



God Sightings: Seeing God's Movement in Our Day

2023 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

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Wednesday, February 22
Ash Wednesday
OUTREACH FOR HOPE

Rev. Chris Manke, Executive Director of Outreach for Hope: Hi! I'm Pastor Chris Manke. And I'm excited for our Lenten journey that we're about to start on together!



For the next several weeks, 40 days, we'll have a daily devotion coming out to you from Outreach for Hope. We've had 40 different people sharing their thoughts and their reflections on this theme for this year, which is "God sightings," this idea of, "how do we see God in our world?" And I'm convinced part of our problem is that we stop looking for God. We stop looking for God's presence in our lives and thinking about, "How is God active in my life? What is God doing in and through me, and all the things that I do on a day-to-day basis?"

Some of you might know that I'm a photographer. I enjoy doing photography, and taking lots of pictures everywhere I go, and sharing those. But I'm always amazed as I reflect on those pictures, as I see them, I see how God is at work, how God is with me. And as I look at them later, it always strikes me.

Often, we think about God's presence at times in our lives when things are going really well. In times of, like, the birth of a child, or the celebration of a moment in life. And we think to ourselves, "Thank you, God! Thank you, God, for the goodness of this moment" of how God has been with us in those times. And we celebrate, just like our ancestors in the faith that we hear about in scripture. But it's also in those times of great difficulty where we think, "Oh, wow, how am I going to get through this?" And then especially as we reflect on those times, looking back, we see how God was with us, how God took care of us. In all of those little moments, maybe through a friend's presence, or someone reaching out to us, or our church faith community being there with us. Those celebrations and those difficulties remind us about how God is with us each and every day.

And so, this Lenten devotion, my encouragement for you, is to think about how God is with us each and every day. To look for God's presence in our lives, the reminders that there are no coincidences, that God is walking with us, and often doing those things that remind us of God's goodness, God's presence, God's love in our lives. And so, my hope for you, as we go through these next weeks of Lent, moving us towards the Easter

moment, is that we will look for God. That we will see God's presence in our day to day, sometimes in the very small things, and sometimes in the very big. But we know God is walking with us. And so, blessings to you on this journey that we are starting, and may you keep looking for God's presence in your life! Amen.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Compassionate Lord: May we love our neighbor as we would want to be loved, so that we can continue to strive for that which we are called to embody: faith, hope, and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Thursday, February 23
GREATER MILWAUKEE
SYNOD

Rev. Afi Dobbins-Mays, Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity & Leadership: This week, in reflecting on a God sighting to share, I was struck by how it seems such a monumental thing

to experience-- going inward to reflect and draw up a memory of a time that I saw God moving. I was feeling the pressure to come up with something powerful and grand that can capture sometimes those amazing and overwhelming feelings of awe... Yet, again, as I thought about Lent, and how we turn our eyes to the road that Jesus travelled, I think about how it was one with its own share of family trauma and drama, his journey. It was a journey that was fraught with the expectations, frustrations and failings of people and institutions, which ultimately signed his death warrant. I'm reminded that Christ's journey also led him by the seashores, and over still waters, and even up mountains. It led him through storms. Throughout his ministry, signs and wonders followed him. And often in between, he can be found in a posture of listening and praying, sitting with God.

As we journey this year with Christ, through the traumas we have endured... despite any number of things that might have frustrated us, and also, despite the people and institutions that may fail us at times... Still, there are the moments in which we can go away, or come to the mountain, and feel God and God's presence.

This week, in this season, I've seen God in the clear, bright light of the moon, and the cool, crisp winter air. I've seen God in the laughter of a loved one whose struggle has been so deep, that even a smile was difficult. I've heard God in the chirping of the birds, and the dripping of the melting ice and snow.

Winans, a gospel group that was popular in the 80's and 90's, sing of God. They say everything God touches is a song. And they say God, you touched my life one day, and my burdens, they just rolled away.

I pray that in this season, we might all meet Christ by the water. Or when we first step out of the door and feel the breeze or the wind on our cheeks. In the eyes of a friend, or in the eyes of a stranger. That we'll see God everywhere we look because Christ touched our lives one day. The Lord be with you!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PSALM 19 |

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

Friday, February 24
GRACE WELCOME
CENTER, KENOSHA
OFH Ministry Partner

Rev. Jonathan Barker: Hello! It's Rev. Jonathan Barker down here at Grace Welcome Center. And this past winter, we saw God show up tremendously on that cold spell that we all experienced right before Christmas. And we are down here in this very room-- And that day, we were giving out jackets to all of the guests as we were anticipating negative 30-degree weather, and all that that was going to entail. And we ran out of jackets... And one of our volunteers had actually recently bought a brand-new jacket, they'd gotten it on a great pre-Christmas clearance sale, and they just love this jacket... But they saw one of our guests was going to be having to go through these cold days without a jacket. And they literally took the jacket off of themselves, and they gifted it to our friend, so they would be able to stay warm during the blizzard.



And all I could think about was how much the Holy Spirit was working through that volunteer as they made this generous gift. And it reminded me of something that we read at the very beginning of Luke's Gospel, when John the Baptist comes on the scene, and people are asking what repentance looks like. And he says that repentance looks like giving away your coat if you have two and doing likewise with your food. And I'm just so mindful how, not only was this volunteer able to live this out-- but all the people that donate jackets and clothing and long underwear and food to Grace Welcome Center, living out this command to share with those that don't have. And so, God bless you all, and thanks for being part of our Grace Welcome Center family!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear God: Your presence enfolds us like a warm coat on a cold winter evening. Help us to remember the feeling of your love each and every day, so that we may share your goodness with our neighbor, so that all people may be blessed in this often cold world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Saturday, February 25
REFORMATION
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Thaurra Stallings, Youth & Family Minister: Well, I just wanted to let everyone know how blessed we are

here at Reformation. It is truly a blessing to be here. I just want to tell about an experience this young person had on education night. And we was talking about Jesus-- John 3:16, how He love the world. And this young man said, "My mom love me!!" And I said, "God, love you, too! Jesus love you. He died for you." And he said, "He did?!" And I said, "Yes." And the young man said, "You sure, Miss T?!" And I said, "Yes. Ain't you living today? Ain't you walking?" And he said, "Yes!!" He said, "Well, I'm gonna tell my mom Jesus love me, and He died for me!" And I said, "Yes! That's a moment we want you to go home and tell your parents, what you are learning about Jesus Christ here at Reformation." And he was so happy! And he's like, "I'm coming back! You think I could bring my little sister with me?" And I said, "How old is your little sister?" He said, "She's three." I said, "Everybody is welcome here Reformation!"

So, I'm just so pleased to have this ministry here at Reformation. We meet on Wednesday nights at six o'clock, and we give them a meal. They get a chance to play a little bit and share the Word. And that's what this community needs, here at Reformation. It is truly a blessing to be here on 3806 West Lisbon. Because we have people come in and out these doors every day. And we just listen to their stories, listen to their heart, have some coffee, and share the Word with them. So, I'm just pleased to have this ministry here. Thank you!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Thank you for your love, for your forgiveness, for how you walk with me each and every day. Help me to let others know about you as well, so that they will also know the peace, love, and joy you bring to our lives. Thank you again! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, February 27
ALL PEOPLES
GATHERING CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

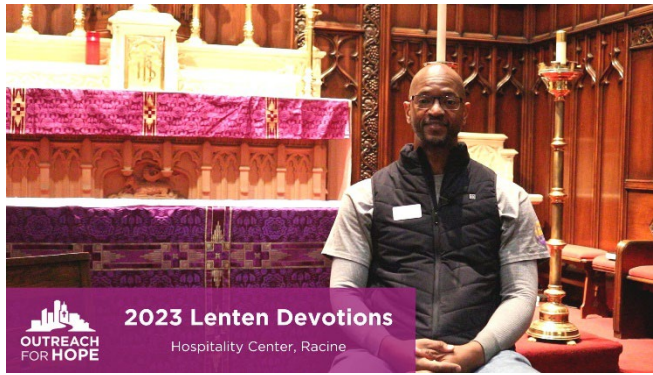
Brian Bolling, Interim Neighborhood Minister: Hello! I'm Brian Bolling from All Peoples Church on 2nd and Clark.

And I am the interim "Food Dude" Neighborhood Minister at All Peoples. And I am running the pantry here for the last couple of years. And I am extremely glad to be able to tell you that I see God every single Wednesday, when I am here with the people, the guests, the customers that we serve every week. The faith journey that I am on, has led me here and connected me with the guests, and our partner congregations whose faith journeys have intersected at this point. And I see God so often -- when I see our partners, when I see our guests and our clients, and the amount of generosity that they have when they pick up food. Very few actually pick that up just for themselves. They have children, they have grandchildren. And our partners who provide us food are just so generous. And because of their generosity, the people that we serve... their generosity is overwhelming. And it deeply touches me every week. And I'm just very thankful that God has been able to put me here, and to be able to see God in so many different places and ways.



As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Gracious Lord: May our relationships remain grounded in love and respect. Help us to recognize the goodness in our diversity and how our unique gifts complement each other. We pray that through our collaborations, more people will receive your healing and wholeness. Bless the work we do together, so that an abundant harvest of your love, justice and peace will be known and experienced by all. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, February 28
HOSPITALITY CENTER,
RACINE
OFH Ministry Partner

Carl Fields, Director of Community Engagement: Well, my name is Carl Fields. I'm the Director of Community Engagement here at the Hospitality

Center in Racine, Wisconsin. And one of the things that we do is, plain and simple, we invite people into the space. And we do so in order to build community. It's a great opportunity to live the faith, walk the values that we talk so much about. I myself am a community organizer, so I come to the work in a way that has a lens of social justice. And I try to live my life out loud in a way that works. And I have a good time with it. The program has been in existence for some time now, almost 12 years, and one of the things about doing this work is that we meet people where they are. And when there are successes, we lift them up, and we hold them high.

