



# Good News-Letter

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church

December 2023

A Member of the WELS

*By faith Joseph as he neared the end of his life, mentioned the Exodus of the sons of Israel and gave instructions about his bones (Hebrews 11:22).*

Home is where the heart is. This is a familiar phrase that we still hear today. We see it on wall hangings. We see it embroidered on pillowcases and dish towels. It's hard to say where this phrase originated. Some have attributed it to a Roman scholar and historian name Pliny. The reason I mention the phrase is because of the situation Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, and his family were in before his death. Joseph had lived 93 of his 110 years on earth in Egypt. It would have made sense to bury him in Egypt since this was his home for all but the first 17 years of his life. But when Joseph gave his last will and testament to his family, he showed his heart was not in Egypt. His heart was in the land the Lord had promised his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Home is where the heart is can be seen in the example of Joseph.

Thirteen of the last fourteen chapters of the book of Genesis cover the life of Joseph. Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob. And Joseph's older brothers resented their father favoritism for Joseph. In fact, they hated him so much that they harbored thoughts of killing him. But eventually they decided to sell him in slavery to Egypt and cover it up with a lie.

In Egypt Joseph showed he was a hero of faith. He served the Lord faithfully while in Egypt. He offered a wonderful statement of faith when his boss' wife made sexual advances at him: *"How could I do such a great evil and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:9). Despite some difficult days ahead, Joseph remained faithful to the Lord. And the Lord blessed him by making him prime minister in Egypt, second in command to the Pharaoh himself.

As successful as Joseph was in Egypt, one might think that he was content calling Egypt home. With all the wealth and power he had accumulated there you might think Egypt was home for Joseph. But before he died, he said to his family, *"God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"* (Gen. 50:24). Joseph's heart was not in Egypt. His heart was with the

Lord and the promises God made to his fathers. He believed that from the land of Canaan would come the Savior of the world. And the land of Egypt would play an important role in the life of our Savior. The Lord foretold through the prophet Hosea, *"Out of Egypt I called my son"* (Hos. 11:1) God had to rescue the Christ child from the murderous hand of King Herod. An angelic warning to Joseph in a dream brought the Christ child to Egypt to stay there until the death of Herod.

Like the nation of Israel returning to the promised land following a 430 year stay in Egypt, Christ would return to the promised land and grow up to carry out his saving work. He'd serve his Father and all of us flawlessly. He'd carry our sins to a cross where he'd suffer and die in our place. He'd rise from the dead on the third day assuring us of certain victory over sin, death and Satan. Joseph believed in that Savior. That is where his heart lay. Joseph's heart was with the Lord.

We live in an age of technology that boggles the mind. The comforts of this world can easily lure us away from our Lord. When we fall into Satan's trap, we must turn to God for forgiveness. Be assured that God's forgiveness was won for you by the Christ child who came up from Egypt. He lived the perfect life we could not. He died the death that we deserved. He's won us an eternal home far greater than this life might offer.

We'll spend much of this month preparing our hearts for his coming. The children of St. Michael's will spend several hours practicing their recitations and songs to share the good news of our Savior's birth. Additional worship services on Christmas Eve (6pm) & Christmas Day (9:30pm) will help you celebrate his birth and keep your heart with the Lord.

As we end this calendar year and begin a new one, it's impossible to know for sure what God has planned. Blessings will abound since God is faithful in his promises. But challenges may arise that will lead many to question God's goodness. Joseph had challenges—torn from family by slavery; being falsely accused by his boss' wife and jailed unjustly; being left in prison for 13 years probably wondering if he'd ever get out. But God was with Joseph and blessed many people through Joseph. God does work all things for good.

## Great gospel power in Vietnam

Dear Friend,

Jesus taught: “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade” (Mark 4:30-32).

In God’s kingdom, small beginnings lead to great endings. A person who examines the mustard seed through his own wisdom concludes, “This tiny seed cannot grow into the largest tree.” The person who examines the mustard seed through Jesus’ wisdom concludes, “The Lord will perform a miracle with this tiny seed. It will become the largest tree, just as he promised.”

With confidence in Jesus’ wisdom, we began the rural training program for the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam in a small way. We trained 55 church leaders in the doctrines of God’s Word. We did not have training for the many church members in the rural congregations. Could we use the small group to reach the large group?

Because of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 we could not continue the scheduled seminary classes in Hanoi. We decided to use online training for the new program of rural training. The 55 leaders met with us on Zoom to study the first course in the rural training program.

We met to study the gospel of Mark using the theme “In the Mighty Name of Jesus.” The students delighted to have a greater understanding of the mighty name of Jesus through this gospel’s history, miracles, and revelation of our salvation in Christ our Lord. By the end of class, they eagerly wanted to share this message with all the members of the Hmong Fellowship Church.

This happened when the small group of 55 leaders taught a larger group of 700 leaders. Those leaders in turn instructed the leaders of more congregations. Then the leaders of all the congregations shared the mighty name of Jesus to all 145,000 members in the Hmong Fellowship Church. The small beginning with 55 grew to a great ending with 145,000!

