need to update your pledge card, please see Jonathan Baisch. Updated pledges help our Trustees plan more effectively and efficiently.

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**NEWS FROM THE TRUSTEES**

The following projects were successfully worked on in the month of November:

* Water meter was changed.
* Shrubs were trimmed.
* The rails to downstairs were wiped down.
* Strom windows were installed in hallway for the winter.
* Hot and cold-water valves were replaced on the stainless-steel sink in the kitchen to eliminate the dripping of water.
* Trustees have come to a decision on the air conditioning company and will forward their recommendation to Church Council.

Christmas decorations will go up December 9th starting at 10am.  We will need as many volunteers as possible to help.

As always, please feel free to speak with a Trustee with any concerns or place a note in Mike Flaugher’s library mailbox.

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**ATTENTION AUDITORS!** A **Monthly Audit** will take place following worship, Sunday, December 17th in the library. If unable to attend, please phone Bev Chlpka at 724-962-4806.

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**SCRIP Program:**

The next date for **SCRIP orders and payments** is Sunday, December 3rd. Checks should be made out to Sts. Peter & Paul’s and are to be given to Matt Berent or placed in the offering plate. You should receive your gift cards the following week.

Forms for ordering gift cards are available on tables in the narthex and next to the nursery.

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**Bible Study Classes**

* The **Sunday Morning Bible Study** (8 am)

group currently studying the prophet Nehemiah.

* The **Women’s Bible Study** group is currently studying the book of Romans. We will be taking the month of December off. Please consider joining us the first and third Thursdays in January at 10 am when we will pick up with Romans 3.
* The **Men’s Bible Study** is temporarily suspended until a new meeting day/time is determined.

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**CELEBRATING IN DECEMBER!**

**Birthdays**

Rev. Jacob Deal 12 -4

Marie Flaugher 12 -5

Jennifer Voytik 12 -5

Rebekah Baisch 12-13

Rev. Edward Kucera 12-13

Joan Rice 12-16

Bill Wolf 12-16

Debbie Zurawsky 12-17

Titus Deal 12-23

Jean Tomko 12-28

**Anniversary**

Ralph & Judie Dorman 12 -9

\*If birthdays or anniversaries have been omitted, please let the church office know. Thank You!

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Submissions for the January issue of **“The Rock and the Sword”** newsletter and calendar are due to the secretary’s office Wednesday, December 27th at 9 am. This includes meeting dates and times for the church calendar.

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Collected pop tabs can be left for Marie Flaugher in the library.

**Coffee**

**(and Cookies!)**

**Fellowship**

**is December 10th!**

Join us following worship, Sunday, December 10th for **Coffee Fellowship** featuring home-made Christmas cookies, punch, and coffee sponsored by the Altar Guild! There may even be a few extra cookies to take home that day!

The 2024 Fellowship Sponsor sheet has been posted on the bulletin board in he narthex. If interested in being a sponsor, please sign your name on the sheet. Sponsors are asked to drop off 2-1/2—3 dozen “treats” and a quart of juice in the Fellowship Hall kitchen prior to church on their given Sunday. Coffee preparation, set-up, and clean-up will be done for you.

Please speak with Diane Riefstahl if you should have any questions.

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**Important Events in December**

Sunday, December 3

10 minutes after the Divine Service

*Voters’ Assembly*

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Saturday, December 9

10 am

*Church Decorating*

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Sunday, December 10

After the Divine Service

*Coffee Fellowship*

*Sponsored by the Altar Guild*

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Sunday, December 17

After the Divine Service

*Monthly Audit of Deposits*

**Please keep the following**

**in your prayers**

PVT Alexander Carr

7009 Quartermaster Rd.

F Co 16th OD BN 4th PLT

Fort Gregg-Adams, VA 23801

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Anna Mae Daris

1865 Hofius Lane

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-962-5079

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Millie Elavsky

1209 Maple Dr.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-342-0345

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Rudy Tomko

Rm. 8

Nugent Convalescent Home

500 Clarksville Rd.

Hermitage, PA 16148

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Jean Tomko

2629 Romar Dr.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-979-4360

lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll

Betty Ann Wolf

7777 Arthur St.

Masury, OH 44438

330-448-1080

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Ed & Millie Zachar

1320 Old Forge Rd.

Niles, OH 44446

330-652-9316

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**REMINDER:** If you do not have an email account or do not receive emails from the church, but wish to be notified of significant information concerning your fellow church members, please put a note in the secretary’s mail slot asking to receive a phone call. Every attempt will be made to phone you within 24 hours of an email being sent out.