There was one particular person that we've been walking with, a guy who was what they would call "street homeless." And he was homeless for some time -- years, in fact. But with Hospitality Center being available to him, he built connections here with us -- myself, the pastor, and our program manager, Pamela. He also was connected to HOPES Center, which is a partner here in downtown Racine, and part of what we call "the continuum of care" here in Racine. We were able to ultimately walk with him long enough to help him make a decision to not be homeless. When the resources came, he was able to get an apartment and he took it. And so now he lives in an apartment. He's doing well. He still drops by to see us, let us know how he's doing. So those particular updates are key. But it also empowers others: on not just how to do it, but here's someone to do it with. And here is the community systems that helped me to do this, and that is just... man! That's something. To see that. To be a part of that. And for me, it's something I get to do every day. I'm grateful for that.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | God, creator and redeemer of all things: Without you, nothing is holy, and nothing that is profane is beyond redemption. Send your grace into our lives, so we might have the courage to live them out loud, turning those things over to you that bring us shame, and lifting up those things that make you proud. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, March 1
REDEEMER LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Jeff Bray, Music Director: So, the question is, "Where have I seen God working in my life?" Well, I had an experience where I met Jesus in a homeless man. My life had, before Christmas, was kind of chaotic... I'm a contractor. So, I had some work, and I had a difficult client that wanted to argue with me over my invoice and disputed my claims of the hours that I worked... And, you know, I've been doing this work for 20 years. And I guess as it were, we met at a Colectivo on one of the coldest days of the year. And I arrived a little early to meet this guy, and to give him his lien waivers so that I couldn't put a lien on his house from not paying what I asked him to pay. So, he gave me his check, and I gave him his lien waiver. And I ended up running into a homeless man who came over to me, and in my kind of, disturbance, he asked me how I was... And I didn't know what to make of it! And he asked me for money, of course. I gave him \$5. And... but he stayed. He stayed and he stood with me. Again, he asked me how I was, and that usually doesn't happen. And he seemed dizzy, and he put his head down. I said, "Would you like to sit with me?" And then when I invited him to sit with me, then he went off to get the food that he could get with the money that I had given him. But I realized at that time, that the money that I wasn't getting paid by this troublesome client, and all the—say, the drama that was between us --it meant nothing. Because I had met Jesus in the form of this homeless man. So that's my Christmas story. That made my Christmas!



As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Lord God: Help us to see you in each other, in the stranger, in the person we meet passing by. Help us to know how deeply you love each of us and call us to love each other as well. Bless us to love each other as you have shown us how to love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Thursday, March 2
**LUTHERAN CHURCH OF
THE GREAT REDEEMER,
MILWAUKEE**
OFH Ministry Partner

Myra Johnson, member and volunteer:
My name is Myra Johnson. I am Lakota
Sioux, and I was born and raised in a

little village on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. I was always very shy and timid. I did not want to be noticed in any way. But I found out years later, the Creator God was always there beside me. He gave me strength to leave an abusive relationship, go back to school, get a job, and raise four children on my own. And lately, the Creator has given me the courage to talk in front of a group of people, to not be afraid, and to have faith that He is guiding me in the right direction. Thank you!

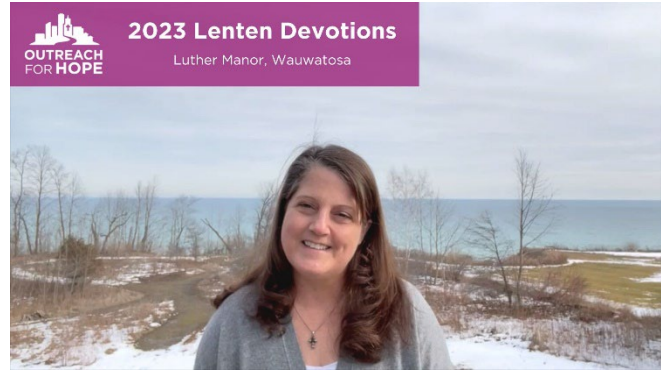
As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Lord God Almighty, shaper and ruler of all creatures: We pray that your great mercy will touch our lives and guide us toward you. Show us your will, for we cannot do it ourselves. Make our minds steadfast in your will. Help us to love you before all things, with a pure mind, for you are our maker and our redeemer... our help, our comfort, our trust, and our hope. Aho. Amen.

Friday, March 3
OUTREACH FOR HOPE
DONOR

Julie Ische, Luther Manor Hospice

Chaplain: We can be so good at thinking that we know just what we need. And we can even be faithful in lifting those needs to God in prayer. But how often and how fortunate that God, in God's great wisdom and love, shows up unexpectedly, and doesn't always give us what we ask for, but will give us what we need!



For me, it was the end of January. My husband and I had just sold the home that we had lived in for 27 years, and the closing date was right around the corner. And my husband's birthday is at the end of January. So, we planned a special dinner with friends. And that Sunday happened to be our church's annual meeting. Well, that's the weekend it snowed. That Saturday, my husband and I arranged to have a truck, and we were moving mattresses. And sure enough, one of the mattresses flipped out of the truck bed! And that's when God showed up the first time, through a young man whose name I don't know, but I thank him for helping my husband and I wrangle that mattress back into the truck!

Well, the snow continued, and the clear-out of the home took way longer than we thought. That led to the disappointment of the cancelling of the birthday dinner. That Sunday when we woke up, we had over eight inches of snow. Well, the snow blower's at the old house, because we were still responsible for clearing snow over there. And the plow service said they weren't going to get to our home until after 11 o'clock. So, overstressed from the move, disappointed in the cancellation of the birthday dinner--and now, I'm not going to make it to church, or our annual meeting.

So, I take my cup of coffee, and in my frustration, I sit down.... And that's when God broke into my morning with such brilliance. The sunrise that morning was just spectacular! And that's when God stirred in my heart those words: "Julie, Julie, you are worried about so many things, but only one thing is needed. Be still and know that I am God!" On that snowy morning in the quiet stillness, God showed up unexpectedly, revealing again God's great faithfulness to us... and if we can be open to it, morning by morning, new mercies I will see.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

WATCH THE VIDEO: outreachforhope.org/lenten-devotions

PRAYER | Dear Creator God: You touch us with the beauty of your creation. You remind us of your presence through the natural elements of the wind, the soil, the animals, the flowers and trees. Everything supports each other through the circle of life that you have created. Help us to remember to look for your hand in all of creation, and may we respond as you did at the end of those first six days of creation - it is very good. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Saturday, March 4
ASCENSION LUTHERAN
CHURCH, WAUKESHA
OFH Suburban Partner

Steve Spieker, member and OFH Ride Run Walk corporate sponsor: Over 30 years ago, I suffered a bout with depression that lasted several years.

That painful time in my life resulted in me losing my job and having my family, friends and church turn their backs on me. Prior to my diagnosis, I found myself gradually slipping into a state of alcohol dependency. At the time, I thought I just preferred my cocktails over other beverages. I now know habitual alcohol consumption is a common practice of self-medication for someone suffering with depression.

Why am I telling you this? I'd like to share a time with you when God showed up. It's a moment that still takes my breath away whenever I recall it. It happened on a Sunday morning following one New Year's holiday. It was that Sunday when every year, everyone is kind of "churched out" and feels like taking a vacation day. Although my wife Carol and I generally attended worship every Sunday, I remember mulling over the possibility of us just taking a break and sleeping in. Despite us deciding several times we would skip that Sunday, I vividly recall having a strong pull to attend worship that week for some reason. In the end, we decided we had better go. As expected, worship was low in energy, and we tried to trudge through. Finally, it was time for the sermon. To my surprise, the 20-something son of a squeaky clean and well-respected family approached the pulpit. I recall feeling puzzled as he took his place and took a couple of deep breaths. His first few words were rather weak and uncertain. I wondered what he was there for. After listening for a moment, I realized he was sharing his experience with alcohol dependence. He related how his actions had negatively impacted him and the people around him. He had come to accept he had a problem and was taking steps to overcome his dependence. Initially I thought, "How in the world could something like this happen to someone with the advantages of a great family and privileged upbringing?" In my mind, it seemed like only people with nothing going for them had drinking problems. It didn't take long until I saw my reflection in the words he was speaking. His story was my story.

Upon returning home, I felt emotionally drained. I sat at the end of the bed in my wife's arms. I admitted I was a drunk, and I apologized and cried in her arms for what seemed like hours. From that moment on, I never drank again. Of course, not having the crutch of alcohol made me feel the pain of depression even more. But that same pain and

discomfort was the catalyst for me seeking help and digging myself out of the deep hole that I had fallen into.

Even after all these years later, I still frequently asked myself, where would I be and who would I be if God had not met me in that moment? What would have happened had I not heeded the persuasive tug to go to church on that Sunday? I know it was God reaching out to me because I needed his help. I am reminded that when I expect it least, God is always there to give me what I need.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Thank you for how you walk with us day after day, guiding us, caring for us, helping us to move towards lives of healing and wholeness. May each day be a step with you on paths of goodness and light. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, March 6
ELCA OUTREACH
CENTER, KENOSHA
OFH Ministry Partner

Mary Zorn, Administrative Assistant:

My name is Mary Zorn. I work at the ELCA Outreach Center in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The theme this year is "God sightings," and working at the ELCA Outreach Center, I'm fortunate to, pretty much daily, be able to see God's hands at work in our community.