Since that time, we have taught many other courses in our rural training program. Eventually we will complete a curriculum of 30 courses. God be praised!

The many prayers and generous gifts for this ministry have allowed us to train 700 of the 1,400 church leaders we want to train. Support from WELS members provided travel, meals, and lodging to the leaders conducting the training. With the help of your gift

today, we could expand the program to reach the 700 additional church leaders. Then, by God’s grace, we will have trained 1,400 leaders to reach all of the rural congregations of the Hmong Fellowship Church more quickly and efficiently.

During this season of Christmas joy, please consider making a gift of love to our Lord Jesus for our brothers and sisters in the Hmong Fellowship Church. Jesus will use his great gospel power to make our efforts, as small as a mustard seed, grow into the largest tree in his garden of grace.

Serving our newborn King,  
Rev. Joel Nitz  
Missionary in Vietnam

Prayer: Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—it is by your hand alone that we’ve been able to conduct gospel ministry in Vietnam. We praise you for letting us support the training of Hmong Fellowship Church leaders at the theological education center in Hanoi. Continue to bless this program that trains pastors, who then return to their congregations to teach other pastors and members. Thank you for giving the members of the Hmong Fellowship Church a love for your Word. May a similar spirit spread across the world so that your kingdom grows rapidly according to your will. Amen.

## Latin America Mission – Fall Update

As of October 2023, *Academia Cristo* has two million followers on social media. The social media platforms used by *Academia Cristo* include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Through these platforms, *Academia Cristo* manages over 30 million engagements every month. Over a million people have downloaded the *Academia Cristo* mobile app that launched in February 2020. 2,400 people have completed the self-led courses offered in the mobile app or through WhatsApp since March 2020 and are signed up for live courses. 696 people have completed one live course since March 2020 with a WELS missionary or national partner. 85 students in the *Academia Cristo* program have gone through a doctrinal agreement process designed for leaders and church planters. There are 29 groups that *Academia Cristo* leaders have taken through at least seven lessons of a two-year program of worship and study. One congregation formed through the program has joined *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* and several others will soon be reaching the criteria required to apply for membership.

A snapshot of blessings from Aug. through Oct. 2023:

1. An alternative to the mobile app was identified and tested.

- Through a platform called [respond.io](https://respond.io), those interested in studying with *Academia Cristo* are guided in WhatsApp through the same four self-study courses that have been offered in the app.
  - This alternative, self-study through WhatsApp, produced more students with less spending on advertising. It also offered several other positive features, such as the opportunity to engage with students while they are in the self-study process and collect their contact information.
  - Because of the success of the app alternative, it was decided at the 2023 annual meeting to use this alternative instead of the app.
  - Going forward, the “Self-Study Level” through WhatsApp will be the way for students to move from social media to participating in live courses.
2. A music summit was held in Quito, Ecuador, with representatives from the Latin America mission team and Multi-Language Productions (MLP). Plans were adopted to produce more hymns and liturgical music for use by church planting groups.
  3. The instruction function of the Latin America team focused on incorporating course and lesson objectives into the *Academia Cristo* curriculum.
  4. An admissions coordinator was hired to help enhance the student onboarding experience.
  5. A program was started to identify and recruit volunteers and match them with needs within *Academia Cristo* and church planting groups.
  6. *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional* held their first convention in Moca, Dominican Republic.
  7. The Latin America seminary program (*Seminario Cristo*) is wrapping up year two of test courses and has plans in place for 2024. Artemio Garcia from Mexico is currently teaching O. T. Isagogics.
  8. Plans are set for Rev. Larry Schlomer to lead the Diaspora Ministry Program, continuing the foundation that was laid by Rev. Carl Leyrer through Hispanic Outreach Project in the United States.

## Did you know you can donate . . .

### . . . appreciated assets (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, real estate)?

Receive a double tax benefit when you give appreciated assets held longer than one year. First, you can deduct the full fair market value of the investment. Second, save by avoiding all tax on the capital gain.

### . . . from your IRA?

Direct transfers from an IRA to charity (up to \$100,000 per year) are free from federal and potentially state income tax for anyone 70.5 or older.

*Want to learn more? A [WELS Christian giving counselor](https://www.wels.net) can help you get started. If you are interested, call 800-827-5482 or e-mail [mcg@wels.net](mailto:mcg@wels.net).*

## “Give it twice” through a legacy charitable remainder trust

A legacy charitable remainder or “give it twice” trust is funded after both parents (or a single parent) go to be with the Lord. In addition to any immediate gifts to children or other heirs, a portion of the estate is placed into a trust that pays five percent each year to children for a term of up to 20 years. When the trust ends, the remaining assets are distributed to designated charitable beneficiaries, such as your church and/or synod.

### BENEFITS

- **Provides for your heirs:** Instead of leaving a one-time lump sum inheritance, you can provide an ongoing source of income for your heirs for up to 20 years.
- **Tax savings:** Funding the legacy trust from a tax-deferred retirement account may provide additional tax benefits. Rather than having to distribute an inherited IRA within 10 years, the IRA can be used via beneficiary designation to fund a legacy charitable remainder trust with a 20-year payout period.
- **A gift to ministry:** At the end of the payout period, the trust remainder is distributed to the ministry (or ministries) of your choosing. This charitable distribution can be made as a lump sum or used to fund an endowment—providing an ongoing source of support for your favorite WELS ministry.

