

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

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UPCOMING DATES

September 6
Elders

September 13
Church Picnic

September 20
Church Council

N E W S L E T T E R

The Forgiving Father and His Two Prodigal Sons

Luke 15:25-32 - "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, took! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' My son," the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Now we meet the other prodigal son. For though he has remained at home and has faithfully served his father, he nevertheless has fallen just as far as his younger brother.

But before we delve into the nature of his fall, we need to take a look at what appears to be a legitimate complaint on his part. Who hasn't complained or at least been tempted to complain to God, "Life just isn't fair! I see scores of people who despise your Word and your church. They live well, better than I do, for sure. They seem to have it all. Their whole life is one of 'eat, drink, and be merry.' No conscience holds them back from even the crudest vice. They mock all that is holy and scorn any call to repentance. But I plague myself with struggles against my own sinful flesh. I sacrifice for the good of the church and the world. I try, I really try, to serve and be useful in accord with your Word. I endure the ridicule of those who think I am a fool for it. And still, what do I receive from your hand? Yet more reminders of my sins. Even worries about my job or my health or my family are never far away. Do not even those who despise your Word and heap contempt on your church notice it and conclude that they are right, and I am a fool because of it?"

Doesn't this older son have a point? And isn't it a point that especially those rare individuals—and rare they are indeed!—could make whose lives are like that of this older son? Surely you have known such people. Perhaps you are one of those who, in all honesty, can make claims similar to his. You have known Jesus since you were a child. You did not go through the violent and rebellious phase of so many in their youth. As an adult you may not have fallen for the temptation to just live for yourself. You have been faithful to your spouse, to family and friends, to the church. What does Jesus have to say to such as these who really do not have any crude or gross sins to confess or deep falls to recall?

Listen to Jesus' answer: "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours!" What a perfect answer! That's what the older son missed. He missed this elementary and beautiful fact; that is what made him a prodigal son just as much as his younger brother. A prodigal, by definition, is one who wastes and squanders what he has. The younger son squandered and wasted his father's wealth. This older son squandered and wasted the truth and the joy that his blessed status should have given him. All the while he was serving his father, he enjoyed a conscience free from shame and never had to suffer a memory forever scared by past disgrace. That's no small blessing! All the while he was serving his father, he should have enjoyed the happy thought that his life was filled with purpose and meaning. Again, no small blessing. Yes, and all the while he was serving his father, he lacked for nothing. Indeed, he had the assurance from his father's wealth that he would continue to have and enjoy all he needed.

(Continued on next page.)

What a blessing and one that few ever know—having a conscience relatively free from blame. What a blessing to never have known the shame and the consequent separation from God that willful sin brings. What a blessing to be able to come before God and confess that, yes, I know that I am far from perfect, but I always know even better how perfect the blessings of the gospel of forgiveness are, so despair never knocks on my door.

But those who have such blessings need always to watch out for the fall of the older son. He came to think that he merited the father's bounty. He didn't ever consider that the status of beloved son was one that could never be earned or deserved. He came to imagine that his protection from the evil into which his brother fell was due alone to his own virtue. And so he fell. He fell into the sin of thinking that service to his father—to God—is a burden and a bother. He fell into pride and arrogance. He fell into a hard-hearted grudging of mercy for his fallen but repenting brother. And the fall into such hateful self-righteousness was just as bad as the more blatant and obvious fall of the younger son. We see it so often.. Those not tempted to despair may be tempted to self-righteousness. Those remain the two root temptations, the two equally damning sins.

But look again at how the father in the parable treats this prodigal older brother. Just as the father had embraced and welcomed back the younger son, so he gently strives to incite repentance and return in the heart of the older brother. With this one too there is no well-deserved scolding: "You ungrateful wretch! How dare you question my grace and love for your brother! How dare you imagine that you deserve anything at all from me. That you didn't enjoy what you received from me is not my fault but the fault of your own ingratitude and self-righteousness!" No such words fall from the father's lips. Instead, there is only the so simple and yet so complete answer: You are always with me, and everything I have is yours!

Jesus doesn't tell us in the parable what the response of the older brother was. He leaves it to us when we are tempted with the older brother's complaint to answer for ourselves and so to finish the parable. Oh, may we finish it with an outburst of joyful thanksgiving! For it is so true that he is always with us and everything he has is ours. It is only when we turn our eyes away from him that we fall either into despair over our obvious and blatant sins or into self-righteousness, congratulating ourselves for our virtue and thinking his gifts well-deserved. For both prodigals there is the so salutary embrace of the father in the gospel and the reminder of our blessed status as our Father's sons and daughters for Jesus' sake. Let us then fix our eyes on Jesus and on his Word of grace and peace and pardon. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, let us flee the lies of the devil that would bring us to shame and disgrace. And let us as well live in and enjoy the bounty of our Father who gives us everything for Jesus' sake. Let us to be sure enjoy his blessings for our own use. And then let us strive to live and work in obedience to his Word, for the benefit of those around us and for the glory of his name. (Adapted for use at Immanuel, from Daniel Deutschlander, *On Giving Advice to God*, pp.124-127)