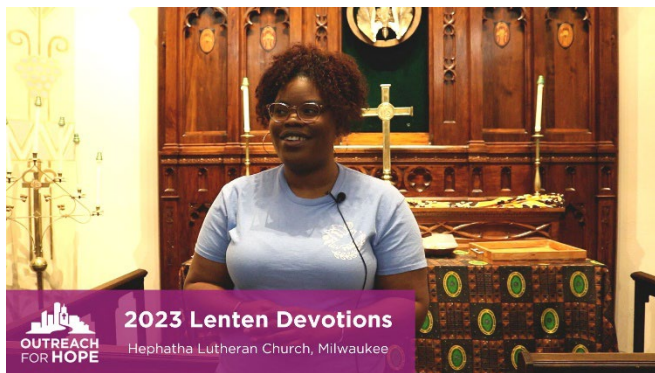


One of the stories that really touched me was when we had this glove, and it was laying on the counter in the front where people check in. And I go by that glove, and I was like, "What is this glove doing here? This is a very nice glove!" But it was just one glove. I was like, "I don't know what this glove is doing here." And just right after I asked, this man walked in, and he looked at me and he said, "I need a glove." I said, "A glove? Well, I have this one. But I don't know where the match is." And he said, "That's okay, I only need one." He only had one hand. And it just so happened that the glove fit. It was the correct hand for that! And I know that's a simple thing... But it's just like, nobody knew where the glove came from. It just happened to be laying there. Nobody would take credit for putting it there. And it just stayed there, until this man came to claim it. It was really nice to be able to say to him, "I think God had this love here for you."

Things like that happen so often here, that I think we tend to almost take it for granted. And I pray that in this year, and in this Lenten season, that I don't take this for granted, and that I just am always grateful for the times that God just touches us in ways that are miraculous.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: You are the finder of lost souls, the one who helps to fill all of our emptiness, the God of those whose need is great. Bless us in our own brokenness that we may be comforted and restored, so that we can then turn to our neighbor as well and share what you have given to us. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, March 7
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Laresha Love, member: The devotion I will be talking about today is a time where I've seen God active in my ministry. And that is a time where

pastor was out of town, actually. And so, we had a guest pastor. And our nurse here, Nurse Chris, is a second set of eyes for the congregation, just making sure that everything's going perfectly, everything's running smoothly. And we actually had a member that was struck by a car outside. And it was very weird because no one heard it in the church. And normally, we hear everything like that. But we didn't hear anything at all. So, Nurse Chris actually handled that by herself with another few members. No one knew what was going on. And then some things was misconstrued with [the worship] service, and things were moved around. So, she just helped us get back on track. And then shortly after, one of our member's blood sugar level dropped.

So after the whole crazy Sunday that we had with Nurse Chris just really being an act of God, and just moving so swiftly and making sure that everyone was alright-- My parents and I went home, and we sat outside, and we just talked about how we really didn't hear anything, how everything was so quiet and everyone was just moving swiftly and under control. That's when we found out that the member was okay, she did sustain a few injuries, but she's back on Zoom worship with us, Sundays at nine. So that's always good to see her face on the screen, we can't wait for her to be back. And the other member, whose blood sugar dropped low-- [Nurse Chris] got him some water, got him outside for some fresh air, and I believe she gave him a piece of candy. He perked right back up. So, he was doing well after that. So, it's just good to have [Nurse Chris] here, to make sure that our members are safe, because we do have a lot of elderly, so it's good to always have her around and near just in case something happens.

And me knowing Nurse Chris-- She actually was a nurse over at Hopkins, Community School, and I attended Hopkins as a kid, and so she was my nurse there. So, coming here, as like a high schooler, as a teen, and knowing her from my elementary days was... it was warm. It's kind of hard coming into a new place that you don't know, with no one, that you don't know. It's uncomfortable... but she definitely made us feel comfortable. So yeah, I've been knowing her since I was like, nine or 10, almost.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | God of healing, we thank you for the many moments in our lives when you deliver healing to us through those you send to minister to our injuries and diseases, afflictions, and hardships. We bless Nurse Chris and all parish nurses and servants of healing who carry out your good will for health and well-being. We pray for those who are suffering from all kinds of harm. In us, your church, your body here on earth, may they find a sign of your care and mercy from your heart. This Lenten season, as we contemplate deeply the wounds of Jesus, may we tend the wounds of others with the compassion of Jesus, and with the knowledge that as we tend our neighbor, we tend him. Lord Jesus, have mercy on us and heal us. Amen.

Wednesday, March 8
ASCENSION LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Marilyn Lange, member: Hello! I'm Marilyn Lange, and I'm a disciple here at Ascension in Milwaukee. I'm so happy to have this opportunity to share with you.



Yesterday, as I was doing some reading, I came across something that I found meaningful, and hope that you will too. It's a quote from Coretta Scott King: "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate action of its members." I immediately thought about Outreach for Hope. Outreach for Hope, in my eyes, is just a wonderful organization, and an opportunity for all of us to be able to participate in sharing and loving our neighbors, our brothers and sisters throughout the Synod area.

And we here at Ascension, in the last couple of Sundays had a warm clothing drive. And this is just some of what we've gathered. We're looking forward to sharing that with our partner congregations! When we decided to do this clothing drive, I wasn't really sure how it was going to go. Since, of course, like all of you, COVID has had its impact on church attendance. But I was more than pleased to see how readily our members responded by cleaning out their closets and sharing those things that maybe they're no longer using. But it was just wonderful to see the enthusiastic response! And this is the evidence [gestures to pile of bags full of winter clothes]. We know that God is with us always. And we certainly feel that here at Ascension. Experienced it as people were coming in Sunday morning, with smiles on their face, knowing that they were having an opportunity to respond to the words of our Lord. It was wonderful to feel and experience God's presence among us, as people came in Sunday morning, bringing their contributions and donations of clothing.

I hope as you are experiencing the Lenten season, that you will use this time to think about our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the Synod. And think about how Outreach for Hope gives you an opportunity to participate and get involved in sharing with our brothers and sisters. I just wanted to say, may God be with you this day and every day! His blessings are with all of us. Have a great day! Peace and blessings to all of you!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Loving Lord: May we be stirred, moved, disrupted, and compelled by your compassion and empathy. May we not grow weary in doing good and pursuing Your Kingdom here on this earth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Thursday, March 9
RACINE VOCATIONAL
MINISTRY
OFH Ministry Partner

Jim Schatzman, Executive Director:
Good Morning, I am Jim Schatzman,
Executive Director of Racine / Kenosha
Vocational Ministry. We work with

people returning from prison who are working to become restored members of the community.

In one of the Lenten readings from Luke 15:4 Jesus says, “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”

This is a story about Carol. She was lost.... really lost! Her life revolved around alcohol. Little else mattered. Her addiction caused her to travel from state to state trying to find a place to stay. She ruined nearly every family relationship with broken promises and bitter disappointments. She feared being alone. She missed her grandchildren; she was embarrassed by how her children saw her – but still her addiction drove her life. Eventually, there was no more family to run to. She ended up in Racine at a friend’s house. Carol quickly got a job and soon lost it due to absenteeism from drinking. Her friend finally said, your only option is medical detox. If you simply stop drinking, you could die! Carol felt like a wretch, lost, her health was in danger, her family had had it, and she felt hopelessly caught in the snare of her desire to drink. No matter how many promises she made to herself she could not seem to keep them. In treatment Carol met a nurse who touched her with kindness and hope. She began to see the light at the end of her challenging journey.

Today, Carol has finished her master’s degree in social work and has been clean for three years. She has held the same job for over 2 years and has reestablished her relationship with her children and most especially, her beautiful granddaughter. She volunteers at a women’s center in Waukesha, sharing her experience and offering hope to others. She is truly paying it forward!

God never gave up on her and neither did we! God’s saving grace restored her to a wholeness she could not have imagined.

As the hymn states, Amazing grace! How sweet the sound - That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see.

Thank you to OFH and all of their dedicated sponsors. You are saving lives and sharing God's love!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

**Friday, March 10
INCARNATION
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Rev. Char Guiliani: Hi! I'm Pastor Char from Incarnation Lutheran in Milwaukee.



At Incarnation in 2022 we decided to coincide our God's Work Our Hands Sunday event, during the hours of the City of Milwaukee's Trick or Treat. In this time, we planned on distributing clothing, jackets, candy, pumpkins and different yard signs. We had no idea how many children, youth or adults were going to show up. From the beginning we noticed and felt God's presence among us. We were all amazed at the number of people we were able to meet. The different ages, Halloween costumes, smiles, laughter and conversations were wonderful! Using our new Bee Hotels as a focus, one of our members wore their own bee costume and distributed candy at one of the hotels. At one point, when a group of children walked up the sidewalk, one of them asked what the building was. When she was told it was a church, she asked if we could pray. God was present and working through everyone involved. God is present through activities and events we would never expect to see God. This Lenten season, look for God in the smallest activities, you will be amazed! Blessings during your Lenten journey.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear God: You often reveal your goodness and love through life's lessons. Sometimes, we learn more about you as we teach others and connect with them and their needs. Thank you for teaching, equipping, and empowering us with our own gifts that we can use to serve others, so that they may also know you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Saturday, March 11
REDEEMER LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Randy Sikkema, Noon Meal Run Lead Cook: I love the practice of God sightings! It reminds us that there is more to this world than we often

think... that reminds us to pay attention. That reminds us that even in the valleys in the wilderness of life, God is still present. God comes to us sometimes in simple acts of hospitality or words of blessing.

