

“Be strong and courageous: do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” – Joshua 1:9

Blessed Neighbors in Christ,

Welcome to the beautiful month of September. You'll may have already noticed that the sun is setting a little earlier, the temperatures are a bit cooler in the mornings, and that changes in worship times are here. That's right, Beloved. Our Neighbors in Christ (NIC) Parish congregation worship times have changed: Sunday morning worships are now at 8:30 am and 10:00 am.

Some weeks ago, the NIC Parish Council met and came to a unanimous decision on shifting the worship times for the three churches. This occurred after more than a month and a half of conversation, messages, bulletin announcements, and information being passed out to the parish members. No longer will there be three on a Sunday morning; there will be a two worship rotation and combined services for the month.

You may have already seen the new schedule, either passed out to you, mailed out, in your mailboxes, or accompanying your worship bulletins. The color-coated new schedule has the entire year contained on it with each church being represented by a specific color: Augustana is green, First is beige, and St. John's is blue. If you have one close to you, or see it inside of this newsletter, please pull it out and I would like to walk you through the schedule and dynamics of how it works.

As you may see, it is completed in an excel spreadsheet format with spaces for the respective month, Sunday (or day of the week), date of the month, and time for each worship service. It moves from a left to right way of determining where and when we will come together to praise the God on high.

September 2021 has four Sundays in the month, and they are listed as the 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th. So for the first Sunday in September, please locate September 5th...and then move to the right. You will see that there is a 'SJ' in the blue box, right underneath the '8:30 AM' column. So that means that St. John's Lutheran will have the first worship for that day, at 8:30 am. And if you keep moving to the right, you will see 'FL' underneath the '10:00 AM' meaning First Lutheran has worship at 10:00 am. And if you go to the following week, beginning on September 12th, you will only notice '9:30 am – SJ Dinner.' This is to signify that this will be a combined NIC scheduled service at St. John's celebrating their annual Steeple Fest, and worship begins at 9:30 am. A porkchop dinner will follow the worship service and you are all invited to attend.

As you continue down the date column to September 19th, you can decipher that worships will be held at Augustana Lutheran at 8:30 am and First Lutheran at 10:00 am. The next week services

will be held at St. John's Lutheran at 8:30 am and Augustana Lutheran at 10:00 am. Figure it out yet? Great!

The schedule was put together with the intention of having the regular church community worships for the first three weeks of the month alternate back and forth between the three churches. The fourth Sunday of the month would be a regularly scheduled combined parish worship held at one congregation, on a rotating schedule. If there happens to be a fifth Sunday in the month, this would also be a combined service too. Once in a while, one of the congregations would have a special event or annual celebration that would qualify them for the combined service, just like this September with Steeple Fest.

You may also have noticed that there are regular holidays and traditional NIC worship services included on the schedule, like Thanksgiving Eve, Lenten, and Holy Week observances. These have been included because they are important to the worship schedule and lives of the respective churches holding these special times. Worshipping traditions are very important.

As we get into the regular rotation and weeks of the month, this new schedule will get easier to understand and remember. But I would appreciate if you did place the schedule in a location that is very familiar to you, such as a jacket pocket, in your vehicle, or even on your refrigerator door. If you know where it is, it will be easier to remember which Sunday your respective church holds worship and at what time. Once you go through the schedule you can see how it continues to repeat itself and becomes quite 'normal.'

I included the prophet Joshua's commission by God as the verse for this message, and for any other transitions you may have this month. As Joshua and Israel are given their marching orders to cross the River Jordan into the 'promised land,' God commands them to be strong and courageous and to not be frightened anywhere they go. God is with them, just as God is with us. Let this also be a quick devotional to help you during these times of change. I encourage you to open your heart to this new worship schedule and give it a try. See how it works for you. And please even head to one of the other NIC congregations you may not be that familiar with. We are all in this Neighbors in Christ Parish together and ultimately wherever you worship, at 'your church,' or another...we are all in this together as beloved children of God.

See you soon at worship and have a blessed September, my family and friends!

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish