

The Epistle

THE NEWSLETTER OF APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH

Gloucester, Virginia

www.apostles-elca.org

January 2023

Our Mission is to be a Caring Inclusive Christian Community responding to God's grace through Worship, Service, and Sharing the Gospel

A Word from Pastor Jay

Happy New Year!

As of January 1, 2023, I have been appointed by Bishop Humphrey and the Virginia Synod, along with a vote of Apostles Church Council, to the position of Interim Pastor at Apostles. I look forward to the opportunity to serve our Lord here in the greater Gloucester area in general and in the congregation in particular. Although I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you, please allow me to introduce myself.

My official name is Rev. Joseph A. Serafin, but my nickname from childhood on has been Jay, so please feel free to call me Pastor Jay. I come to the Virginia Synod via the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, where I had served over the past 33 years in two parish settings. Most recently, I served the Brandonville-Ringtown parish for over 27 years. My wife Jamie and I moved to Williamsburg, Virginia in September after purchasing a house there last year. We have no human children, but do have four-legged, furry children including two dogs (Cabernet and Syrah), a cat (Truffles) and two horses (Champion and Duke). The dogs and cat reside with us in Williamsburg, while the horses continue to be boarded in Pennsylvania because the older horse, Champ, is 37 years old and might not be able to travel the long distance from there to here. The names of our animals give clues to some of my interests, which include wine (I have a WSET Level 2 certificate) and food (I love to cook). I love sports and have a fondness for football (Penn State, Eagles),

baseball (Phillies) and basketball (I was an assistant basketball coach for our local high school's girls' basketball team for six years). Academically, I graduated from Penn State with a degree in religious studies and from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (now known as United Lutheran Seminary) with a Master of Divinity degree. My amazing wife Jamie is able to work from home as a team leader in the laboratory department for the Geisinger Healthcare System in Pennsylvania and enjoys gardening and caring for our pets.

I look forward to the coming weeks and months of learning about Apostles and meeting and getting to know the congregation and members better. I am aware that last year was a struggle and will do my best to help the congregation move into the future in ways that will be healing and meaningful. With the help of the Synod, congregational leadership and your prayers and efforts, we will seek God's grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to direct us forward and to continue to do the ministry of servanthood we all have been called to embody. As we move forward, I will share with you my office hours (generally Monday and Wednesday from 10am-1pm with changes according to other congregational or synod events) and hope to have the opportunity to meet you in conversation regarding our shared ministry and mission at Apostles. I will be open to visits or conversations by phone, and will need your help in learning about the

congregation and areas where I may serve, including hospital visits, homebound visits or community servant possibilities. I am not always the best at learning names, so I do appreciate the name tags at church and ask for your patience as I try my best to learn names and faces over the coming weeks. Please feel free to call me or stop by to chat or to share concerns or information which you think might be helpful as I go about my duties. You can reach me by calling 570-205-7506, by leaving a message on the phone at the church office or by emailing me at j80j84@msn.com. Please know that my call is part time, usually entailing Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays, but I am available for emergencies and important information at any time.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as Pastor at Apostles, and may God's grace work in us and through us as we share the good news together here and in the world.
Pastor Jay

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**Memorial Service for
Opal Baker**



Opal M. Baker, beloved mother of Judy Sowden, passed away peacefully on November 22, 2022. She was born on May 24, 1919. She was preceded in death by daughter, Nancy Fisk; son-in-law, Robert

Fisk; son, Roger Randall; son-in-law, Mike Sowden, and brother, George Mitchell. She is survived by daughter, Judy Sowden; granddaughter, Debbie Toms (Ronnie); granddaughter, Linda Fisk (Dave), and grandson, Robert Fisk; great-grandchildren, Jackie Tennant, Ronnie Lee Toms and Mikey Toms, and great-great-granddaughter, Gwendolyn Tennant. The memorial service will be **Saturday, January 7th, at 11:00 AM** at Apostles—a reception will follow the service.

**Congregation Council President
and Vice President Elected**

Congratulations to **David Luenig** and **Ben Grimes** who were unanimously elected by Congregation Council in December to serve as President and Vice President, respectively, for 2023. A BIG thank you to outgoing President, Doug Dalager, for his wonderful leadership in 2022!!