There are difficulties many of us have with God. Like many others, I often wonder, and I'm baffled by the way, God is running the world. The world often is not gentle for many people. There are many horrors, coming to many people from many different directions. On the other hand, there's great goodness and beauty in the world. Maybe the same vein as this, I wonder how God may be wanting to work through us. As there are words of blessings we are called to speak or acts of hospitality that we're called to share with those we know and love, or even those that we don't know, and maybe no one loves them.

There is the theology that asserts that God comes to us disguised as our own lives. God makes Himself known through the events of our own lives. God made Himself known in my life. Examining my life convinces me that there have been a number of Gods sightings: Unmistakable moments when He revealed Himself. Times when I sense that the Lord has been mindful of me and attended to me.

The Scriptures tell us that mercy is the deepest quality of God's love. There are beautiful words from Lamentations, "The favorites of the Lord are not exhausted, His mercies never come to an end. They are renewed every morning." Again, as I meditate on my life, I can sense the action of God. Those various times, they are his interventions, God sightings. There is a promise of scriptures that God has created an economy in which there is enough for everyone. Gandhi said there is enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed. And John the Baptist reminds us that if we have two tunics, we should give one to people who do not have one.

The God sightings that I see here at Redeemer are, so many people that are doing just that sharing. They're sharing their extra clothes, their extra food, and more importantly, sometimes it's their extra time that they're sharing with people that need it. And we see

the sightings of God in these people... through their hugs and their smiles and their thanks to us. On the other side of this, maybe in the same vein as this, I wonder how often God may be wanting to work through us in our daily lives. Are there words of blessings we are called to speak? Are there people we should be helping -- people we know, or people that we don't even know?

So, I want to leave you with a little homework this week. The first thing I'd like you to do is to look for God sightings as you see them. And then one more thing, that maybe you can become an angel to someone in need.

In your search for truth, focus more on the effort of God's life and his teachings. You will discover that Jesus loves you.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Open our eyes, oh Lord, to work in our lives and in the world around us. Open our hearts to your leading, that we might be instruments of your love and mercy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Monday, March 13
GREATER MILWAUKEE
SYNOD

Rev. Matt Short, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission: I'm recording this video from Arizona, where I was born and raised. And before I tell you where I see God, both in the desert and in our shared ministry together, I have two passages I want to read for you. The first a little bit more well known, the second maybe a little bit less well known.



The first one, Galatians 6:9: "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up." The second, Job 14:7-9: "For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water, it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant."

I love especially that second passage, because it bears witness to one of the places I see God. And that's in the desert. And not just in the natural landscape, but in the way our God works. In the parched places, in the places where we would look at it and say, "This is just dirt. There's no way anything can grow here." No, in fact, seeds are planted. And like that passage from Job, even the scent of water will cause these plants to explode in color. If you've never seen the desert in bloom in the spring, just Google that. It's an incredible thing, because the desert floor erupts in wildflowers. The cactus behind me will put forth beautiful flowers on it at just the scent of water!

I see God in our shared ministry together, and in so many of our congregations where they are daily walking in a reality that might look like a parched place. But they know, they have the faith that God brings the rains, that God's grace and mercy and love show up. And so, I see it in so many of our partnered ministries. In the ways that we don't lose hope. Because we know, like the Galatians passage says, we can't grow weary of doing what is right. Because God will bring the growth. God will bring the spring and the rains and even the scent of water when we need it. I pray that's a blessing for you today from the desert. It certainly is for me.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | God, we thank you for the ways you keep us going. When the days feel long, and incredibly hard, you are there. When love seems in short supply, you are there. When we feel parched, you are there, giving us what we need to bud and sprout new life again. Help us to receive that new life when we need it, and BE that new life when others need it. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Tuesday, March 14
HOPE CENTER,
WAUKESHA
OFH Ministry Partner

Mike Coltrane, Meal Coordinator: This is recently, about two Sundays ago. I work on Sundays. I pick up food from Trader Joe's. There's a guy that's

named... 'Brian', for example. Haven't seen him in a while. So, you know, you kind of think about people you haven't seen in the while. But he told me, he came down and said to say hello to everybody. He told me that he'd stopped drinking, it'd been about two years. He said, when he was drinking and having issues, his mom would not associate with him at all, because she knew that every time he called, it was for money or something that he needed. So, he said, he ain't seen his mom face-to-face for two years, when he was getting this progress change to his future. He found a job, he got a place on his own. He said he went from calling, to texting, to emailing. And the Sunday that he came to talk to me and say this wonderful thing-- that's why I'm bringing it up -- he said, "Mike, I want to say thank you so much, because since I've been here, you always acknowledged me as a regular person." He said, "You would give me a hug when I had dirty clothes. You show love and appreciation, never looked down on me." And I said, "You know why? It's because homelessness is something that can be changed. It's something that you can break through, if you choose to make the proper steps." And he said, "Guess what? I'm about to go see my mom for the first time in two years!" So, it's things like that, that makes you be like, you know... This is a purpose. Having a ministry to go forward and look out for people that don't know when their next meal is coming, or don't know the next time they'll be talked to, because people look at people differently when they're in a bad situation. So, having peace and just staying humble. It's gotten me this far, so I'm trying to pass before to somebody else.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Thank for forgiveness, from you and from others, that we may continually work toward healthy relationships with your love at their center. In your name we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, March 15
GRACE WELCOME
CENTER, KENOSHA
OFH Ministry Partner

Leif Peterson, Executive Director: Good morning. I'm Leif Peterson, Executive Director of Grace Welcome Center. We're in the basement of Grace Lutheran Church in front of one of our walk-in coolers that we use at our food pantry. I would like to share with you a story that came up this past Tuesday during food distribution.



We had a neighbor who lives right across the street on 20th Avenue, comment to us. She was so appreciative; she got food for the last time. She had been getting food during the pandemic for the last year and a half because she didn't have enough to feed her family. She and her husband could barely get by, and she was unemployed and couldn't get a job.

So we supplemented them, and she came by for food every week. And she just wanted to thank us, and she was extremely excited, because she had just gotten a good-paying job in town, and this was the last time she was going to need food services. So she thanked us profusely for the assistance we have given her so that her children didn't go hungry, and nor did she and her husband.

So, we are just demonstrating a way in which the Holy Spirit and God continues to work through this church and through this program. All of this food that we're distributing is donated. Behind me is the list of names of our volunteers. They come and make this food pantry happen. It takes a lot of dollars, and a lot of volunteer hours to make our pantry happen. We've served 164 families this past week. We went through, I think, about 8,500 or 9,000 pounds of food just this last Tuesday night.

So, thank you for your continued support. We are happy to lift up those in our community, and we are always looking for assistance here. This food pantry is really making a huge difference in this community of Kenosha. Thank you very much.
God bless you all.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Gracious and loving Lord: Each and every day, you sustain us with the necessities for living. Thank you for your blessings and for how you call us to use our gifts to support our neighbors in their needs as well. May all be fed and loved with the compassion you have shown us day after day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Thursday, March 16
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Jane Prahlow, member: Hi! My name is Jane Prahlow, and I'm a member at St. Paul's Lutheran in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

My latest God sightings have revolved around my church, and its connection to Our Safe Place. Recently, our small congregation sponsored a Christmas giving tree for Our Safe Place, which is located just around the corner from our church, St. Paul's Lutheran on 28th and Wisconsin, in Milwaukee. Just an ordinary Christmas project for our congregation. The men living there, at Our Safe Place, are in recovery from substance abuse and struggling to find their way. Most have severed ties with their families, and are lonely and sad. Using Outreach funds, St. Paul's first connected with Our Safe Place a few years ago, when we embarked on an explorative journey, searching for a way to reach out in a meaningful way to organize these organizations in our neighborhood.

We met the directors, Bonnie and Andy, and learn more about their nonprofit. We collected towels and sheets to help men who arrive at Our Safe Place with next to nothing. I saw God when some of these men showed up monthly, to help us haul things up from the basement of our church, so we could give out hygiene packets, new clothing, and lunch for the people in our neighborhood.

In December, members of our congregation purchased gifts for some of the men, and we funded other gifts with the money from the Outreach fund. There were lots of God sightings. I saw God as members clustered around the tree, picking out "their guy" to pray over and buy gifts for Christmas. The generosity of our members overwhelmed me! But this and other responses from the men at Our Safe Place left me in awe of how God empowers us to love, and envelops us in an even greater heap of love. I saw God in the responses from the men there. In a thank you, one man wrote that no one had given him a present in years. That's unimaginable in my world, and probably yours. Listen to this thank you note: "May the holidays find each of you growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. Your non-judgmental love and support has touched me in ways you will only know when you are called home, and the Lord tells you, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Thank you for your prayers and support, and my sincere promises to you: I will pay it forward! Shalom and God bless you!" God was

present in every part of this exchange! And we, the congregation of St. Paul's, received more than we gave. God was in the midst of this.

Lent is a time to reflect on our relationship with God, and a time to open our eyes to how God is here with us, right now. It's a time to look around, and see the ordinary, made extraordinary, through God.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Heavenly Father: Open our hearts and eyes to your presence in our everyday lives. Empower us to reach out to those in need, and work for relief and justice in the lives of those who are suffering. Amen.