Season of Pentecost Divine Service Themes

In September, the over-arching theme of our services will be: **Unexpected Truths**. The opening lines of the United States Declaration of Independence boldly assert that certain truths are “self-evident”—truths accessible to human reason and widely recognized by observation of the world. Among these are that all people are created equal and possess unalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The founders appealed to principles they believed reasonable people could recognize simply by reflecting on human nature and justice. These truths were meant to be obvious, clear to the mind, and persuasive in the public square.

Lutherans, however, note that the most important truths revealed in the Bible are not self-evident at all. In fact, they frequently appear surprising or even contrary to human expectations. Scripture teaches that humanity is not naturally good but deeply sinful. It declares that salvation cannot be achieved through human effort but comes entirely by God's grace. Most unexpected of all is the message that God brings forgiveness and eternal life through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Biblical truth is revealed by God rather than discovered by reason alone. While some truths may seem obvious to human judgment, the truths of the Bible are often unexpected.

September Worship:

- September 6th – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost – I Am My Brother's Keeper
 - When danger strikes, most people instinctively move away from it. Fire, violence, accidents, and disasters trigger a natural desire to find protection and safety. Yet first responders do the opposite. Firefighters, police officers, and paramedics run toward the very scenes others are fleeing. They enter burning buildings, approach violent situations, and kneel beside the injured in chaotic moments. This response is unexpected because it goes against basic human instinct.
 - God calls us to be spiritual first responders when we see people in trouble because of sin. Instead of self-preservation and comfort, we choose service to them and to our Lord. Our motive is the grace of God and his desire for the salvation of all mankind.
- September 13th – Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Forgiveness Is For Me
 - Forgiveness does not come naturally to human beings. It is expected that humans will defend themselves, lash out when attacked, hold grudges, and bite back. So, when human beings hear that they are forgiven, they may even be suspicious or skeptical.

Jesus tells a parable that contrasts the forgiveness of God with our own unforgiving sinful nature. God forgives our huge debt. Who can comprehend such unexpected mercy? Certainly not unmerciful servants, who refuse to forgive small debts. Have mercy on us, Lord, and teach us to forgive like you!

- September 20th – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Grace Is Amazing
 - Give a single bag of M&Ms to siblings in middle school and tell them to share. You will witness counting done with accounting-like precision. Each child will get an equal amount of candy because that is fair. That's what's expected! Human beings have an incredibly strong sense of fairness.

That is why it can be so amazing when we see how God unexpectedly dispenses blessing and grace. The prophet Jonah was perplexed when he saw God's mercy on a nation that was an enemy to Jonah's people. Like Jonah, we need to stop expecting God to be fair. He does not give us what we deserve. Instead, in his grace, he shows us mercy. That's amazing!

- September 27th – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Real Repentance Looks Different
 - It might be expected for someone to look sorry when they are caught doing something wrong. You might even see tears and hear words of apology. But you might not be surprised if the shock of being caught wears off and so does the intensity of the repentance.

Real repentance looks different. God doesn't want us to simply go through religious motions like some sort of show. God's desire is that our repentance would demonstrate sincere sorry over sin. It might be unexpected, but God wants us to see the grace and forgiveness he has shown us in Christ, and in response, to love him back deeply and sincerely.

Thank You

Thanks to all who helped at the County Fair in August. We appreciate the time you volunteered to sit at Immanuel's table. We were able to distribute 20 booklets on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, many flyers, and also gave away five Bibles.

The Festival of St. Michael and All Angels

Michael is one of two angels that Bible names for us. The other is the great messenger of God's grace, Gabriel. Gabriel's job was to announce the remarkable works of God's salvation to the waiting world. Michael's job is different.

Michael is called the archangel, that is, the leader of the angels. The Bible says that he is in charge of the great army of angels that God uses to protect and care for us. This is the day we remember God's great love in giving us these amazing protectors, the angels. The church celebrates this festival every year on September 29th. For 1500 years the Christian Church has celebrated this festival near the autumnal equinox, the day of 12 hours of sunlight and 12 hours of darkness. As Christians watched the autumn nights grow longer and the days grow shorter, they were reminded of the struggle between good

and evil—between the forces of light and the forces of darkness—between the angel armies of God and the demonic forces of Satan. And so, every year as autumn darkened into winter, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Archangel, and remembered that Michael and All the Angels fought on their side. You see, angels are one of God's answers to our fears. God wants to give us the proper perspective as we go through this life. No matter what sounds we hear, or dilemmas we face, or tragedies we endure...God's message for us is: Don't be afraid, because we are not alone.