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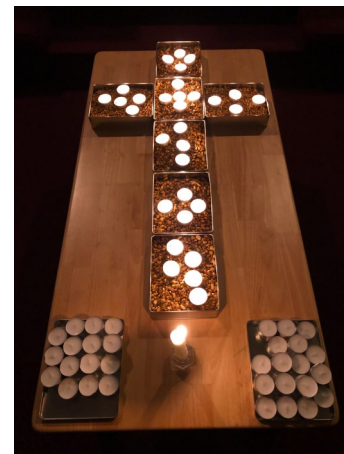
Annual Congregational Meeting

The annual congregational meeting will be held on **Sunday, January 29th** after the 10:00 AM worship service. At the meeting the President of the Congregation Council (Doug Dalager) and the Treasurer (Tina Britt) will submit their reports; each ministry team and affiliated group will submit their reports and we will elect new Congregation Council members (3), Mission Outreach Fund Committee members (3), members for the Nominating Committee (6), and voting members and alternates of the Virginia Synod Assembly. Please make plans to attend!!

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**Blue Christmas Service
Rescheduled**

The "Blue Christmas Service" has been rescheduled for **Wednesday, January 4th, at 7:00 PM**. This is a service of remembrance, comfort and hope. We will be making luminaries to line the entrance into the church for the service. We will also be giving out prayer shawls to those attending the service.



December 2022 at Apostles!



Advent worship with the lighting of the Advent wreath

Decorating the sanctuary for Christmas



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Ministry Team Meetings

The following ministry team will meet in January:
 + **Service and Sharing** - Tuesday, January 10th, at 7:00 PM

+ **Reconciling in Christ** - Thursday, January 12th at 7:00 PM

+ **Worship** - Tuesday, January 17th at 7:00 PM

+ **Caring Community** - Monday, January 23rd, at 7:00 PM

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Poinsettias for Christmas

If you purchased poinsettias for Christmas, please take them home—they are in the fellowship hall—thanks!

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Happy Birthday To . . .

- Gail Britt January 2
- Carl Hess January 5
- Heinz Albert January 12
- Teresa Grantham January 14
- Gene Gomez January 16
- Emily Riordan January 20
- Chris Hawkins January 22
- Don Garfield January 24
- Amanda Kendzierski January 24
- Kayla Hautz January 25
- Pastor Jay January 26

Happy Baptismal Anniversary to.

Ellie Crocker January 5

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Happy Anniversary to.

Pete and Betsy Liljeberg January 15

Pam and Billie Moore January 25

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First Sunday Potluck Fellowship

The first Sunday potluck fellowship will be the **second Sunday** this month—**Sunday, January 8th**. Please bring a dish to share!

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**The Way In The Wilderness:
 Preparing for Synod Assembly
 Together**

As Virginia Lutherans prepare to gather for the 2023 Synod Assembly, everyone is invited to join in a five-session bible study to explore the theme, *The Way in the Wilderness*. God is always with God's people, including joining us in all the wildernesses of life. Jesus calls us in many and various ways to share God's expansive love in our unique contexts. We are united in the wilderness, even if our journeys are different. In each session, participants will hear a story about God's presence in the wilderness, will learn how that story has impacted a synod leader, and will have opportunity to share their wilderness stories too. Each session will help prepare our hearts and minds for the Synod Assembly, assured of God's presence with us as individuals and together as a synod. Everyone is welcome to attend: Lay and rostered, voting member or visitor, even if you won't be onsite for the Assembly in June, you are welcome to join the conversation. Portions of the sessions will be recorded and shared. Thank you to our session leaders: Bishop Bob Humphrey, Pastor Kelly Bayer Derrick (Assistant to the Bishop), Pastor John Wertz Jr. (Director for Evangelical Mission), Charles Downs (Synod Council President), and Blythe Scott (Synod Council Secretary). **January 23, February 27, March 27, April 24, & May 22 7-8:15 pm on Zoom—register at www.vasynod.org.**

January: National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month

According to the International Labour Organization (www.ilo.org), 49.6 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021. 27.6 million were in forced labor and 6.3 million were in forced commercial sexual exploitation. Hunger is one of the leading causes of human trafficking. Hungry families sell their children into prostitution in order to put food on the table and pay for housing. UNICEF (unicefusa.org) reports that food insecure teens accept exploitative scams in order to secure food and other necessities.

Consumers contribute to modern slavery and forced labor by purchasing inexpensive goods made in factories where workers are victims of forced labor and inhumane living conditions. Hungry families allow their children to work in unhealthy and dangerous situations.

Prayer: Loving and generous God, forgive us for unknowingly participating in the root causes of modern slavery and human trafficking. Grant us a generous spirit and willingness to help those who experience food insecurity and hunger. Give us the courage to speak up for the rights of those less fortunate than us. Gather together your scattered people; set free those who are slaves among the nations; look on those who are rejected and despised; and let the nations know that you are our God.. Amen.