Friday, March 17
HOSPITALITY CENTER,
RACINE
OFH Ministry Partner

Fr. Seth Raymond, Executive Director:

My name is Seth Raymond. I'm the Executive Director of the Hospitality Center in Racine, Wisconsin, and also the priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church here in Racine as well. And you might be asking yourselves, good Lutherans that you are, why is an Episcopal priest speaking to you here in your Lenten season? Great question! It's because, a couple weeks back, I was at a little award ceremony here in Racine, and I was given an award that called me a "relentless optimist." And I really grate against this idea that Christians are optimists. And in fact, I think Christians are not optimists. We're realists because we believe in a promise. And the promise we believe in is that God will bring us all to unity with one another in Christ. And, in fact, we know here at the end of the Lenten season, we've reached this final reunification with Christ in the resurrection. But before we get there, we have the opportunity to actually express that unity with one another, here in the world that we live in. And so, this last year, the Hospitality Center recognized the unity we've already been demonstrating for many years, which is the fact that Lutherans and Episcopalians have been working together here in Racine at the Hospitality Center: providing food and clothing and lots of resources for folks here, in a shared way, for many, many years. And so, this year, we finally formalized that unity with an agreement that allows the Hospitality Center to be an outreach arm of the ELCA as well as the Episcopal Church. And so, I now get to be Luth-opalian or Episco-Lutheran or something. (Laughs) And it's a great joy, here in this Lenten season, to be that sign of unity -- and not optimism, but a fulfillment of the promise that God has sent us, to unify us with one another and God in Christ.



As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Holy God: You are the source of fellowship and unity. You give us the gift of the church to practice sharing what we have, so we might live united rather than divided. Inspire us to collaboration where there is disagreement, and understanding where there is hurt. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Saturday, March 18
FAITH/SANTA FE
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Victor M. Puentes Ramirez, Treasurer:

Hi! My name is Victor. I'm from Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church. I've

been here for around 13 years, I will say. And the question "How do you see God at work?" takes me back to those days when I was having problems. And then I decided to start teaching [music]... for no reason, I just came here to have a free space and state of mind. I began to feel better with myself. I think that's how I started this work. And in those days, Pastor Peterson let me teach for free... And I think I was really worried. Like, I was getting rewarded, with the kids teaching me a couple lessons in life. And then I got like, excited to teach after that moment.

I have a couple students still, from that time. They are already doing music careers. Especially one of them, his name is Arturo Rodriguez, and he's doing music in Texas right now. And he's amazing. A couple of kids, I have some... some memories. Actually, it's not really work. It's more of a reward. And then it becomes more like... you know, like a habit of doing it. And every time I have the chance to [teach], I just do it, without thinking. It's different, with this vocation or this job... but that's how I see God at work. Just sharing something without asking for something in return, you get more. So that's my answer. Thanks!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear God: You often reveal your goodness and love through life's lessons. Sometimes, we learn more about you as we teach others and connect with them. Thank you for teaching, equipping, and empowering us with gifts that we can use to serve others, so that they may also know you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**Monday, March 20
ELCA OUTREACH
CENTER, KENOSHA
OFH Ministry Partner**

Raul Hernandez, Legal Coordinator:

Hello! My name is Raul Hernandez. I'm here from the ELCA [Outreach Center].

I am the legal coordinator here. I've been here for about... almost three years, or maybe going on four. So, my success story is-- I mean, almost all of them. Because people come in here with emergencies. Don't know where to start. And that's when I come in and help out. You know, coordinate the lawyers with the clients and, you know, appointments. And so, they're able to come in and talk to the lawyer for free for 30 minutes and find out the right steps or the right forms, so they can represent themselves with all the legal paperwork and the correct paperwork.

So, my success story is, there was a gentleman that came here about... almost three months ago. He was having trouble finding a lawyer and also the money to pay a lawyer. But he came in and heard about our programs, and we were able to help him out. He got all his things that he needed through the court. And about two months later, he came in and he donated the money that he was saving up for a lawyer! And he was grateful that we had a program like this, and he wanted to give back to the community.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Oh God: Please give me strength when I am weak, love when I feel forsaken, courage when I am afraid, wisdom when I feel foolish, hope when I feel rejected, and peace when I am in turmoil. Walk with me through the joys and struggles of this world, reminding me that I always have an ally in you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.





Tuesday, March 21
BREAKING THE CHAINS
CHURCH
OFH Ministry Partner

Nate Shubat, volunteer: Hello! I'm Nate Shubat, volunteer with Breaking the Chains Church. When I look for signs of God's presence in the world,

the first place I look is the worship services we have with the men at the Felmers Chaney Correctional Center in Milwaukee, and the Kenosha Correctional Center in Kenosha. And I know the idea of God's presence at a worship service seems obvious, almost cliched. But there's something more to this. The Breaking the Chains Church worship services... They're so simple, so sincere, so genuine. I think that's probably the way it was in the early days of the church. No one's worried about the polish. No one's worried about the performance. And I think that simplicity makes it easier to see God's presence there around the table.

Another example of God's presence there, is the fact that.... you look at the men around the table. We're all there-- incarcerated and incarcerated --following very different paths, leading very different lives, very different experiences and perceptions. Yet despite all these differences, there we are, together. Coming together to talk about our faith in our life, and how those two come together, and how we're going to use that to move forward to build God's kingdom here on earth. Teaching each other. Learning from each other. Lifting each other up, regardless of where we came from, or how we got there. That's a sign of God's presence in the world. After all, Matthew tells us that Jesus himself said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there also." Thank you!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Gracious God: Hope rises when we come together as your people, when we are centered on your love and goodness. Bless us in our efforts, that faith, hope and love would grow in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Wednesday, March 22
INCARNATION
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Rev. Char Guiliani: Hi. My name is Pastor Char from Incarnation Lutheran in Milwaukee.



Sometimes you don't realize God is involved in your decision making until you are deep into the project. A young man reached out to Incarnation in 2021 asking if he could complete his Eagle Scout Project at our church. His idea was to build Bee Hotels to help the pollinators flying through our area. Yes, they even fly through the area of 15th/Keefe in Milwaukee. As a congregation, we gave a big YES. The summer of 2022 the Bee Hotels were built and installed in the two gardens near our church entrance. As the area was being prepared and the hotels were being installed, the neighborhood came to see what was happening. From toddlers to older generations showed up! God was working through this project from the beginning, and we felt God's presence throughout the two days of work. People from different walks of life gathered to help complete this project and you can see by the pictures shared, everyone enjoyed themselves working together and getting to know each other. Our Boy Scout is now an Eagle Scout, and we are looking forward to seeing God's smaller creation begin to take occupancy in these hotels. Blessings to you during your Lenten journey.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Creator God: Thank you for guiding us in directions and paths where we don't know the destination, because we know with you, the end result will be something from your good hand. Bless us as we fly through each day and help us to realize our purpose and direction in this life is in and with you. Thank you for unknown outcomes that you lead us towards. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Thursday, March 23
ST. OLAF LUTHERAN
CHURCH, RUBICON
OFH Suburban Partner

Steve Stretz, member and OFH Ride Run Walk volunteer: Friends of mine tell me that they've been more or less talked to by God, and that God has moved them to be a missionary to do this or to do that. And I

don't think it's that way for everyone. It's not for me, anyway.

So, let me tell you a little story. I was at All Peoples Church, at the garden, helping. I had delivered some produce. And there's conversations that go on, such as someone talking to some young people, you know, saying they're gonna miss them, they're moving. And in the midst of that, someone comes up, and the young lady comes up and can't decide what she wants. She talks to me, and we have a conversation about a variety of things. So, I go about my business. And next thing I know, she's asking if anybody has a sofa. And I thought that was odd that she would ask about a sofa... And then I hear Susan say that some people are moving out of the house across the street. It turns out that the same young ladies that she was missing, were moving out of the house. And they can't take the furniture, because it was donated by the church, and they don't have a way to move it. They're just moving in temporarily and moving out. So, the furniture would go on the street. So, we say, well, maybe there's some furniture for this young lady that can help with what she needs. Turns out, she was in love with all the furniture. And the next question is, how do we get it from there to her house-- and then all of a sudden, there's a trailer available. And I say, "Well, I have my Jeep and I have a trailer hitch. Maybe I can help." So that's what happened. So, we move all the furniture out of the house and put it into trailers. We drive it to her house. And on the way she sees her son and daughter, I think, are walking on the street, and she calls out to them and says, "Look what God gave me!" And I had to smile. So, we unloaded all the furniture. And there was no real furniture in the place at the time, and there were people living there. So, God put me there and put all the things together to allow her to have the furniture that she needed. It's strange, but that's what happened.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Guide us in our lives, that the gifts and abilities you have created us with, may help our neighbors and show the kind of love and care that you have first shown to us in our own lives. Soften our hearts to see the needs of others around us, and put us in situations perfect for our gifts and abilities to be well used. In your name, we pray. Amen.

**Friday, March 24
REFORMATION
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Arnez Blathers, staff: I really have to admit that, you know, God had an impact on my life before, you know, before the gang life and everything. God was there. He would be there. I don't even know how to describe it like... I've been hurt. And I'm still here. God was always like, "Look, pay attention. Look, I'm trying to show you something. Look."