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**Altar Guild News**

At the November 11th regular meeting, election of officers for 2024 was held. Elected to serve next year are President, Marie Flaugher; Vice President, Elizabeth Haenftling; Secretary, Elizabeth Loughan; and Treasurer, Evelyn Baisch.

Members are reminded to turn in their $25 dues for next year to Evelyn by the end of January 2024.

Altar Guild members will be sponsoring the December 10th Coffee Fellowship and are asked to sign up on the sheet in the narthex. Please bring your 1-2 dozen homemade cookies to the Fellowship Hall kitchen prior to worship that day.

Also available in the narthex are the 2024 “How May I Serve” forms. Please be certain to complete a form and return it by December 3rd to Marie Flaugher.

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**December Church Office Hours**

The secretary’s office will be open as follows in December:

* Weeks of December 3, 10, & 17: Mondays & Wednesday (8:30 am – 5 pm) and Fridays, as needed.
* Weeks of December 24 & 31: Tuesdays & Wednesdays (8:30 am – 4:30 pm) and Fridays, as needed.

If needing to enter the building during the week, please phone first to make certain someone is there to let you in.

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**Word of Hope: 1-888-217-8679**

The only 24/7 CONFIDENTIAL Hotline that is distinctly Lutheran, bringing healing found in Christ, to those whose hearts have been broken by abortion.

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**What is Nelson’s Nook?**

Before his passing, Barry had a vision to establish a foundation that would provide a place with free clothing, shoes, personal items and school supplies for students who are in need. His hope was that they would have one less thing to worry about and have more time to concentrate on their studies and grow into well-rounded young adults. Barry had high expectations for his students. He always encouraged them to put forth their very best efforts, strive to be good citizens, and work hard to be successful in life.

The Nelson’s Nook room is up and running! Students have shopped after school, teachers throughout the day get items the students need, and families have made appointments to come in the evening.

A Few Success Stories:

* After a student shopped one day, he left the room with tears in his eyes.
* Another student asked why this room was created. He was told that a former teacher wanted to help students. His response was “I would like to help too!”

Many blessings are coming from this opportunity for students to have access to Nelson’s Nook. Barry would be very proud to know that we are making a difference in the lives of students and their families.

We are very grateful for those who have put in many countless hours of collecting, organizing, and publicizing to make Nelson’s Nook a reality. Without the volunteers, teachers, retired teachers, PTA, donations from many different places, and the support of the administration at Commodore Perry, this would not be possible.

Thank you to all who have donated in one way or another to Nelson’s Nook here at Sts. Peter and Paul. You have helped to fulfill his vision to create this room.

God’s blessings to you.

The Nelson Family







*Donations to Nelson’s Nook may be either made directly through a family member or by contacting the Community Foundation of Western PA & Eastern OH.*

Remember thefollowing in prayer…

**~The Hurting and Healing:**  *Amy, Steve Antolovich, Ellen BaronCA, Amy Blomenberg, Lois BortnerCA, Sara Brubaker, Dee Bullock, Bev & Joe Chlpka, Susan Davies, Loretta Deal, Tim Dudash, Judith & Eddy Furey, Griffin, Austin Hamilton, Pastor Charles Henrickson, Joan, Keith Jozwiakowski, Darla Krajci, Barbara Kreske, Jess Lavoie, Paul LucasCA, Sandy Marshall, Frank NiemeyerCA, Juanita Rentschler, Richard ReuningCA, Nancy RobertsonCA, Kriss SvidroCA, Rudy Tomko, Joel & Peggy Wasson, Angela WeserCA, and Ruth Wolf.*