Take action:

- + Find out how your purchasing power influences human trafficking and modern slavery. Take a quiz to find out your slavery footprint and learn more at: slaveryfootprint.org.
- + Look for fair-trade certification on products that you purchase. Learn about how to purchase ethically made products at: <https://humaneeducation.org/10-tools-help-find-ethical-products/>

Additional Ways to Address Hunger

- + Attend **A Day for All People** in Richmond on January 18th. It is an advocacy day sponsored by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy



(VICPP) and Virginia Interfaith Power and Light (VAIPL). This is a day full of workshops and networking to learn how to advocate for those unable to advocate for themselves. The Virginia Synod of the ELCA participates in this activity.

+ January 19th is **National Tin Can Day**. How about taking up a collection of canned goods for your local food pantry and presenting it to them on this day.



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Midwinter Power In The Spirit

MIDWINTER

POWER
in the
SPIRIT

Blessed Are

January 30 to February 1, 2023
Online

Keynote:
Brenda Smith
1517 Media, Book of Faith

Workshops on Matthew 5:3-12

Register today to join us for **Midwinter Power in the Spirit (Digital)** event **Monday, January 30 to Tuesday, February 1, 2023**. This will be our third annual Midwinter Power in the Spirit online gathering. Blessed are . . . Come, and explore how you can bring the Beatitudes into the modern world with a fresh look at Jesus' words for you today through the morning devotions, digital workshops, and worship. Explore how God's people can reach out to all with the love of God. The Rev. Brenda Smith, from 1517 Media, retired director of the ELCA Book of Faith initiative, joins us as our keynote speaker! You can register at www.vasynod.org. There is no cost for the event.

January Opportunities



Come see David Tyson on Sunday, January 22nd, at 4:00 PM at Reformation Lutheran Church in Newport News. The program is Renaissance Revisited: Out of the Darkness Comes the Light. A modern day fool goes in search of the truth by traveling back in time. Using masks of the

commedia dell'arte, clown, and storytelling, the show is a fast-paced engaging theatrical event. Mr. Tyson has a modern take on such classic texts as "Everyman", characters like Punch, and stories of knights, dragons, and magic. The fool learns how the past can illuminate the present. Mr. Tyson is the Artistic Director of his own Weaver of Tales Theatre. He holds an MFA in Acting from Case Western Reserve University; a Master's Degree in Communication & Leadership from Park University and is a graduate of the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in California. This performance is partially funded by the Virginia Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts. The event is free and open to the public. Contributions will be accepted to help support the Mildred McDonald Concert Series.

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Please Keep In Your Prayers

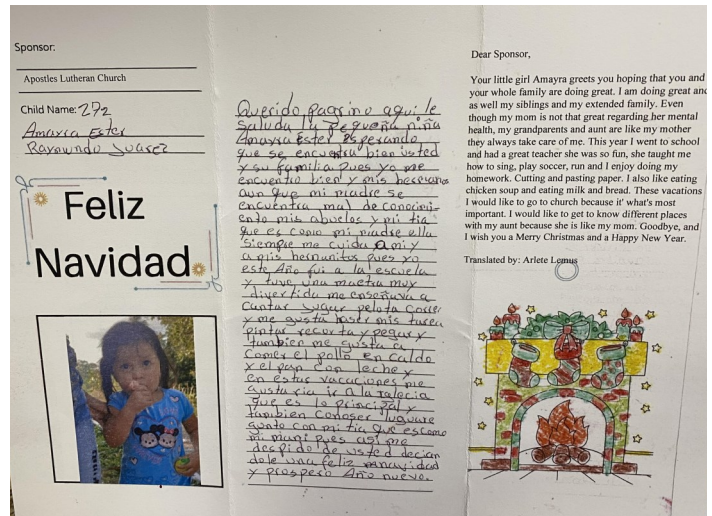
Eddie Freeman, Manning Freeman, Don Garfield, David Muse, Michael Schlemmer, George Thomas, Jewel Thomas, Sue and George Turner, and Jerry and Lena Woodlief.

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Congregation Council Meeting

The Congregation Council will be meeting on Monday, January 9th, at 7:00 PM. Anyone is welcome to attend!

Christmas Greetings from Our Children In Guatemala



We received a beautiful card from one of our sponsored children in Guatemala, Amarya—the card is on the table in the narthex—check it out! We sponsor 3 children in Guatemala—Amarya, Hugolino and Manuela.

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Reconciling in Christ Ministry



The Reconciling in Christ (RIC) team will meet on **January 12, 2023 at 7 PM** at Apostles in the library. Anyone who would like to join by Zoom, please contact Betsy Liljeberg. Reconciling Works has been growing to include not just the LGBTQ+ community, but also people of color and indigenous peoples. All people who might otherwise live on the margins of American society, are welcome in the Lutheran church as full participants. The RIC team will be looking at ways to include, educate, and share ministry with an ever broader community. The team is looking for new members. If you have an interest in participating in this ministry team please join us on the 12th. Betsy Liljeberg

A Message From Your Financial Secretaries

The company that provides our offering envelopes, the McDaniel Church Envelope and Mailing Company, has experienced delays in getting orders shipped. They hope to ship the envelopes sometime in January. In the meantime, if you use offering envelopes, please just use a pew envelope and make sure your name and offering envelope number are on your check. Thanks! (A BIG thank you to Irene and Heinz for serving as our Financial Secretaries for many years—they have agreed to serve again next year—we are so grateful!!)