The minimum gift amount for a legacy charitable remainder trust is \$200,000 funded through your estate planning documents such as your will and beneficiary designations (for example, your IRA).

*Learn more about legacy charitable remainder trusts by contacting your local WELS Christian Given Counselor at 800-827-5482 or [mcg@wels.net](mailto:mcg@wels.net).*

*The above items recently appeared on our synod’s webpage: [www.wels.net](https://www.wels.net).*

### Save the date!

2024 WELS International Youth Rally, June 25-28, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.

The next WELS Women’s Ministry Conference will be at the Ingleside Hotel in Pewaukee, Wis., July 28-30, 2024.

The WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts will be at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis., July 30 - August 2, 2024.

## What's going on at St. Michael's

- Church decorating for Advent/Christmas will held Sat. Dec. 2 at 6pm. Decorations will be taken down on Sat. Jan. 6 at 6pm. Thanks to all who help.
- Our monthly Bible study/breakfast at Perkins, held the third Friday each month at 7am, is now being offered to brothers & sisters in area WELS congregations. A 19-minute Bible study is offered the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Weds. at 7pm in the church basement.
- Youth group meeting is held this month on Sunday, December 10 at 6pm in the church basement. We'll watch and discuss a video study on personal evangelism, look into the international youth rally held next summer in Fort Collins, CO and possible fund-raising activities so more young people can attend the rally. We'll end the night with fun activity. Join us on Sunday, December 10 at 6pm.
- Your elders are reaching out to inactive members encouraging them to keep listening to our Good Shepherd. We pray these efforts will bring our straying brothers and sisters back to the fold. Keep your brothers and sisters in your prayers as well as your elders and pastor. The elders are also looking into the synod's Peter Plan as a better way to track member's attendance and encourage faithfulness.

## What folks are saying about St. Michael's:

Hello Pastor Westenberg,

I just wanted to thank you and the group for allowing me to join in this morning's Bible study. It is a true delight to have the opportunity to come together with other believers and talk about God's Word and get other's perspectives on what the Bible teaches. It was evident to me that the group enjoyed sharing their faith and that they have a true love for the Lord. Praise God!  
*(St. Luke, Pickwick member)*

Thank you both for the invitation to join St. Michael's yesterday. It is always great to join you guys for worship and share the great things going on at Luther. You have an incredible church and your congregation is very friendly...Have a great week!

*(John Byus, Luther High School)*

### November Calendar Highlights

- Christmas Practices: Sat. Dec. 2, 9, 16, 23 at 9am
- Decorate Church: Sat. Dec. 2 at 6pm
- 19-Minute Bible Study: Wed. Dec. 6 & 20, 7pm
- Ladies Aid meal at Wing Dam, Sat. Dec. 9, 12pm
- St. Michael's Song Service, Sun. Dec. 10, 9:30am
- Youth Group mtg., Sun. Dec. 10, 6pm
- SS Teachers mtg., Mon. Dec. 11, 7pm

- Stewardship Committee mtg., Thu. Dec. 14, 6pm
- Perkins Bible Study, Fri. Dec. 15, 7am
- Board of Elders mtg., Tue., Dec. 19, 4pm
- Outreach Committee mtg., Tue., Dec. 19, 5:30pm
- Church Council mtg., Tue., Dec. 19, 7pm
- St. Michael's Brass Concert, Sat. Dec. 23, 3pm
- Children's Christmas Service, Sun. Dec. 24, 6pm
- Christmas Day/Communion, Mon. Dec. 25 9:30am

### *Your Council Members*

Jonathan Mayer	President/Education
Ryan Ligman	Secretary
Eric Horstman	Outreach
Jim Baures	Treasurer/Stewardship
Roger Bechly	Properties
Mike Baures	Financial Secretary/Elders

### *Those Who Help*

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#### **Ushers for December**

Eric Horstman	Allen Glodowski
Mike Baures	Jim Wick
Paul Isakson	Asher Duerr

#### **Altar Guild for December**

Marie Grossell	Jean Burmeister
Yvonne Tamke	Cally Ligman

#### **Money Counters for December**

Roger Bechly	Kevin Buswell
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#### **Ushers for January**

Jonathan Mayer	Richard Putz
Ryan Ligman	Merlyn Klebig
Stanley Stewart	Evan Osborn
John Schlesselmann	

#### **Altar Guild for January**

Denise Bechly	Angie Anderson
Anna Hart	Wanda Putz

#### **Money Counters for January**

Paul Isakson	Elroy Conrads
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**Coulee Region OWLS**—The Coulee Region OWLS will be holding their regular monthly meeting on Thu., Dec. 14 at First Lutheran, 400 West Ave South, La Crosse at 12:00 noon for a potluck luncheon. Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Coffee will be provided. All church members – men & women age 55 or older – are welcome. There will be a free will offering.