**~The Homebound:**  *Anna Mae Daris, Millie Elavsky, Jean Tomko, Betty Wolf, and Ed & Millie Zachar.*

**~Serving in the Military:**  *Alex (Sasha) Carr, Duncan Vaupel, Curtis Sinewe, and Joshua Solyan.*

**~Community & World Needs:**  *Those suffering from or affected by the coronavirus; those suffering due to the conflicts in the Middle East and between Ukraine and Russia; those suffering from loss and dislocation because weather disasters; those suffering from addiction and their families; Local, State, and National Government Leaders; safety for all Police Officers, Firefighters, & First Responders; the unemployed; our Fourth Quarter Local Mission: Willow Women’s Center.*

*\*CA represents cancer.*

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**It’s Official!**

We are pleased to announce that Rebecca Marquette has accepted the position as our full-time organist! We are grateful to her for sharing her immense musical talents with us.

**OUR 4th QUARTER MISSION:**

**Willow Women’s Center**

*Call/text 724.854.9455*

*to learn more.*

Your support of this Quarterly Mission will be greatly appreciated. Donations may be placed in a pew envelope and put in the offering plate.

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The second Sunday of each month is designated as **“Food Pantry Sunday”.** Your financial support of this community outreach is greatly appreciated.

Did you know that our Food Pantry is currently serving over 30 families? If you know of anyone experiencing a hardship, please have them contact [foodpantry@saintspeterandpaul.net](mailto:foodpantry@saintspeterandpaul.net).

Also, sincere “thanks” go out to all the congregation members who attended and/or assisted with the Food Pantry breakfast November 9th! Your presence helped convey to our clients that this congregation does, indeed, care about them. We hope to sponsor another breakfast again in the near future.

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**We were chosen!** By directing designated Choice Dollars through Thrivent Choice, eligible Thrivent members choose where Thrivent Financial for Lutherans distributes some of its charitable outreach grant dollars among thousands of participating Lutheran nonprofit organizations and congregations.

**Many thanks** to Thrivent Financial member **David Williams** who recently directed Choice dollars to our church!

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**December Special Services**

Please join us to celebrate the following special services this month!

**Advent Midweek Services**

December 6, 13, & 20

*Matins: 10 am*

*Vespers: 7 pm*

**Christmas Eve Service**

December 24, 8 pm

*A Service of Lessons and Carols*

**Christmas Day Service**

December 25, 9 am

*Divine Service*

**Feast of St. Stephen, Martyr**

December 26, 7 pm

*Vespers*

**Feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist**

December 27, 7 pm

*Vespers*

**Feast of The Holy Innocents**

December 28, 7 pm

*Vespers*

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There will be an important **Voters’ Assembly** held 10 minutes following the end of worship Sunday, December 3rd. Among the items on the agenda are the 2024 Church Budget and the election of Church Officers and Boards.

Your attendance will be greatly appreciated!

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The **Installation of 2024 Church Officers and Boards** will take place during the Divine Service Sunday, January 7, 2024. All are asked to attend.

**Memory Verses for November:**

**For Adults:**

Nov. 5: For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

*John 6:40*

Nov. 12: But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. *Philippians 3:20-21*

Nov. 19: And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

*Isaiah 25:9*

Nov. 26: But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*1 Thessalonians 5:8*

**For Children:**

Nov. 5: With you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. *Psalm 130:4*

Nov. 12: The King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, to him be honor and eternal dominion. *1 Timothy 6:15-16*

Nov. 19: Give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. *Colossians 1:2*

Nov. 26: Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning. *Luke 12:35*

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Make certain to pick-up your copy of the **2023 Advent Devotions** **“The Seen Yahweh”.**

***Your Christian Faith:***

***A Private Matter?***

The world did not know what to do about the early Christians, so it told them to keep quiet or pay a steep price – often their very lives.