And the whole time I was always doing my own thing. I was doing whatever I wanted to. And always live life. Joined a gang, or whatever you want to call it. I was part of a lot of stuff. I've been involved in a lot of stuff... Going to prison, was life changing. It was a wake-up call. It was, "Okay, this could be me for the rest of my life." I've always felt like God sent to me who he wanted in my life. And right now, I have I went from like, just a wide circle of people. I'd hang with these groups, and then I hang with this group and-- no, now it's just down to chosen few. Because you never know. And I picked that up from prison. Because no matter what you do, there's always a consequence behind it.

My whole life-changing thing was when-- he'd come all the way from Iowa. Him and his wife, and they talked to prisoners. And it wasn't like, "Oh, so what's it like in there?" No, it was always, "Did you bring your Bible? Oh, that's okay. We'll read to you." And it was like... first it was like, "Okay... Whew! I get out my cell? You know, cool." And after a while, it was like, I was either getting programmed, or something inside me just woke up and said, "Yeah... That makes sense!" But every time we stopped talking, he said, "I want you to read Ezekiel 36:26. I want you to read that. And I want you to read that either to yourself or read it to someone else. Just read it." And I'd read that over and over again. And just, that right there. One day, I just literally dropped to my knees and submitted to God. "Okay, fine! Okay. Okay! I can't do this. I can't! Fine. Okay?" I was already five years in. But uh... that woke me up. Just that little part right there, because I get what they were trying to say, I just needed a new heart. I needed it. And I wouldn't accept anything less.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

Ezekiel 36:26 | "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."



Saturday, March 25
ST. MATTHEW'S
LUTHERAN CHURCH,
WAUWATOSA
OFH Suburban Partner

Gloria Potter, Stephen Minister and OFH donor: I most profoundly felt God's presence in my life during a very difficult

season, when my husband's business went under, and he was dealing with depression and ways to cope with this loss. We were scheduling divorce proceedings, filing for bankruptcy, and selling our house.

I was teaching and in grad school, and it was a lot. Eventually, my own coping mechanisms were failing me, and I felt alone and desperate. I remember just getting in my car and asking, "God where do I go? I am so vulnerable right now and my path looks so dark." As I put my hands on the steering wheel, I knew there was a plan for me. I found myself in the parking lot of a psychiatric hospital. There, I received support through caring doctors, therapists, and medication. I talked, shared, journaled, and during those lonely nights, prayed so hard for guidance. Jesus was always walking with me, but now I was listening and allowing the healing to take place. After a two week stay, I remember walking out the hospital doors and seeing my little red car in the parking lot. I knew God had drawn me to this place to refresh me and move me forward.

I now am a Stephen Minister* at St Matthew's Lutheran Church. I often think that if I had had a Stephen Minister at that time, I would have felt the presence of God through that ministry. Maybe I wouldn't even have had this journey to share with you. Now, as I sit with someone and they share their story with me, I feel the presence of God in our relationship, and it is a reminder that our Gracious God is always present with us. I'd like to close with Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5: "God has said, never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

** Stephen Ministers are lay congregation members trained to provide one-to-one care to those experiencing a difficult time in life.*

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Even in the worst moments of our lives, you are with us. Please watch over us and guide us toward your goodness and wellbeing, so that your love would flourish and grow in and through us. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, March 27
CROSS LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Dr. Rose Dotson, Adult Center

Director: So, my name is Dr. Rose Dotson, and I am the new Director of the Cross Lutheran Church Milwaukee

Adult Center, which is where we are now. And this is something that someone that mentored me when I was in high school-- and before that, even, here at Cross --started. And it's a continuing ministry for adults of a mature age, shall we say. And it was previously directed by our parish nurse who retired, and she thought that I should do it. And I said, "Oh, no. I'm not gonna do that!" As a retired neurologist, I'm definitely more active in the ministry here at Cross, and in our Synod, just because now I have time, and I felt that God was calling me to actually participate in what our church is doing and see how I can contribute. And some of that is my upbringing. My mom and dad always said, "You were brought on this earth to do some good things." And I felt God wasn't done with me. I needed to do some more. And so, thinking about it, and actually talking to my spouse who said, "You know, you love those people. You enjoy those people. And you have so much that you can share with them and give them spiritually, but also from a health standpoint." So, God nudged me in a lot of ways. And I prayed about it, thought about it. Came here, experienced it, fell in love with the people, some of whom I knew when I was a kid, and some of them that I just met. So, I'm excited with what God is going to do here at the Cross Adult Center. Excited that He chose me and is going to allow me to hopefully help them to stay spiritually grounded with the help of Pastor Michelle here at the church. And allow me to help with some wellness, because that's a passion of mine, is wellness and brain health and keeping the brain healthy and maintaining cognitive function. So now I have people I can help with that, and I don't have to be their doctor. So, I'm excited to see what God's going to do!



Michelle "Micky" Glover, Adult Center Volunteer: Cross has been my only church home. I've been going here since I was two months. Baptized here. Went through confirmation here when I was in junior high. I was away a little bit when I started working as an adult, because I've worked for the state for 31 years. And when I retired, pastor said, "You know, I got something for you." So, I came back and started being a shopper for the food pantry. And then Linda Radder needed a cook. And then I promised her I'd help even though I can't cook a lick! [laughs] So, like I was saying, they would let me know what was donated on Mondays, and then I would look up recipes

and I'd come in and cook. And so far, it's worked out well! And when I would tell my family and friends that I was doing, they would be like, you know, "Dear God sent!" You know, they would say, because I would cook something, and they would actually eat it. And I'd be so surprised, because it turned out really good! So, it's helping me, it's helping them, and I'm starting to really enjoy it, actually! It was kind of rough at first, because standing on my feet for like eight hours, and the whole next day I'd be laying in bed. But then once you get used to it, then I kind of-- I like it! And it's part of my talent and time in addition to my tithe.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Through our lives you bring people to us to nurture and mentor our growth, so that as we develop and mature we move closer to you. Thank you for those who lifted us up and for how we now have the opportunity to lift others as well. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, March 28
RACINE VOCATIONAL
MINISTRY
OFH Ministry Partner

James Schatzman, Executive Director:
Good morning! I am Jim Schatzman,
Executive Director of Racine / Kenosha
Vocational Ministry. We work with

people returning from prison who are working to become restored members of the community.

Endel was a dope dealer and a gang banger. He had already been to prison twice and he knew that a third time could mean as much as a 25-year sentence. As a child, he had suffered neglect, abuse, and was thrown out of school and abandoned to life in the streets. His foster parents, his father (who was in prison for murder), his mother, and the system had all given up on him. One elementary school psychologist labeled him a psychopath!

In Luke 13, Jesus tells a parable, *"A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, then you can cut it down.'"* Someone had to give Endel one more year!

Second Corinthians reminds us that we are given the ministry of reconciliation and called to be restorers of the breaches in our community!

In the years since we met him in 2003, he has paid off over \$35,000 in child support, raised an honor roll student, teaches inmates in prison how to succeed on the outside, runs his own trucking business, and this year received a gubernatorial pardon. Endel is truly a new creation!

In his new life he is truly an asset to a community he formerly terrorized with drugs and violence!

Many thanks to OFH and all of the parishes and members who support this work through donations of time and talents!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday, March 29
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Skie, member: Well, I first came to Hephatha because of my cousin, but she died... And Hephatha is, it's like a big family. They come together. They support you through everything. And they support you through sad times. When you're in trouble, they help you. They let you know more about God. It's like, it's just a family, a big family.



As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Lord God, we thank you for all the families that make up our life together in you. We pray for our congregations, that your place in our lives together will bring us closer to you, closer to each other, and closer to this world you so love. As we go through this Lenten season, keep us mindful of the gift of your son, shared with the whole human family. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.



Thursday, March 30
GALILEE LUTHERAN
CHURCH, PEWAUKEE
OFH Suburban Partner

Deb Kohler, member and OFH Ride Run Walk Site Coordinator: So, we don't always know when we're having a God moment. Sometimes we can learn about that sometime later.

For example, when I first moved back to Pewaukee, to Wisconsin, I visited Galilee Lutheran Church in Pewaukee. And one of the first invitations that I had from the pastors here was to join them at community night at our urban partners in Milwaukee, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, on 28th and Wisconsin. Little did I know then, when I sat next to Kim Williams, the neighborhood minister, and had a conversation over dinner saying, "I've had all of this great stuff that I brought from California to New Jersey back to Wisconsin. Is there anybody here in the neighborhood that could use some of this gently used wonderful stuff?" And she did. So, the next month, took a couple of bags of gently used clothing, other items, and she knew who needed what and when in that neighborhood. Over the years, word spread within Galilee. And the third Wednesday of every month, we took a carload of gently used items down to St. Paul's. Every Christmas, we had our hat and mitten tree, where folks in the congregation donated, made, and shared wonderful hats, mittens and gloves that could keep folks warm.

So, in 2007, we lost Kim. She passed away unexpectedly. And that left a great hole in the hearts of us, and I'm sure in the hearts of the folks in the neighborhood of 28th and Wisconsin in Milwaukee. So, St. Paul's, our urban partner, formalized a ministry, and Kim's Closet was born in early 2009. Since then, it's expanded over the years. It expanded to two Wednesdays every month. They included new Threads of Hope, bringing new clothing to the folks in the neighborhood of 28th and Wisconsin. And even recently, with the pandemic, it kept going as a new version called Kim's Table. During the summer, Kim's Table was offered right out on Wisconsin Avenue. So, that community night meal where I sat next to Kim and had a table conversation, turned into a wonderful ministry that has lasted decades. And it was sometime later that we realized God was present at that table in that conversation.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: Thank you for guiding our lives and helping us connect with others who show us the beauty of your kingdom and the wonder of what it means to serve and love one another. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Friday, March 31
EMAUS ELCA, RACINE
OFH Ministry Partner

Rev. Jaime Dubon, Supply Pastor for Latino Ministries: Hi! I am Jaime Dubon, and I currently serve as supply pastor for Latino ministries at Emaus Lutheran in Racine.