Church Picnic

A church picnic will be held on Sunday, September 13th, at 11:30 a.m. Pulled pork sandwiches, chips, water, and tableware will be provided. Members are asked to bring a side dish and/or dessert to pass. Please sign up on the sheet in the Narthex if you plan to attend.

Sunday School Classes

Instruction in Bible history will begin on Sunday, September 13th.

Sunday Bible Class

We will begin a new series on Sunday, September 13th. This would be a great time to join other members as we study God's Word together.

Confirmation Classes

Instruction in God's Word following the outline of the Small Catechism will begin on September 16th. On that night, we will begin with a meeting with parents and children at 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday Bible Class

Class will meet on Wednesday mornings at 10:00 a.m. beginning on September 16th. We are going to begin a study of the life of Jacob (Genesis 25-36), with special attention given to Martin Luther's Commentary on Genesis. Watch the bulletin for more information.

Church Directory Update

Our scheduling process has begun. You can go online and schedule your appointment for October 1st, 2nd, or 3rd. Thursday and Friday times are 2:00-8:30 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Starting Sunday, September 13th and the following two Sundays we will have volunteers to help with scheduling your appointment if you wish. To schedule online, visit www.ucdir.com, click on photography appointment scheduling login on the right side, enter MN673 in the Church Code field and enter >MNMEMBERS673< in the Church Password field. Follow the prompts to schedule your family's appointment time. If you have 6 or more in your family, please use 2 consecutive times slots. The online scheduling option is available Monday through Friday. Appointments fill up quickly, so schedule as soon as possible to secure your preferred date and time.

Birthdays

Steve Okins.....September 3
Jodee Okins.....September 7
John KappersSeptember 18

Anniversary

Justin & Beth KannasSeptember 20

Church Council Meeting Minutes

July 12, 2026

Members Present: Jim Buffington, Pastor, Scott Claussen, Michael Ziebell, Martin Fabrizio

MMSP = Motion Made, Seconded, Passed

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 10:41 a.m.

Pastor opened with the Lord's Prayer.

Agenda: MMSP to accept the agenda as presented.

Secretary's Report: MMSP to accept the June 14, 2026 council minutes with the removal of the following sentence from New Business: Council discussed food choices, breakfast time, and needed utensils.

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Chairman's Report: Council members need to meet for photographs for the church annual.

Elders Report: Elders met and went through a list of members who have not attended for five to ten years and are working on contacting those members.

Trustees Report:

- Painter looked at basement walls and water stains.
- Toilet next to kitchen was found to have a broken handle. Trustees fixed the problem.
- Trustees are considering a cordless blower for cleaning cement curbs in the parking lot.
- Weeds around church are going to be sprayed.

Financial Secretary's Report: MMSP to accept the Financial Secretary's report as presented.

Treasurer's Report: MMSP to accept the Treasurer's report as presented.

Planned Giving Committee Report: No report.

Church IT/AV Committee:

- Committee would like to update software to Microsoft One Drive to allow better online access.
- New laptop purchased.
- Suggestion was made to update church website.

Pastor's Report:

- Pastor and elders had discussions on mailing monthly newsletter vs other options. No decision has been made currently.
- Mission Festival will be held on January 10, 2027. This date is earlier than normal, but it worked well for pastor and the presenter. The focus will be on WELS Home Missions. Half of the presenter's presentation will focus on work at the national level and half on the district level.
- The new combined church on Highway 212 will be called Trinity Evangelical. The church is working on a new constitution.
- Mailings will be sent out to Zion Lutheran members asking them if they would like to become members of Trinity Evangelical.
- Pastor is considering going to Voters Meetings at Zion Lutheran.
- Pastor will be on Vacation August 9, 16, and 23.

Old Business and Action Committees

No report.

New Business

- Syrup bottles were removed from kitchen area.
- Discussion on including MLC Student in 2027 budget (\$6,500). It was agreed to wait until July Voters Meeting to decide.
- Elders will reach out to Nominating Committee to look for an elder replacement.