However, the apostles Peter and John – who had been with Jesus, had seen His miracles, and had become His friends – knew that they had to speak up. With great boldness they declared, “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20)

Like the early Christians we are being told today by persons in government and in our society that our faith is meant to be hidden . . . out of the “public square” . . . a “private matter.”

Jesus said that those who follow Him and hold fast to His teaching “Will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32) When truth and reality are censored in the public square, those who dissent are punished – and countless lives are harmed.

Whatever the challenges, on the world stage or in your own life and community, you and I can always be certain that God is with us. Many are afraid to speak out because of what it might cost them, yet there is much more to lose by staying silent. By failing to stand up for our beliefs – the biblical and moral teachings we have received from God – our neighbors, whom we are called upon to love, are harmed. Therefore, we cannot but speak the truth of that which we have seen and heard.

This is an Acts 4 moment for God’s people, one where those in power seek to silence those who speak the truth – especially those who profess and confess Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

As we support Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), who in turn defends those who risk their own livelihoods as they stand for truth, and as ADF advocates for legislation that protects and advances our right to live and speak freely, we stand with Peter and John, and “cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20)

Together with ADF, we will stand for the truth that:

* God created us male and female, a fact that matters in how we educate our children and protect the safety of women and girls in sports, restrooms, and college dorms;
* Parents have the right to direct the up-bringing of their children, to be their protectors, and first and best advocates;
* Religious freedom means that all people have the right to follow their conscience and peaceably to live out their faith; and
* The right to speak freely should be protected because it is the basis of a free nation.

This article was derived from a letter, dated October 16, 2023, issued by Kristen Waggoner, CEO, President & General Counsel of ***Alliance Defending Freedom.***

*Submitted by Pastor Emeritus Arthur H. Baisch*

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Chris Nelson, Choir Director, has requested a one-year leave of absence from choir responsibilities which has been understandably granted. We pray that everyone is supportive of Chris and whatever decision she ultimately makes.

*The following letter was received from AWARE which has been a past recipient of our Quarterly Mission dollars.*

Dear Community Member,

AWARE, Inc. is Mercer County’s domestic and sexual violence agency. We are dedicated to advocating, educating, and supporting all people in Mercer County impacted by domestic, emotional, and sexual violence.

As we approach the holiday season, we are reaching out to you with a heartfelt appeal for your generosity. Christmas is a time for joy, love, and togetherness, but for many children and adults who have experienced the trauma of abuse, it can be an especially challenging and isolating time. This year, we are striving to bring hope and happiness to their lives by organizing a special gift drive. Last year we helped over 60 families including children, teenagers, and adults.

Your contributions will make a tremendous difference in brightening the holiday season for these survivors, offering them a chance to experience the warmth and compassion that the holiday spirit embodies. We kindly request your support, through financial contributions or donated gifts to ensure that every child and adult affected by abuse can find a moment of joy and solace this holiday season. Your kindness and generosity will bring a glimmer of hope to those who need it the most.

If you would like to make a one-time monetary donation, you can do so either by cash, check, or a donation directly on our website, www.merceraware.org. If writing a check, please put Christmas Donation in the memo line. On our website, please select Holiday Donation in the drop-down designation.

If you would like to sponsor an AWARE client or family as a Christmas elf, you can reach out to Amanda Banic at 724-342-4932 ext. 114 or at abanic@merceraware.org.

It is donations like yours which help us give Christmas to these children and their families. We could not do this without your help. Thank you for considering this important cause, and together, we can make this Christmas a brighter and happier one for

those in need.

Sincerely,

Amanda Banic

Volunteer & Training Coordinator

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**REMINDER:** If you do not have an email account or do not receive emails from the church, but wish to be notified of significant information concerning your fellow church members, please put a note in the secretary’s mail slot asking to receive a phone call. Every attempt will be made to phone you within 24 hours of an email being sent out.

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**Best wishes to you and your family for a blessed Christmas!**

~Pastor Deal, Vicar Wessel, & Diane