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Celebrating the Ministry of the Virginia Synod: 2022: A Year in Review



At the core of what it means to be Synod is to journey together as we seek to proclaim the good news of Jesus to the world. Our wonderful Virginia Synod has put together an awesome video about what we have accomplished together this past year—you can watch it at <https://vimeo.com/783045540>. Thank you for being a part of and supporting the Virginia Synod!



Paint Party Fundraiser for Jade Hawkins

As an active eligible member of Girl Scouting, Jade Hawkins has been given the opportunity to travel to Puerto Rico in 2024. Let's work together to help her get there. There will be a "paint party" at Apostles on Friday, February 10th, from 5-8 PM. The art instructor for the evening will be Gloucester's own Janet Griffin. SEATS ARE LIMITED TO 30 AND ARE \$30 EACH. A taco bar dinner will be served and additional donations will be collected then. Interested in attending? Interested in helping with the Taco Dinner? There is a "Sign up Genius" with 30 seats to reserve—you can also sign up to help setup or help with the taco dinner—there are 10 spots for those interested in helping. Please contact Jennie Hawkins at photojenic02@yahoo.com for the link or type in the following code:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080D4BAEA72AABFC1-paint1>

Please review the available slots and click on the button to reserve your spot today. Please contact Jennie if you have any questions—you can call Jennie at 571-359-7617.

If you would you like to make a donation to her trip please use the following link at anytime: account.efexploreamerica.com/donations/VoK514. This is a important milestone for Jade and the support of Apostles is so important. Thank you!!

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A Message From Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

On December 31st, we awoke to the news of the passing of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. As part of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we mourn his death and celebrate his life eternal in Christ Jesus. General Secretary Anne Burghardt reminds us of Pope Benedict's enduring commitment to the unity of Christ's church and, in particular, "his appreciation of the 'Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification' that has enabled many advances in Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations." His brilliance as a theologian and his ecumenical

spirit will continue to challenge us to build bridges of mutual understanding and visible unity through dialogue, cooperation and common witness.

We also pray for Pope Francis, who will continue to lead the Roman Catholic Church in this historic time – the likes of which haven't occurred since nearly a century before the Reformation. We extend our condolences and unceasing accompaniment to all our Catholic neighbors, including the bishops, priests, deacons, scholars and laypeople with whom we are in dialogue and partnership.

Pope Benedict lived in the surety that "whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. Amen.

In Christ,
Elizabeth A. Eaton

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Blessing The Home During Epiphany

Matthew writes that when the magi saw the shining star stop overhead, they

were filled with joy. "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother" (Matt. 2:10-11). In the home, Christ is met in family and friends, in visitors and strangers. In the home, faith is shared, nurtured, and put into action. In the home, Christ is welcome.

Twelfth Night (January 5), Epiphany of Our Lord (January 6), or sometime before February 19 (the festival of Transfiguration) offers an occasion for a blessing for the home. During this time where many of us are staying close to home, what better time to bless these homes that have kept us safe, warm and healthy. You could enjoy a "Twelfth Night" cake or some other treat to celebrate the visit and the gifts of the Magi (see recipe below). Someone may lead the greeting and blessing, while another person may read the scripture passage. Following an eastern European tradition, a visual blessing may be inscribed with white chalk above the main door; for example, 20 + CMB + 23. The numbers change with each new

year. The three letters stand for either the ancient Latin blessing *Christe mansionem benedicat*, which means, "Christ bless this house," or the legendary names of the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar).

Greeting

May peace be to this house and all who enter here. By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. (*Proverbs 24:3-4*)

Reading

As we prepare to ask God's blessing on this household, let us listen to the words of scripture. Read John 1 verses 1-4, 14, and 16—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being, and the life was the light of all people. The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."

Inscription

This inscription may be made with chalk above the entrance: 20 + CMB + 23. Write the appropriate character (left) while speaking the text (right)

The magi of old, known as

C Caspar

M Melchior, and

B Balthasar

Followed the star of God's Son who came to dwell among us

20 two thousand

23 and twenty three years ago.

+ Christ bless this house,

+ and remain with us throughout the year.

Prayer of Blessing

O God, you revealed your Son to all people by the shining of a star. We pray that you bless this home and all who live here with your gracious presence. May your love be our inspiration, your wisdom our guide, your truth our light, and your peace our benediction; through Christ our Lord.