I also serve as a member of the AMMPARO Executive Committee, the ELCA migration strategy. AMMPARO stands for "Accompanying Migrant [Minors] with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities." Last December, the AMMPARO Executive Committee met in San Diego, California. While in San Diego, we visited Friendship Park at the border. Our group was joined by members of the Pacifica Synod. We split in two groups: one on the Mexican side of the wall, and the other on the US side. We participated in the march of silence, along with members of the border church. This is the wall at the border that ends in the Pacific Ocean. The wall at this part of the border is an 18 feet metal mesh wall that allows people to see each other from both sides. They said that in the past, many Latinos living in the states who can't travel to their country of origin will come to this part of the wall to meet with their relatives from Mexico and from other countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Parents will bring their children to meet their grandparents on the other side of the wall. And people with terminal illnesses will also come to the wall to say goodbye to their beloved ones.

Today, our government wants to tear down that metal mesh wall and build up the 30 feet brick and metal wall that former President Trump started several years ago. The march of silence intended to protest this intention. It was moving to see colleagues separated by a fence. We see each other, we shouted, but couldn't touch each other. "Peace and Friendship, yes! But not walls," we kept yelling. This experience was an important opportunity for me to learn more about conditions along our southern border and inspired us to work harder to safeguard protections for asylum seekers. And I am sure that God indeed was with me and with the others at the border. And he continues to work in the midst of this challenging situation. Because "truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Amen.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Accompanying Abba: You walk with us through some of the darkest days that we will experience in this world, and yet you never let us go. Your love for each and every one of us is immense, and your compassion is endless. Help us to see you through the obstacles in this world and help us to have your eyes so that we might see our neighbors as you see them - your beloved children. Bless us with your compassion and your sense of love. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.



Saturday, April 1
GRACE WELCOME
CENTER, KENOSHA
OFH Ministry Partner

Rev. Jonathan Baker: Hello! It's Rev. Jonathan Barker down here at Grace Welcome Center. I'm standing in front of our beautiful "Caring for Creation"

mural. And how this mural got started is one of the most miraculous things I've ever seen.

I was in a season of praying and fasting for climate justice. And it was at the end of 12 days of praying and fasting. And I was literally making the re-feeding food to break the fast, when I got a phone call that said, "How would you feel about putting a big climate mural on front of your church?" And I thought, "Wow, God, that is a really heavy-handed way to get my attention about what you're up to!" But truth be told, just so humbled by God hearing those prayers around not only praying but fasting. And what ended up happening is, this year we were able to invite our whole community-- About 1,000 people put a brushstroke on this mural, from our community here in Uptown Kenosha, and came together around this theme of caring for creation, and God's Shalom for all things. And we got to experience so much Shalom as our community came together for this beautiful project, and shared meals together, and creative dream sessions together. And we're just so grateful for the ways that God showed up in this project. And we're so grateful for the ways that many people from Outreach for Hope came down, and left their mark on this mural with our community as well. Many blessings to you all.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Creator God: You continuously reveal to us your beauty, and you desire your creation to know your goodness and love. Thank you for how you nudge us and show yourself to us in the goodness of your creation, and most importantly, help us to see your artistry and splendor in each other. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Monday, April 3 – Holy Week
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Linda Riley, Council President: Hi. I want to talk about our awesome children's ministry. Here at Hephatha, every Tuesday and Sundays the kids get together, and you don't have to be a member of the church to come. But the kids love coming to Tuesday praise. We get kids from all over within our area to just come and praise God, receive food and receive some love at the same time. And a lot of them come on Sundays also.



Well, one day, one particular Friday, me and Nurse Chris happened to be coming to Hephatha for a function that the homeless sanctuary was giving for their founder, Sister MacCanon. And food was to be served, but the food wasn't to be served for several hours. So while we was waiting outside to come into Sister MacCanon's celebration, we saw two young kids sitting on our stair steps here at the church! And we approached 'em, they couldn't be no more from ages three to six, a little boy and his little sister. And we approached them, we said "hello" and they just said "hi." They would not tell us their names. They would not tell us their parent's name. And when we asked them where they lived, they pointed, they pointed north. That means they lived across the street, north from the church. All they told us was they were hungry, and they were told to come here to get food. So me and Nurse Chris was like, "What we gonna do?" Immediately, Nurse Chris went downstairs to see, did we have anything that we could give them right away? And all we had was just a couple crackers or some cookies. So we happened to look-- we saw that one of our church members, Ruby, who lives across the street from the church, happened to be at home. And Nurse Chris said, "let me go see if Ruby have anything." Ruby came home on her lunch break! So we explained the situation to Ruby. Right away, Ruby, who's raising her grandson on her own, she has snacks and everything kids prefer. She made up the biggest lunch for them kids, hot and cold, and she bagged it. And Nurse Chris came out, gave the lunches to the kids, walked them back across the busy street-- because Locust is a busy street, and a lot of people just don't cross Locust --and then the kids went on their way. And that was a God moment right there, for all of us to be in that position. 'Cause kids from miles around know, if they're hungry, they know to come here to eat.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | God of love and care, we pray for all those who hunger for physical daily bread to nourish their bodies. We especially pray for hungry children. We pray for all those, like Ruby, who feed children on daily basis and make sure their next meal is a good meal. This Lenten season, increase our hunger for you and satisfy our hunger for you by using us to feed you as you come to us in the form of the hungry children of our City. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who feeds us with his very body and blood and tends our every need. Amen.



Tuesday, April 4 - Holy Week
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner

Rev. Delaney Schlake-Kruse: My name is Pastor Delaney Schlake-Kruse, and I serve St. Paul's Lutheran Church at 2812 West Wisconsin Avenue in the City of Milwaukee.

Over the past three years, we have received money from Outreach for Hope to help us grow deeper relationships with those in our neighborhood. Our neighborhood is a densely populated area between 27th and 35th streets, and Wisconsin and Highland Boulevard. There's a lot of folks who live there, and a lot of organizations in our neighborhood. So, over the past three years -- four years, really -- we have been working to get to know the people who are serving our neighbors alongside us. In an effort to do that, Outreach for Hope has helped us to buy gifts from black-owned businesses in the City of Milwaukee, to share with our neighbors, to make that first connection.

This year, one of the organizations that we visited as a congregation was the Red Cross. Back in the 90's, our congregation was a shelter for the Red Cross. When people were in times of crisis or emergency, perhaps in case of an apartment fire, we would host them. Families would come and sleep in the basement of St. Paul's, housed by the Red Cross, through our congregation's building. We haven't done that in a long time. But as we've been seeking to grow more deeply rooted in our neighborhood again, after a long time being there, we connected with the Red Cross. We took some treats and shared them (bagels from Ruby's Bagels here in Milwaukee) and visited with the staff people of the Red Cross, over the summer. We learned more about what they do, how they serve our neighborhood. They're just around the corner on Wisconsin, next door to the church. And we learned about the opportunity to become a host again, for people in emergency situations. And so, after that initial contact, we continued to talk back and forth, and our Council decided that our church ought to and would like to follow the call that God had extended to us, as we get to know our neighbors, to become an emergency shelter again.

And so, a week before Christmas, a person from the staff of the Red Cross came to St. Paul's, and met with our office manager and myself. He looked around the building, and we showed him where people would be sleeping if they were to come to St. Paul's. And we showed him the community spaces where people could gather and warm up and rest in a time of chaos. And the Red Cross determined that we were a good spot for them! And so, we have now entered fully into this agreement, where St Paul's can be a crisis space-- as well as our neighbors down the street, Redeemer, entered into [the agreement].

This type of engagement in our neighborhood is a way that we follow the Holy Spirit at St. Paul's. We really want to be planted where we are. My internship supervisor told me when I was in seminary, "If you want to know where God has called you, look at your feet." And so, as we look at our feet, so to speak, in the congregation, and we recognize where God has placed us for the last 180 years as a church-- but especially in this particular place since 1917. We want to follow God. We want to respond to the Holy Spirit's invitation to get to know the people who live there.

And in so doing, we have had so many incredible God sightings! I could tell you all day about the ways that God has been present in this journey of meeting our neighbors more fully over the last three to four years. But this experience of the Red Cross gives us an opportunity to respond to God's call, to serve our neighbors-- to do the Matthew 25 thing and try to have some folks who need somewhere to sleep, to feed somebody who might be hungry. Really, to offer a compassionate space for people in crisis, when their home has been destroyed or is uninhabitable for a time being, that they can come and be warm and be safe at 28th and Wisconsin, in the church building that God has given us to share with our neighborhood.

The God sighting to me is the openness, the generosity in our community, and the spaces that are filled by the Holy Spirit's connection that helps a church like ours-- a beautiful, vibrant, small congregation --to connect with our neighbors in meaningful ways, and to build a mutual relationship, where people can be served, where people can experience the love and grace of God. And we can share what we have with one another.