FINANCIAL REPORT

January 1st through July 31st, 2026

GENERAL FUND

January 1st			July 31st
Balance	Contributions	Expenditures	Balance
\$ 57,257	\$ 122,407	\$ 130,452	\$ 49,212

WELS CONGREGATIONAL MISSION OFFERING		MLC - CONGREGATIONAL PARTNER GRANT		LUTHERAN INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRY ASSOCIATION (LIMA)	
2026 Commitment	Year to Date Contributions	2026 Commitment	Year to Date Contributions	2026 Commitment	Year to Date Contributions
\$ 34,000	\$ 22,283	\$ 1,600	\$ 1,895	\$ 2,200	\$ 1,386
Average Monthly Commitment	YTD Average Monthly Contributions	Average Monthly Commitment	YTD Average Monthly Contributions	Average Monthly Commitment	YTD Average Monthly Contributions
\$ 2,833	\$ 3,183	\$ 133.33	271	\$ 183	\$ 198

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- July 19, 2026 after Bible class
- August 9, 2026 after Bible class
- September 13, 2026 after Bible class

Pastor closed with blessing and the meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully,
Scott Claussen, Recording Secretary

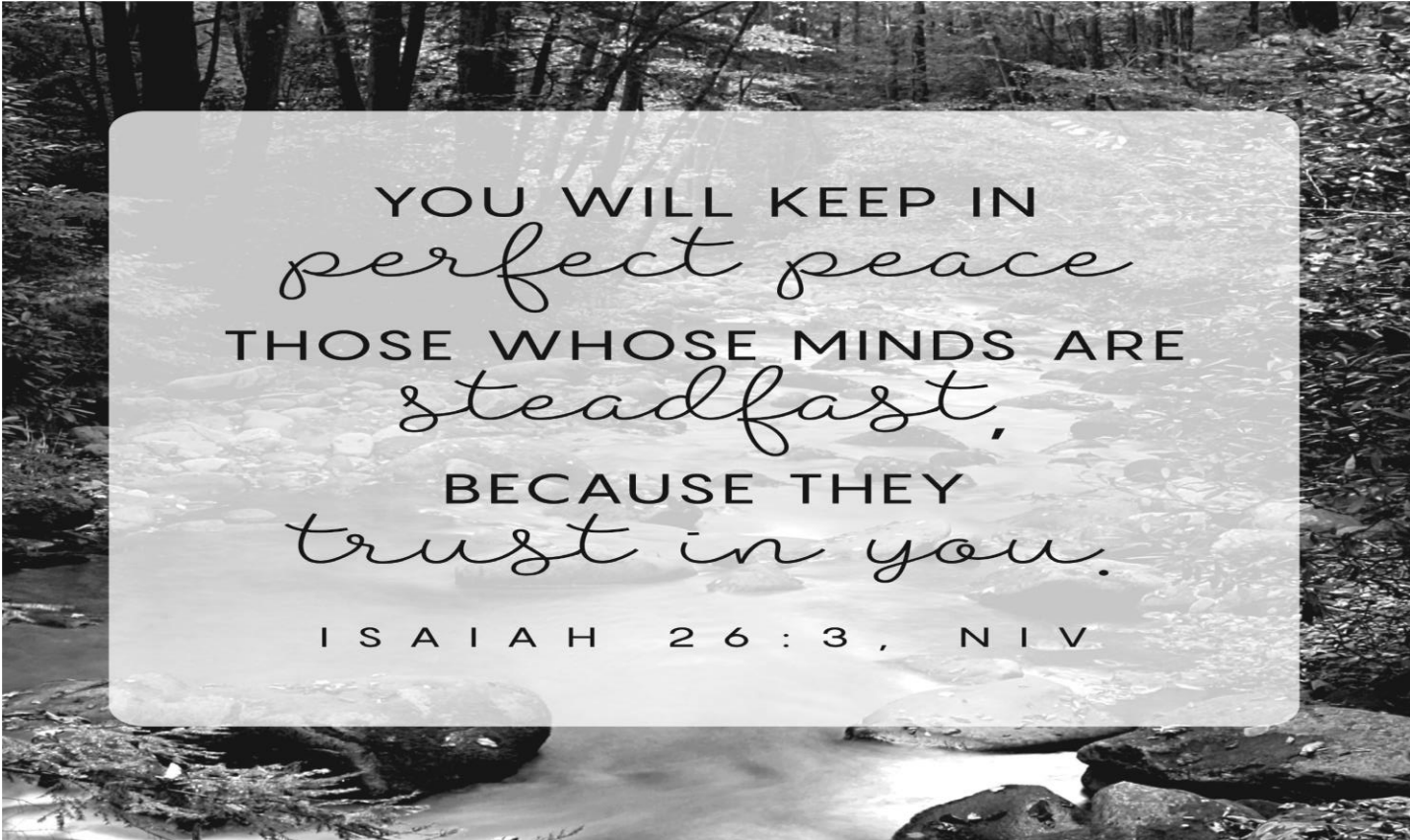
QR Code for Online Giving



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

A black and white photograph of a forest stream with a semi-transparent text box overlaid. The text box contains the following text:

YOU WILL KEEP IN
perfect peace
THOSE WHOSE MINDS ARE
steadfast,
BECAUSE THEY
trust in you.

ISAIAH 26:3, NIV

ISAIAH 26:3, NIV