So, this Lent, I hope for more God sightings to be made apparent to all of us throughout the Greater Milwaukee Synod! As we notice, as we look at our feet and see where God has called, and recognize what opportunities exist in our own theological neighborhoods or our own physical neighborhoods, whether at home or at church. There's so many connections that the Holy Spirit is just waiting to make!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Heavenly God: As our Creator, you know us better than anyone else. Throughout our life, you have helped us form relationships. Remind us that you are at the center of these connections. Help us resolve any conflicts we may experience and continually remember to forgive as we are forgiven. May we look to you for wisdom and guidance, love and hope. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Wednesday, April 5 - Holy Week
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF
THE GREAT SPIRIT,
MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Ron Grieger, member and volunteer:

Hi! My name is Ron Grieger Jr. I'm Ojibwe from Bad River, and I'm enrolled Oneida from Wisconsin.



God came to my life when I went to South Dakota to smudge at Wounded Knee Cemetery. Smudging means blessing a space with natural medicine, sage, cedar, and tobacco. After I smudged the Knee, an elder came up to me and said, "I knew you were here." He thanked me for smudging the Knee. He told me some of his family were buried here at the Knee. He said, "I appreciate you coming from so far." And he proceeded to share his stories with me.

At the time, I truly believe God put me there for a reason. This is the most spiritual connection I've ever felt in life. It gave me the strength to move forward in a positive way, and just stand tall and help others where needed. I truly believe we can help each other make a difference. Thank you!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear God: Create clean hearts in us. Hearts which are peaceful, benevolent and devout. Help us to have hearts and minds which overcome evil with good, and which love you above all things. Lead us always to think of you, speak of you and to give you thanks. Just as the dawn comes with its exact precision, help us trust that you will also move in, with and through our lives with perfect timing. Aho. Amen.



**Thursday, April 6 – Maundy
Thursday
BREAKING THE CHAINS
CHURCH, MILWAUKEE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Rev. David Rebey: Good evening, everybody! I'm David Rebey. I am the pastor of Breaking the Chains Church at

the Felmers Chaney Correctional Center and at the Kenosha Correctional Center as well.

Last night, I was inside the Felmers Chaney Center with another one of our volunteers, Greg Wajerski, for Bible study with four of our regular participants. We were about halfway through the Bible study, when a new man walked up to the table and asked if he could join us. One of our regular participants introduced him and said that he had invited this man to come. He was glad that he came. And he also shared with us that he had been through a pretty difficult time in the last couple of weeks since Christmas. He didn't tell us why. But he told us that he really thought that this guy would benefit from being with us. And immediately when he sat down, he started adding to the Bible study and offering his own reflections and was a very engaged participant.

When our Bible study came to an end, at about the one hour mark, the man who had introduced him asked us if we could all gather around him and place our hands on his shoulder and say a prayer for him. I didn't know why we were praying, but we prayed for him together. And we could all tell, I think, that he needed our prayer, and then he found some comfort from being with us.

Later, as we were walking out the door, the security guard on duty asked me if that man had ever been with us before. And I said, "No, it was his first time." And he went on to share with me and Greg that he was glad that he came, and that this man had lost his son in a drive-by shooting the week after Christmas, and had been going through a real difficult time... I cannot imagine what it feels like to lose a loved one, particularly a young son, while you are incarcerated. But as I drove home last night, I kept thinking about Matthew 18:20, where Jesus said, "For where two or three of them are gathered in my name, I am among them." We were where we needed to be last night, and Christ was with us. I hope that that man joins us again.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

MATTHEW 5:3-10 | "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**Friday, April 7 – Good Friday
EMAUS ELCA, RACINE
OFH Ministry Partner**

Soledad Beltran, Council President: It's no secret that God often answers our prayers in ways we don't expect. September 11, 2022 was one of those moments when nothing seemed to be in

our favor. The weather forecast called for rain. How much rain? We had no idea. So, when the clouds rolled in and rain started to fall, we just took it in stride. That was, until we realized this wasn't going to be a normal rainfall.

You see, our church building as well as our parsonage are getting old, and there are many leaks. All of which become concerning when the amount of rain exceeds an inch or more. So, it goes without saying that the 9.6 inches of rain that fell that day left us in a bit of a mess. Or should we say, a big mess.

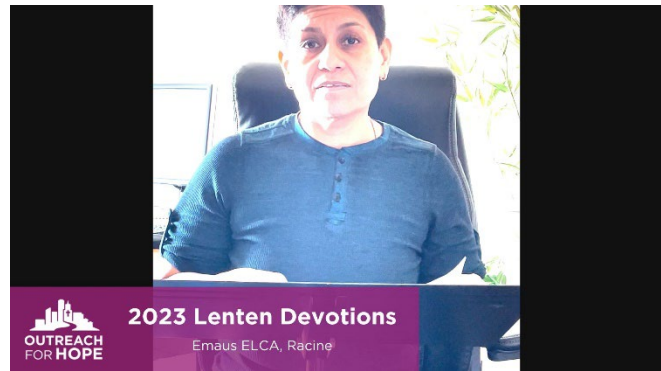
Between the church building and our parsonage, we found ourselves looking at over \$12,000 in damages, all of which could not be put off and repaired later. With no idea of how we we're going to pay for the repairs, we went ahead and scheduled them anyways. One could say that we were relying on the manna from heaven that has kept this congregation thriving for years.

With heartfelt prayers, we decided that we would send out a plea to our members and community friends, describing the situation, urging all to prayerfully consider ways in which they could help. It was our hope that we would be able to raise at least half of the deficit.

Never in a million year did we expected the response we received. Within a couple of days, checks started to roll in. Some of which came from unexpected sources, but all of which left us amazed. It's crazy how much we put limits on God's amazing Grace sometimes!

Our limited hopes of raising half the repair money were surpassed by over \$12,000, This left us with yet another dilemma. What would we do with the extra money that was so generously given?

For a moment we hoped we would be able to raise enough additional funds to cover the estimated cost of \$36,000 to repair our front entranceway that we had been lamenting



and putting off for years due to a lack of funding. But reality set in, and we knew that \$36,000 was too steep of a climb for us.

However, when God is at work, all things are possible with a little faith and a whole lot of GRACE. You see, that storm that blew through Sept 11th brought about more than rain damage. It cleared a pathway to new possibilities. Through hours of brainstorming, we learned that our council president's brother, who works in construction, was coming from Mexico to visit for a few weeks, leaving us to question whether he would be willing to help us repair our entranceway at a cost that was more within our means? For that, we would have to wait and see. And see, we did, as we stood by watching our entranceway be transform back to its original state!

We find it to be no coincidence that the extra \$7,000 that had been raised just happened to be the amount that was needed to complete the repairs.

Jesus teaches us not to be anxious, but to ask God for what we need. That often is much easier said than done. But in the face of the proverbial and literal storm, we were reminded once again that God does answer prayers... not always in the timeframe we demand, or the in the way we want, but always in the way that is needed. Thanks be to God!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear God: Help us to weather the storms of life with resiliency and help us to have hope even when it seems darkest in our days. Help us to remember that with you, all things are possible, and help us not to put limits on what you can accomplish through us and with each other. Bless us with open hearts and minds toward your creative and hopeful outcomes. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Saturday, April 8 – Easter Vigil **GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD**

Bishop Paul Erickson: Hi! I'm Paul Erickson, Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. As I reflect on where I've seen God active in the world, the first thing that comes to mind is

through the children in my life. While my wife and I don't have any grandchildren as of yet, we do have a five-year-old neighbor who often goes on walks with us and our dog, and sometimes comes over to play. Spending time with young children helps me remember that life is a gift. Creation is amazing. And there is much delight to be found in the simple things of life: stomping in a puddle, making ice cream, laughing at silly jokes. I find this is God's way of helping me slow down and take notice... exploring, wondering, playing in this amazing and beautiful place we get to call home. Jesus invites us all to become like children in order to receive the fullness of God's reign.

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Creator God: You call us all your children, and sometimes, we just take ourselves too seriously. Thank you for the gift of the children among... those who teach us again how to play, laugh, and delight in all that you have made. Help us to listen, love, and wonder every day. In your precious name we pray. Amen.

Sunday, April 9 – Easter Sunday OUTREACH FOR HOPE

Rev. Chris Manke, Executive Director:

Good morning, once again. 40 days that we've been through together on this Lenten journey! Thank you so much for joining us, for watching our devotions that we've been through. It's that reminder that God is with us, that God's presence is in our lives every

day. Sometimes we forget to look for God's presence in our lives. And hopefully this has been a reminder for us moving forward into the new Easter season that we're about to start. That reminder that we know God is with us!



We see that God's presence is with our Ministry Partners each and every day, doing that incredible work that they do: caring and loving and walking with compassion for our brothers and sisters throughout our Synod, in places that often find great difficulty. But through those Ministry Partners of ours, that do that incredible hero's work, we know God continues to shine greatly in their ministry!

So, thank you for joining us during this Lenten time! Thank you for being a part, for reflecting on this message of God sightings in our lives, for thinking about how God is walking with you this day and always. And as we move forward, celebrating the Easter message that Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, that we would continue to remember that God is with us, and calls us to care for those around us with compassion and love that He has first shown to us. We thank God once again for all that God does for us! How God walks with us each and every day, and calls us to be His hands, His caring, His love, His voice in this world, that others may know God's compassion and love as well.

Thank you again for joining us! And as we celebrate this wonderful message that Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, that that Easter message will shine forth in our lives, remembering God is with us. Amen!

As you go about your day today, how do you see God at work?

PRAYER | Dear Lord: As we conclude this Holy season, may we not forget to continue to look for you in our day to day lives. You are there - always. Remind us to keep watching, and for your presence to stay close to us, so that we may always know the power and peace of your goodness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

